

Preventions and Interventions for a Student's Challenging Behavior

by Lee Gabor

Clearly, there are a lot of approaches schools can use to prevent challenging behavior and to address it when it does occur. It's important to know that best practice indicates the following:

- Assessment of the student's behavior must be linked with interventions that follow the student through whatever placements the student has.
- Multiple interventions are necessary for improving the behavior of most students. Any positive effect of a single strategy, especially when the intervention is short-term, is likely to be temporary. Just as behavior problems and risk factors come in packages, so too should interventions.
- To produce lasting effects, interventions must address not only the behavior that led to disciplinary action but a constellation of related behaviors and contributing factors.
- Interventions must be sustained and include specific plans for promoting maintenance over time and generalization across settings. Focusing on the student's behavior while placed in any short-term setting, such as an interim alternative educational setting, is not sufficient. Interventions need to follow the student to his or her next placement (and elsewhere).
- A combination of proactive, corrective, and instructive classroom management strategies are needed. Interventions must target specific pro-social and antisocial behaviors and the "thinking skills" that mediate such behaviors. Such a combination provides an atmosphere of warmth, care, support, and necessary structure.
- Interventions must be developmentally appropriate and address strengths and weaknesses of the individual student and his or her environment.
- Parent education and family therapy are critical components of effective programs for antisocial children and youth.
- Interventions are most effective when provided early in life. Devoting resources to prevention reduces the later need for more expensive treatment.
- Interventions should be guided by school-wide and district-wide policies that emphasize positive interventions over punitive ones.
- Interventions should be fair, consistent, culturally and racially nondiscriminatory, and sensitive to cultural diversity.

- Interventions should be evaluated as to their short-term and long-term effectiveness in improving student behavior. Both the process and outcome of each intervention should be evaluated.
- Teachers and support staff need to be well trained with respect to assessment and intervention. Staff working with students who have behavior problems will require on-going staff development and support services.
- Effective behavioral interventions require collaborative efforts from the school, home, and community agencies. Helping children and youth must be a shared responsibility.

We will look briefly at what's known about:

- using effective classroom management and teaching strategies;
- making instructional and curricular adaptations;
- teaching social problem-solving skills;
- implementing school-wide and district-wide programs to teach norms about behavior;
- providing parent management training and family therapy;
- promoting home-school collaboration;
- using alternative education programs or schools;
- providing individual counseling;
- using peer counseling and peer-led interventions;
- providing recreation and community activities; and
- using fear arousal, moral appeal, and affective education.