Responding to Non-Responsive Behavior: Managing Escalations
Geoff Colvin & George Sugai
OSEP Center on PBIS
University of Connecticut
www.pbis.org  www.cber.org

PURPOSE
Enhance understanding & ways of escalating behavior sequences

• Understanding
• Best practice
• Considerations
• Your action planning

Integrated Elements
Supporting Social Competence & Academic Achievement

Supporting Staff Behavior
Supporting Student Behavior

Supporting Decision Making

OUTCOMES
SYSTEMS
DATA
PRACTICES
Primary Prevention: School-/Classroom-Wide Systems for All Students, Staff, & Settings

Secondary Prevention: Specialized Group Systems for Students with At-Risk Behavior

Tertiary Prevention: Specialized Individualized Systems for Students with High-Risk Behavior

~80% of Students

~15%

~5%

Working Assumptions

- Behavior is learned (function).
- Behavior is lawful (function).
- Behavior is escalated through successive interactions (practice).
- Behavior can be changed through instructional approach (teaching).

2 Basic Functions

- Problem Behavior
  - Pos Rein: Gain Something
  - Neg Rein: Avoid Something
  - Env Rein: Avoid Something
  - Internal: Avoid Something
  - External: Gain Something

- Pos Rein: Obtain
  - Sensory
  - Social

- Neg Rein: Avoid
  - Tangible
  - Activity

- Env Rein: Avoid
  - Aversive condition identified
THREE KEY STRATEGIES

• Identify how to intervene early in an escalation.
• Identify environmental factors that can be manipulated.
• Identify replacement behaviors that can be taught & serve similar function.

The MODEL

Calm  Peak  De-escalation

Acceleration  Agitation  Trigger

The MODEL

Calm  Peak  De-escalation

Acceleration  Agitation  Trigger

Recovery
The MODEL

What does your cycle look like?

1. Calm

Looks like...
- COOPERATIVE & ENGAGEABLE
- Accepts feedback
- Follows directions
- Sets personal goals
- Ignores distractions
- Accepts praise
- ......

Strategies...
- INVEST IN PREVENTION
- Conduct FBA-BIP
- Identify & manipulate triggers & maintainers
- Identify & teach competing alternative
- Engage in frequent successful interactions
- Teach social skills
- Problem solving
- Relaxation response (alternative)
- Reinforce positively
- Set high expectations
2. Trigger

Looks like...
- Responding to series of UNRESOLVED CONFLICTS or CHALLENGES
- Repeated failures
- Frequent corrections
- Interpersonal conflicts
- Tight timelines & schedules
- Low success & reinforcement
- ...
- DESCRIBED as
  - Anxious
  - Hyper
  - Distracted
  - Figidty
  - ...

Strategies...
- PREVENT & REDIRECT
- Modify context
- Remove from context
- Increase opportunities to succeed
- Reinforce social skills
- ...

3. Agitation

Looks like...
- INCREASED UNFOCUSED BEHAVIOR
- Off task
- Frequent start-stop
- In-out seat
- Increased or decreased talking & interactions
- Social &/or academic w/ withdrawal
- ...

Strategies...
- REDUCE ANXIETY
- Consider function
- Make structural/environmental changes
- Provide reasonable options & choices
- Involve in successful engagement
- Practice social skills
- ...

4. Acceleration

Looks like...
- Switch to intensive FOCUSED BEHAVIOR
- Non-compliance
- Provocation
- Harassment
- Threatening
- Personal
- ...

Strategies...
- Intervene w/ FOCUS ON SAFETY
- Remember
  - "Escalation & self-control are inversely related"
  - "Escalation is likely to run its course regardless..."
- SAFETY
  - Remove all triggers & maintainers
  - Follow PLANNED crisis prevention procedures
  - Follow through with PLANNED bottom line
  - Disengage from student
  - Monitor continuously
  - ...
### 5. Peak

**Looks like…**
- OUT OF CONTROL
- MOST severe behavior
- Physical aggression
- Property destruction
- Self-injury
- Escape/social withdrawal
- Hyperventilation
- Running away
  - \ldots\ldots.

**Strategies…**
- Focus on SAFETY
- Shift from crisis prevention to INTERVENTION
- Follow planned procedures

### 6. De-escalation

**Looks like…**
- DECREASES in SEVERE BEHAVIOR
- Easily RE-ESCALATED
- CONFUSION
- Blaming others
- Denial
- Social & physical withdrawal
- Justification/minimization of situation
  - \ldots\ldots.

**Strategies…**
- MINIMIZE DEMANDS & ATTENTION
- STRATEGIES
- Don’t nag
- Avoid blaming
- Don’t force apology
- Consider function & replacement behavior
- Emphasize start anew
  - \ldots\ldots.

### 7. Recovery

**Looks like…**
- Attempts to RE-ENGAGE, but NON-INTERACTIVE
- Attempts corrections
- Watch group activities
- Work alone
- Social withdrawal
- Sleep
  - \ldots\ldots.

**Strategies…**
- RESTATE & FOLLOW-THROUGH w/ consequences
- Positively reinforce any displays of appropriate behavior
- Re-establish routines & activities
- Debrief
  - \ldots\ldots.
Recovery - continued

DEBRIEFING
- Purpose = facilitate transition back to engagement
- NOT further punishment
- Follows consequences for problem behavior
- Promote more appropriate behavior
- Especially in problem context

FACILITATING RETURN
- Guided problem solving
- What did I do? When?
- Why did I do it then?
- What could I have done instead/differently?
- What do I have to do next?
- Can I do it?

The MODEL

THREE KEY STRATEGIES
- Identify how to intervene early in an escalation.
- Identify environmental factors that can be manipulated.
- Identify replacement behaviors that can be taught & serve similar function.
What is “bullying?”

Remember

‘Label behavior, not people…’

So, say, “bully behavior”

Link behavior to context

Behavior

Verbal/physical aggression, intimidation, harassment, teasing, manipulation

Why do bully behavior?

Context & Behavioral Perspective

Get/obtain

E.g., stuff, things, victim & bystander attention, status, money, activity, self-delivered praise, etc.

Escape/avoid

E.g., same… but less likely

Why is “why” important?

Why is “why” important?

PREVENTION

Teach effective, efficient, relevant alt. SS

Remove triggers of BB

Add triggers for alt. SS

Remove conseq. that maintain BB

Add conseq. that maintain SS

- De-emphasis on reactive consequence management
- Emphasis on function-based approach & antecedent management
Context or 
Se*ng 
Initiator 
Target 
Bystander 
Staff 

Intervention 
Intensity 
v. 
Problem 
Intensity 

4 basic strategies....if 
you do nothing 
else....

1. Teach 
common 
strategy 
to all 

MUST.....
• Be easy & do-able by all 
• Be contextually relevant 
• Result in early 
disengagement 
• Increase predictability 
• Be pre-emptive 
• Be teachable 
• Be brief
2. Precorrect
Before, During, After
- Analyze problem setting
- Reteach
- Anticipate, remind, & practice
- Replace triggers & maintainers
- Reinforce desired

3. Actively Supervise
- Move
- Scan
- Interact positively
- Model expectations
- Reward appropriate behavior
- Remind & precorrect
4. Reinforce Taught Skills

- Specific
- Informative
- Frequent
- Effective
- Contextually relevant
- Sincere

1. Specify/define need
2. Select right evidence-based solution
3. Ensure implementation fidelity
4. Monitor progress
5. Improve implementation

Data-based Decision Making

Data used to.....