

Behavior Crisis Management Tool #4

Learn What Triggers Certain Behaviors

Finding Each Child's "Emotional Aura"

Purpose

The purpose of this technique is to learn how to prevent and short circuit potential outbursts and inappropriate behavior.

Examples

- John, an 11 year old student classified as a student with an emotional disturbance, strikes out at the boy sitting next to him without provocation.
- Mary, an 8 year old girl with impulse control issues, quickly gets up out of her seat in the middle of a lesson and begins to walk around the room.
- Roberto, a 14 year old boy with behavior issues, begins to yell out and make fun of another student in the class.
- Zach, a 6 year old with emotional issues, gets frustrated and begins to destroy things on his desk.

Keep in mind that all of the above examples represent behaviors initiated by the students rather than reactive behaviors to someone else's behavior.

In all of these cases, the teacher first becomes aware of a problem at the time of the explosive outburst. However, these children exhibited a prior pattern of discomfort, tension or symptoms prior to the behavior which was not observed by anyone. For instance, if I am traveling in a car at 60 miles an hour and someone says, "Did you see that?," my first reaction will be, "No, we were traveling too fast." If we go 5 miles an hour, then I will see everything. Well, behavior often travels at 60 miles an hour, and as a result, we miss the signals given off by a student of a impending problem.

The symptoms exhibited prior to the emotional outburst are referred to as "emotional aura".— For example, people with epilepsy will experience auras prior to the episodes which may allow them to pull over if they are driving, or take precautions not to hurt themselves when the episode occurs. While this aura may be a short period of time, it does provide an opportunity to do something that may prevent a more serious problem.

What May Not Work

What is often very frustrating for a teacher is disciplining the student for the same pattern of behavior with the student never seeming to incorporate the disciplines into self control. While you may not be able to do anything on the first or second outburst ever observed, after that, you should have control over seeing what the trigger symptoms may be in order to step in before the outburst. What does not work is constantly disciplining the child after the behavior has occurred over and over and over. The child's lack of ability to use internal controls is evident by the consistent pattern of inappropriate behavior. Therefore, the better use of energy may be in prevention rather than crisis management.

Try This

After a student has exhibited a certain behavior pattern, have your aide or assistant closely observe him/her, recording all behaviors which may show discomfort, tension, or agitation to see which behaviors occur prior to the outburst. If for some reason you do not have an aide or assistant ask the school psychologist to come in and do a classroom observation to record the behaviors that precede the outburst (antecedent behaviors). Once these are recognized, you will have a prior indication of a potential problem. When you see these symptoms beginning (e.g., restlessness, daydreaming, head down on desk, scribbling etc.), take action immediately by either going over to the desk and using proximity teaching (see prior management tool on Proximity Teaching <http://www.naset.org/2736.0.html>), or have your aide take him/her for a walk or errand. Short circuiting an inappropriate behavior and turning it into a positive experience will not only help you but offer the student a more positive outcome.