

Behavior Crisis Management Tool #3

Forced Choice Technique

Purpose

The purpose of this technique is to limit the behavior of students who try to negotiate everything.

Examples

There are times when the behaviors of certain students are exhibited by the need to negotiate everything you say or request. These students have difficulties internalizing boundaries and attempt to set boundaries of their own. This need usually stems from feeling out of control, since the more out of control a student feels, the more controlling he/she becomes. The need to control comes from vulnerability, anxiety or the fear of not knowing how to deal with things that are not predictable. Therefore, in the students' minds, these fears or anxieties can only be relieved if everything is predictable. However, the problem comes in because they feel that controlling everything will make things predictable and life does not always allow that to happen. Students with this behavior pattern will constantly say things like, "Why can't I", or "Can I do this instead" or "Don't I get a choice".

What May Not Work

What usually does not work is giving in to the demands, requests or negotiations of controlling students when you have established what you need to be done. While these students can be very aggressive, convincing or assertive, they are still trying to control the environment. If you give in, you will be reinforcing the student's belief that they can control you and other things in his/her environment and as a result reinforcement will increase the frequency and intensity of such negotiation. You will then find yourself becoming very angry at the student who you will see as more powerful than you. However, keep in mind that it is not "Look what he is doing to me", but rather, "Look what I am allowing to happen."

Try This

We must be sensitive to the feelings that are present and motivate this need to control on the part of the student and try to direct it in a more positive manner. What we should use instead is what we call a forced choice technique. In this technique, the student who is trying to negotiate is offered two options, both of which are acceptable to you. It is sometimes preferable, especially if

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you know that a certain student has this pattern, to initiate the forced choice technique before he/she tries to negotiate. Choosing either one of your options will be fine, but the student feels he/she is making the decision. A forced choice technique basically says to the student, "You can do this or you can do that. Which one do you prefer?" or "You can do this before lunch or after lunch, which one do you prefer"? Again, the emphasis is on the forced choice. If the student says neither, then you say, "If you do not choose one of these, then I will choose for you, but I'd rather see you make the decision."