Who Receives a Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP)

Today, educators at all grade levels face a growing number of students whose behavior challenges the success of daily classroom instruction. Fortunately, teachers usually are able to rely on standard strategies for addressing classroom misbehavior, such as solid teaching practices, clear rules and expectations, being physically close to their students, and praising and encouraging positive behaviors. Either independently or with the support of colleagues, they are able to find a successful solution to the problem. However, for some students—both with and without disabilities—these tactics fail to produce the desired outcome and may actually worsen an already difficult situation.

After collecting information about a student’s behavior to determine the likely functions of that behavior, teams decide if a formal BIP is needed. The process of identifying possible behavioral supports and developing and implementing a behavioral intervention plan is required under certain circumstances for students with exceptionalities—those identified as having disabilities under the definitions given in the IDEA, or identified as gifted under New Mexico regulations. According to the IDEA, the IEP team is required to conduct an FBA and develop a BIP to address a student’s behaviors that require disciplinary action. (See page 7.)

For a student whose behavior impedes the student’s learning or that of others, the IEP team must consider the use of positive behavior interventions and supports to address that behavior. The NMPED has interpreted this to require the development of IEP goals for behavior or a BIP, as appropriate. It is also important to note that when behavior is an issue with students for whom an IEP exists or is being developed, the IEP team must include a BIP as a part of the IEP.

Like the FBA, a BIP is strongly recommended for any student whose behavior regularly interferes with their learning or the learning of others—and preferably be done before the behavior requires disciplinary actions. Positive, proactive intervention plans that teach new ways of behaving will address both the source of the problem and the problem itself.

Developing an appropriate BIP requires collaborative effort for a successful outcome. In addition to administrative and collegial support, the value and appropriateness of parent and student involvement in the process should be carefully considered. Too often they are excluded from activities when they have much to offer.
Elements of a Positive Behavioral Intervention Plan

Intervention plans and strategies that emphasize the skills students need in order to behave in a more appropriate manner, or plans that provide motivation to conform to required standards, are more effective than plans that simply serve to control behavior. Interventions based upon control often serve only to suppress behavior—resulting in a child seeking to meet unaddressed needs in alternative, usually equally inappropriate ways.

When an assessment team has determined that a BIP is necessary, the team members generally use information about the problem behavior’s function, gathered from the FBA. The team should include strategies to: (a) teach the student more acceptable ways to get what he or she wants; (b) decrease future occurrences of the misbehavior; and (c) address any repeated episodes of the misbehavior. The resulting BIP should not consist of simply one intervention, but include a number of interventions designed to attend to these three aspects of addressing a student’s problem behavior.

A BIP should be designed to teach the student a more acceptable behavior that replaces the inappropriate behavior, yet serves the same function (e.g., ways to gain peer approval through positive social initiations; ways to seek teacher attention through non-verbal signals). Since most BIPs will require multiple intervention options rather than a single intervention, teams may want to consider the following techniques when designing the plan, strategies, and supports.

- Teach more acceptable replacement behaviors that serve the same function as the inappropriate behavior, such as asking to be left alone or using conflict resolution skills; teach alternative skills, such as self-management techniques, tolerating delay, or coping strategies.
- Teach students to deal with setting events (the things that make the desired behavior more likely to occur), such as the physical arrangement of the classroom, management strategies, seating arrangements, or sequence of academic instruction.
- Manipulate the antecedents (the things that happen before the behavior occurs), such as teacher instructions or directions, or instructional materials.
- Manipulate consequences (the things that happen after the behavior occurs), such as precise praise or feedback, keeping in mind the principles of shaping and reinforcing incompatible behaviors.
- Implement changes to the classroom curriculum and/or instructional strategies, such as using multi-level instruction, or encouraging oral rather than written responses.
- Begin interventions that offer reinforcement for appropriate behavior, such as student performance contracts or group motivational strategies.
Using these strategies, school personnel develop a plan with interventions that teach and support replacement behaviors, and at the same time, decrease or eliminate opportunities for the student to engage in the inappropriate behavior. For example, a student may be physically aggressive at recess because he or she believes violence is the best way to end a confrontational situation and that such behaviors help accomplish his or her goals. However, when taught to use problem-solving skills (e.g., self-control or conflict resolution) to end a confrontational situation and accomplish his or her goal, combined with using more effective management strategies with the student during recess, the student may be more likely to deal with volatile situations in a non-violent manner (e.g., defusing the situation by avoiding threatening or provocative remarks or behavior).

The pages that follow are designed to help teams with the process of creating positive BIPs. It includes strategies to address different functions of a student’s behavior, skill deficits and performance deficits, as well as selecting, implementing, and monitoring the BIP interventions. This section also addresses special considerations, such as the use of punishment and emergency and/or crisis plans. The team should know about and consider these elements as it develops and implements a student’s BIP.

**Strategies to Address Hypothesized Functions**

To effectively redirect behavior, the team must understand why the behavior is occurring. (What function is it serving for the student?) Determining the functions, or causes, of behavior was introduced in the section on conducting an FBA. Using observation, interviews, and other assessment tools, the team forms a hypothesis about why the student is choosing a particular type of behavior. In most cases, behavior has a “payoff” for the student—it enables him or her to obtain something desired, or to avoid something undesired. Interventions will differ depending on the team’s hypothesis of presumed function.

Three very common functions of behavior are to get attention, control a situation, and to avoid or escape an unpleasant task or situation. Obviously these are broad categories that encompass a variety of specific behavior manifestations. For example, Ben manages to be absent with a stomachache whenever asked to give an oral presentation; Shelly does not do her homework so that she can stay in at recess rather than have no one to play with. The following pages offer some general strategies for dealing with attention-seeking and escape-motivated behavior. (For strategies that address several specific problem behaviors, see Appendix A.)
Most teachers can attest to the fact that students sometimes use inappropriate or problem behavior to get the attention of their teacher and/or peers. These behaviors usually stem from the notion they are not likely to get that attention any other way. Though generally the function is to gain validation or esteem, occasionally any type of attention will do—positive or negative. Common examples include calling out, swearing, yelling at a classmate or teacher, having a tantrum, or ignoring an adult request. Interventions that focus on teaching the student appropriate ways to get attention are often successful in ending these inappropriate behaviors. For example, the student might be taught various ways to obtain positive peer social interactions or get a teacher’s verbal praise. Once the conditions under which the behavior occurs have been identified, “role play” exercises might be introduced to teach the student appropriate things to say (e.g., “I’m really stuck on this problem.”).

It is important to remember that understanding the amount of time a student will wait for the attention they need is critical and should be a major consideration when developing such a plan. Students may need to be systematically taught to tolerate longer and longer wait times.

Other intervention options include giving teacher attention following appropriate student behavior and taking away attention following inappropriate behavior (e.g., noticing and praising a student “unexpectedly.”

Finally, reprimanding students has proven ineffective in dealing with attention-seeking behavior, probably because it is a form of attention. A more effective intervention plan for attention-seeking behavior combines strategies to 1) keep the student from engaging in the original problem or inappropriate behavior (e.g., verbal threats), 2) teach replacement behavior, 3) ensure that the student gets enough opportunities to engage in the new replacement behavior (e.g., request assistance), and 4) offer opportunities for the student to be reinforced for the new behavior (e.g., verbal praise from adults or peers). For the reinforcement to work, the new “pay-off” has to be better and easier to get than the pay-off from the problem behavior.
Strategies for Dealing With Escape-Motivated Behaviors

Inappropriate or problem behavior often stems from a student’s need to escape or avoid an unpleasant task or situation, (e.g., difficult, irrelevant, lengthy or unclear classroom assignments, working in groups with others that they do not like, negative peer or adult interactions, wanting to be removed from class to be with friends in another class).

Behavior that is used to avoid or escape a difficult academic task might be addressed by teaching the student to use socially acceptable escape behavior (e.g., asking for help, which must be available once the student asks for it). If the student is unable to complete the assignment because he or she does not have the skills necessary to do so, the original assignment should be replaced with another assignment that is more appropriate (i.e., within the student’s skill level), or strategies and supports should be provided to assist the student (e.g., direct instruction, manipulatives, work with peers).

Interventions for dealing with escape motivated behavior include 1) placing some kind of demand on the student when facing a frustrating task or difficult situation (e.g., using the correct behavior to ask for additional help or to be temporarily excused), 2) using signal responses (e.g., the teacher signals the student to use a predetermined alternative behavior), and 3) making curricular accommodations or instructional modifications to boost student interest in and/or ability to successfully complete the assignment.

It is important to note that while time out is often used as a consequence for escape-motivated behaviors, in many cases time out used in this manner is actually reinforcing because it allows the student to escape or avoid the situation. Time out is therefore likely to increase rather than decrease the inappropriate behavior. (See Appendix B for State guidelines regarding use of time out.)

Sometimes, student noncompliance stems from a need to exert control over a situation—to pressure others to “give up” or “back off,” as when a teacher makes academic demands that the student sees as too difficult. Recognizing that the function of the student’s behavior is to escape from this uncomfortable situation by controlling it, the teacher might begin by modifying the assignment, as well as the manner with which he or she interacts with the student regarding the assignment.
Sometimes, a student does not perform the desired appropriate behavior because he or she does not know how to do it (a skill deficit). Other times, a student may have the skills needed to perform the appropriate behavior but does not consistently use them (a performance deficit). This may be by choice, or for reasons based on real or perceived need in the circumstances (e.g., anxiety, anger, a physical condition). It is also possible that a student may be experiencing both a skill and a performance deficit. This section describes strategies that can be considered for addressing these deficits.

**Strategies for Dealing With Skill Deficits**

An FBA might indicate that the student engages in the problem behavior because she or he lacks the appropriate, alternative skills and/or believes the inappropriate behavior is effective in getting what he or she wants (e.g., allows the student to escape or avoid an unpleasant task or situation). If the student does not know what behaviors are expected, an intervention plan could resolve the confusion by teaching the student to sort positive and negative examples of what is expected. A plan should also include the supports, aids, strategies, and modifications necessary to accomplish that instruction. If the student does not know how to perform the expected behavior, the intervention plan should include instruction to teach the needed skills. Sometimes, it may require teaching both behavioral and cognitive skills and may call for a team member to conduct a task analysis (i.e., break down the skill into its component parts) of the individual behaviors or subskills that make up the skill.

In other instances, a student may be unable to appropriately handle the aggressive verbal behavior of a classmate. The student may need to be taught to recognize those words (or actions) that usually lead to aggression and to discern whether the behavior is or is not provoked by the student. Then, a series of role playing sessions might teach the student ways to defuse the situation (e.g., avoid making critical remarks), along with when to walk away or seek assistance from peers or adults. For example, Lee may recognize a problem situation, but lack the impulse control to self-regulate his behavior and respond appropriately. Overt teacher modeling of self-control, along with guided and independent practice (behavioral rehearsal), and discussions of “when and how to” strategies may prove effective. Other options include instruction in the use of mnemonic devices that enable Lee to handle a problem situation in a positive manner (e.g., FAST—Freeze, Assess the situation, Select a response, Try it out).
Strategies for Dealing With Performance Deficits

Sometimes, the team will find that the student knows the skills necessary to perform the behavior, but does not consistently use them. In that case, the intervention plan should include techniques, strategies, and supports designed to increase the student’s use of the behavior. If the FBA shows that the student is engaging in the problem behavior because he or she actually believes that this behavior is more desirable than the alternative, appropriate behavior, the intervention plan should include techniques for addressing that belief. For example, a student might think that acting quickly is best because she values resolution. This belief might be countered by having the student list the additional problems that a faulty, but quick, solution can produce.

Sometimes, a student does not perform the behavior simply because he or she sees no good reason to do so. For example, if Lynne can avoid feeling ridiculed by threatening her classmates on the playground, she may not see the advantage of interacting positively with others. Therefore, the BIP may include strategies to increase her use of existing skills to interact appropriately with peers. Finally, because of her aggressive behavior, it may be necessary to prompt classmates to initiate play with Lynne, and to reinforce both her and her classmates for engaging in positive social exchanges.

Selecting and Implementing Interventions

Once information has been analyzed and a number of possible interventions have been identified, the team needs to select options for the BIP and consider the most effective method of implementation.

Guidelines for Selecting Intervention Options

After some ideas about positive behavioral interventions have been generated for a student’s BIP, teams should consider the following questions. Answering these questions should yield a decision regarding which intervention(s) to adopt.

- Which intervention aligns with the function of the behavior?
- Which intervention is appropriate given the student’s need and current levels of performance?
- Which intervention directly teaches the replacement behavior?
Implementing Interventions and Reinforcing Behavior

A critical component of the intervention plan is the pattern of reinforcement for using the appropriate replacement behavior. Teams should use knowledge of student preferences and strengths to define reinforcers and make sure that the student is reinforced more often for the replacement behavior than he or she was for the problem behavior. As a general rule, school personnel should reinforce appropriate behavior at least twice as often as the problem behavior was reinforced.

In some cases, it may be necessary to initially offer a student “non-contingent” access to a reinforcer (e.g., with “no strings attached”), especially if the reinforcer is something he or she has never had before. Called “reinforcer sampling,” the student participates in selecting positive reinforcers. For example, we might allow a student to participate in a highly preferred activity with a classmate (e.g., a computer-based learning activity). If the student enjoys it, access to that activity would later depend on the student engaging in the desired appropriate behavior.

Sometimes, the desired response may call for too dramatic a change in the student’s behavior (i.e., a change the student is unable and/or unwilling to make all at once). If that is the case, the team will need to define gradual changes toward the desired behavior.

A final consideration in using reinforcers is the process of fading or gradually replacing extrinsic rewards with more natural or intrinsic rewards on a realistic or natural time schedule. Of course, fading will only be a consideration once the student has shown an increased ability and willingness to engage in the appropriate, desired behavior. The process of fading may be made easier by pairing the extrinsic reward with an intrinsic reward. For example, when rewarding David with points for completing a homework assignment, the teacher also could say, “David, you’ve finished all your homework this week, and your class participation has increased because you are better prepared. You must be very proud of yourself for the hard work you have done.”
Maintaining and Monitoring Behavior

The success of any BIP rests on the willingness and ability of the student to continue to use the appropriate behavior without excessive outside support (i.e., the intervention). The most basic way to assure maintenance of behavior change is to be sure that interventions teach the student a set of skills. This will require teams to include strategies in the BIP to teach the student in such a way that promotes the “maintenance” (i.e., lasting over time, even when the extrinsic reinforcers are faded) and “generalization” (i.e., using the behavior in other appropriate settings) of replacement behaviors. One strategy for doing this is to restructure the social environment to benefit from the power of peer relationships to promote positive behavior. These behaviors are then maintained through the natural consequences of having and being with friends. Indeed, there are numerous instances in which students have been taught to encourage or reinforce appropriate behavior and to ignore or walk away from negative provocations of their classmates.

Another way to promote long lasting behavior change is to use strategies based on cognitive mediation (i.e., thinking through a situation before acting on emotion) and self-management (i.e., using techniques to control one’s own behavior, such as anger or anxiety). For example, students have been taught to apply various problem-solving strategies by engaging in “positive self-talk” (e.g., telling themselves, “I know how to get out of this argument without having to use my fists”) or “self-cueing” (e.g., recognizing that their jaw is clenched, they are getting upset, and they need to ask to be excused).

Some interventions should be implemented indefinitely while others will eventually need to stop. For example, Bruce is learning to use social problem solving skills instead of getting into fights on the playground (an intervention that we hope Bruce will use forever). He is learning to ask for adult support when he feels like he might get into a fight and his team has decided that he can earn points toward a reward when he seeks help appropriately rather than fighting (an extrinsic intervention that must end at some point).

Knowing that he cannot get points for the rest of his life, the team has decided to use the technique of fading once Bruce has reached a specified level of success. Bruce’s teachers will gradually decrease the use of points or other tangible rewards when he asks for help instead of fighting. This could be done in several ways. First, his teacher could increase the amount of time Bruce has to remain “fight free” in order to receive a reward. For example he may initially receive rewards daily, but as he reaches criterion it could be increased to every other day, then once a week, and so on. Another way to fade the intervention is for his teacher to award him fewer points until he is receiving no points at all. For instance, Bruce could ini-
Initially earn 50 points per day for not fighting. This could be reduced to 40, then 30, and so on until he earns no points at all. It is very important to note that the social reinforcement should continue and eventually replace the tangible rewards completely. If this process is gradual and Bruce is helped to realize the advantages of using appropriate social problems solving, remaining fight free will become intrinsically rewarding to him.

The success of these strategies may depend on providing the student with periodic “booster” training to review the instruction used in the original intervention plan. Some students also may need to receive “self-advocacy training” to teach them how to appropriately ask for positive recognition or appropriately call attention to positive changes in their behavior. This is especially important for students who have such bad reputations that adults and peers do not recognize when their behaviors are changing. Finally, school personnel can support changes in student performance by accepting “just noticeable differences,” or incremental changes that reflect the fact the student is taking positive steps toward the desired goal.

**Consequences and Punishment**

There is a difference between consequences and punishment. A consequence is simply the result of an action. *When you do X, then X results.* A consequence can be positive, negative, or neutral. Punishment is one form of negative consequence. The important thing to remember is that to shape behavior, the consequences (positive or negative) have to matter to the student. In addition, what may seem like negative consequences to a teacher may actually be positive to a student. Consider this statement: “Abby, when you use inappropriate language, you will be immediately removed from the activity.” The teacher may assume that removal from the activity is a negative consequence, when Abby may think it is a positive consequence—she wants to be removed from the activity.

There are basically two kinds of inappropriate behavior. One is intentional and done in order to produce a certain outcome. The other is behavior that is impulsive and driven by emotion “in the moment” with little or no thought given to consequences.

In the first case, the student chooses the particular behavior because it produces a desired result—obtaining something wanted or avoiding something unwanted. Since punishment does not address the cause of the behavior, it is usually ineffective, especially long-term. The student will either continue the behavior as is, or switch to another behavior that will produce the same results.
Some students, on the other hand, choose certain behaviors on impulse, as an emotional response to a stimulus. They may react by displaying anger, frustration, hostility, fear, or other “gut” emotion, without considering any consequence other than “not this.” Punishing these students for the results of their outbursts is like punishing them for their emotions—the punishment is likely to make the emotions more intense and the behavior worse.

In both cases, positive interventions are far more likely to produce behavior changes than punishment. It is important for the team developing the BIP to consider all positive interventions before considering punishment. For a student who intentionally behaves a certain way to produce a certain outcome, the team must find other, more appropriate ways for the student to achieve the same results. In this case, perhaps explaining the possible results of several courses of action will help that student “think before acting.”

Is punishment ever appropriate? Punishments such as suspension should only be considered in extreme cases when the student’s behavior severely endangers her or his safety or the safety of others. (See Crisis and/or Emergency Interventions below.) In addition, teams should try positive interventions for an appropriate length of time before considering punishment. If all options are found to be ineffective, and the student’s behavior severely limits his or her learning or socialization or that of others, then a more aversive intervention might be necessary to reduce the behavior. When the decision has been made to introduce punishment as part of an intervention, the team should develop a plan to use positive interventions concurrently with punishment, as well as a timetable to return to using positive interventions as soon as possible. Use of punishment may necessitate the development of a crisis or emergency component to the BIP, as well.

Crisis/Emergency Plan

Obviously, behaviors that are severe or dangerous must be addressed immediately. The school should have in place general policies and procedures to handle emergencies, such as events that threaten the safety of staff and students. All school personnel, students, and parents should be aware of this policy. Aside from the event of an emergency requiring instant response, some situations that arise can be deemed critical. A crisis can be defined as a situation that requires an immediate, intrusive, or restrictive intervention to 1) protect the student or others from serious injury, 2) safeguard physical property, or 3) deal with acute disturbance of the teaching and/or learning process.
For those students whose problematic behavior may cause or result in a crisis, the team should incorporate a crisis or emergency provision in the student’s BIP. The BIP would still implement proactive and positive interventions to continue to teach the student alternate behaviors, but would address specific immediate interventions to be taken in the event of a severe or dangerous situation. It is a best practice to spell out the exact conditions under which a crisis or emergency plan can be used. Teams also should carefully monitor the crisis or emergency plan and make sure it is in compliance with any district policies or procedures regarding the use of behavior reduction strategies. (See note below.) Any staff involved with implementing a crisis or emergency plan should be appropriately trained to carry it out.

Individual crisis or emergency steps are appropriate only when less intrusive or restrictive interventions have been unsuccessful. As with all components of the BIP, parental input and approval should be obtained before setting up the crisis or emergency plan.

If a crisis or emergency plan is introduced, steps should be taken to minimize and control the amount of time necessary to manage the behavior. The crisis or emergency interventions should be replaced with less intrusive and intensive intervention options as soon as possible. Parents, guardians, and school personnel should be notified regarding any incident that requires the use of the crisis plan. A thorough evaluation should be part of the plan so that the team can assess both the impact and possible negative spill-over effects of the crisis plan. Finally, following an incident, the team should write an emergency or crisis report that includes ways to prevent future occurrences of the behavior.

---

**A Note About Discipline Procedures**

- School personnel must be fully aware of the requirements under the IDEA 2004 and the New Mexico rules regarding discipline of a student with an exceptionality, including provisions for removal of a child with an exceptionality for violation of school rules.

- If not available on site, paper copies of the IDEA 2004 can be obtained at most public libraries and electronic copies can be obtained online through OSEP at [www.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/idea2004/html](http://www.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/idea2004/html). The New Mexico Special Education rules can be obtained online through the Public Education Department at [www.ped.state.nm.us](http://www.ped.state.nm.us).
Evaluate and Modify the Plan

Once the BIP is developed and implemented, the team should follow up by evaluating its effectiveness and modifying it as needed.

One method of evaluating effectiveness is to continue to measure frequency and duration of the target behavior and compare the changes, if any, to the baseline established in the FBA report. If teams use the same instruments (scatterplot, ABC observation form, interviews) to assess ongoing behavior as were used to gather the initial data, they can use the baseline information as a standard against which to judge subsequent changes in student behavior. These progress checks need not be as detailed as the initial FBA observations, but should be detailed enough to yield information to evaluate the impact of the intervention plan. Data on student behavior should be collected and analyzed every few days at first to determine what, if any modifications, are needed.

When a severe problem behavior is resistant to change, more complex, intrusive intervention packages may be required. The more complicated the intervention plan, the more likely that its impact will go beyond the behaviors the team has identified for intervention. That is, the plan may have an effect on non-targeted behavior (e.g., it could “spill over” and reduce or eliminate other inappropriate or appropriate behaviors). For information on non-targeted behavior (e.g., positive social interactions with classmates and adults; appropriate classroom behavior). Throughout this process, teams must determine when reassessment will take place and specify the ultimate goal of the behavior change.

It is important to remember that if a student is identified as having an exceptionality and the student’s behavior interferes with his or her learning or the learning of others, the IDEA states that a BIP must be incorporated in the student’s IEP. As a component of the IEP, the plan must be reviewed at least annually; however, it may be reevaluated whenever any member of the student’s IEP team feels that a review is necessary.
Does the Plan Need to Be Reviewed?

The following list of circumstances may be used to signal the need for a review and possible modification of a BIP for students with IEPs, and other students for whom a BIP has been developed. 1) The student has reached his or her behavioral goals and objectives and new goals and objectives need to be established. 2) The “situation” has changed and the interventions no longer address the current needs of the student. 3) There is a change in placement. 4) It is clear that the original BIP is not producing positive changes in the student’s behavior.

Possible Pitfalls to Effective Behavioral Plans

The process of functional behavioral assessment and intervention is complete only when the team produces positive behavioral changes in student performance. The best laid plans may be obstructed by any number of factors.

- Too vague a definition of the behavior(s) of concern and/or incomplete measurement/data collection regarding the behavior(s) and the interventions selected.
- Incorrect interpretation of the functional assessment data collected.
- Inappropriate intervention (e.g., too weak to deal with the complexity or magnitude of the behavior problem; not aligned with the assessment data).
- Inconsistent or incorrect application of one or more parts of the intervention plan and/or personnel lack skills and/or training to correctly implement the interventions.
- Failure to adequately monitor the implementation of the intervention plan or to adjust the intervention plan over time, as needed, based on on-going monitoring and evaluation, and to adequately evaluate the impact of the intervention plan.
- Inadequate system-wide support to avoid future episodes of the behavior problem (e.g., too many initiatives or competing priorities that may interfere with time and commitment needed to develop and implement BIPs).
- The behavior is an issue of tolerance rather than being something that distracts the student or others (e.g., a specific minor behavior, such as doodling).
- Failure to consider environmental or psychological issues, cultural norms, family or other situations outside the school that are impacting the student’s behavior.