

TALKING ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION SERIES

VOLUME 14

POSITIVE BEHAVIOURAL INTERVENTIONS

FOR STUDENTS WITH EXCEPTIONALITIES

INFORMATION BOOKLET



This pamphlet is one of a series of resources prepared by the First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) and First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) to share information about how to support all First Nations students, regardless of their needs.

FNSA MANDATE:

to collaborate with First Nation schools to create nurturing environments that develop learners' pride and competence in their First Nations language and heritage and equip them to realize their full potential within self-governing First Nations communities.

FNESC MANDATE:

to facilitate discussion about education matters affecting First Nations in BC by disseminating information to and soliciting input from First Nations. FNESC's primary goal is to promote and support the provision of a quality education to First Nations learners.

We hope that these pamphlets

provide a useful overview of key special education topics, representing an introduction to issues that some people may want to investigate in more detail. Anyone who requires more information or has specific questions is welcome to contact the FNESC/FNSA special education staff.



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POSITIVE BEHAVIOURAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS

Throughout the field of education, there is a growing movement away from an over-reliance on reactive discipline and punitive consequences toward the use of positive behaviour strategies that are pro-active, student-centred, and encouraging. This trend is true for overall school and classroom approaches to behaviour management, as well as approaches to supporting improved and appropriate behaviour for students who have special education needs.

Taking a positive approach to managing behaviour challenges does not mean eliminating the possibility of natural and logical consequences for behaviour. Rather, it means ...

- Building cooperative and trusting relationships between the teacher, the education assistant (EA), the student, and the student's family.
- Understanding behaviours not simply as a problem that needs to be punished, but instead as a strategy a student is using to get a need(s) met.
- Supporting students by helping them to develop more acceptable replacement behaviours.

Positive behavioural interventions and supports have been shown to be effective in addressing a wide range of concerns, including dangerous or highly disruptive behaviours that can create barriers to students' learning and inclusion in classroom and social settings. Positive behaviour strategies, when planned with specialists and using sufficient and relevant information, can benefit students who have developmental disabilities, autism, emotional and behavioural disorders, and students with no specific diagnostic label.

NOTE: in this pamphlet, we use the term "parent" for simplicity, but the information is intended to be inclusive of all family members/caregivers of students with special needs. FNSC and the FNSA respect and appreciate the invaluable contributions of everyone who works to support all First Nations students - regardless of their special talents, gifts, or challenges.

WHY SHOULD EDUCATORS CONSIDER A MORE POSITIVE APPROACH TO MANAGING BEHAVIOUR?

Student success is positively influenced by changing the way that adults respond to behaviour challenges.

- Data shows that positive and proactive interventions and supports are more likely to result in long- term behaviour change in comparison to using coercion and punishment, and lead to improved academic success.
- Understanding and focusing on the root causes of inappropriate behaviour increases the likelihood that the most effective supports possible will be identified and provided.

IMPLEMENTING POSITIVE BEHAVIOURAL APPROACHES

When working with students who are experiencing behavioural challenges, it is important to explicitly define and teach expected behaviours.

- A useful strategy for teaching behavioural expectations in a positive way includes identifying three to five positively stated, easy to remember expectations.
 - attention, provide for easy flow in and out of the room, and have seating arranged for appropriate access to students who might need additional supports.
- It is also important to help students who have exceptionalities understand classroom and school-wide behavioural expectations, including sharing and explaining examples of what the expectations look like in action and in a variety of contexts.
 - Teaching and managing transitions.
 - Communicating respectfully with students, including delivering redirections/corrective statements in a calm, non-threatening way.
 - Teaching, modeling, and reinforcing positive skills, such as following directions the first time, actively listening, waiting patiently, sharing with others, etc.

Additionally, some common classroom strategies that work well for all students can be especially helpful for students who have special educational needs, such as the following.

- Posting, teaching, and regularly reviewing classroom expectations.
- Maintaining highly organized learning environments that minimize distractions, promote focus and
 - Using mobility and proximity as a method to redirect problem behaviours.
 - Using motivation systems to reward desirable behaviours.

- Providing five positive comments, gestures, and interactions for every one correction, reprimand, or negative interaction that is required.

Other key components of positive behavioural interventions for specific students include:

- Ensuring safety - of the student and all others in the school and classroom - as the fundamental priority.
- Focusing on relationship building.
- Pro-actively identifying and targeting a student's unique behavioural challenges and supports.
- Positively reinforcing a student's improvement efforts and appropriate behaviours.
- Explaining and implementing fair and predictable consequences.
- Providing clear and helpful feedback.
- Implementing team-based supports.
 - Using positive one-to-one communications that are focused on helping the student understand expectations.
- Actively supervising the student according to their needs during less structured times like lunch, recess and free time.
- Checking in and debriefing with a student after a stressful day and/or incident.
- Learning about and pro-actively responding to early signs of student dysregulation - also known as emotional dysregulation, which means a limited ability to manage emotional responses or maintain responses within an acceptable range of typical emotional reactions, often including sadness, anger, irritability, and frustration. This may involve consulting with an Occupational Therapist, school counsellor, or other mental health care professional.
- Engaging with families early and consistently to better understand the student's strengths, challenges, and strategies that work well in the classroom and home settings.

SPECIFIC POSITIVE BEHAVIOURAL STRATEGIES AND INTERVENTIONS

There are a wide range of positive behavioural strategies that can be used with students who have various types of special educational needs. The approaches that will work best with individual students will depend on their specific strengths, challenges, preferences, and the classroom and school settings in which they are functioning. Often, it will be necessary to teach, practice, implement and evaluate the effectiveness of different strategies to find the ones that work well for each student.

NON-VERBAL CUES AND SIGNALS

It can be very useful to use predetermined gestures or hand signals to pro-actively communicate with students who regularly require corrections or reminders. Non-verbal cues and signals can be useful when a student is losing attention or focus, to redirect a student from misbehaviours or off-task behaviours, when a student is not following appropriate procedures, or when a student does something successfully. Using a non-verbal cue is a discrete and effective way to respond to a student's behaviour without calling attention to the student in a way that is uncomfortable for them.

To use non-verbal signals effectively, it is necessary to meet with the student individually to identify a special

communication method and to discuss when the cue will be used and why. Ideally, the student will choose the signal, which might be a smile, thumbs up, nod, etc. to acknowledge correct behaviours, or raised eyebrows, a raised finger, or a head shake to remind the student about a problem behaviour. It is best to practice the cues and check-in with students regularly to determine if the signal is working.

PRE-CORRECTIONS TO PREVENT CHRONIC CHALLENGES AND AVOID MISTAKES

Using pre-corrections means using a verbal cue or gesture to prompt a student to use an expected behaviour or respond appropriately to a situation or task with which the student has struggled previously. To be most

effective, it is best to deliver the reminder immediately before the behaviour is expected.

For example, if a student usually finds it difficult to remain calm when lining up, the teacher or education assistant may prompt the student by whispering the phrase “safety first” when the class is about to line up to go to the gym. If a student regularly interrupts when other students are presenting, a discrete finger to the lips before a presentation begins may be helpful.

To be most effective, the following steps can be used for pre-corrections – which can be helpful for all students, and especially those who have exceptionalities.

- Identify the behaviour to be addressed
- Describe the expected behaviour
- Help the student practice the expected behaviour
- Create a prompt to remind the student of the expected behaviour
- Develop a monitoring plan to determine the effectiveness of the pre-correction
- Determine any incentives to reward the student for successfully responding to the pre-correction, ideally asking students what they

would consider a meaningful reward, which might include things like lunch with the principal, time in the gym with a friend, extra free time, a new pencil, a book to take home, etc.

- Ideally gradually reduce the use of rewards as the student requires less pre-correction.

THE CHECK-IN / CHECK-OUT BEHAVIOUR INTERVENTION

Although the detailed implementation of the Check-In / Check-Out (CICO) behaviour strategy may vary from setting to setting, the basic premise is usually the same.

A student is assigned to a CICO intervention check-in with a staff person first thing in the morning to set goals for the day, typically listed on a “points card.” Throughout the day, the student’s teacher(s) assigns points when the student meets the behaviour goals, and at the end of the day, the same staff person who began the day with the student checks-in again and assesses the points total. Generally, the student takes home the points card and returns the signed card at the next morning check-in.

The CICO strategy provides a valuable opportunity for relationship building and positive incentives, and this intervention generally is effective with students who respond well to adult attention. Students who receive regular and systematic

encouragement through the CICO may also learn to self-monitor, internalize successes, and develop self-esteem. Successful CICO focuses not on problem behaviours, but instead on the efforts made by the student to meet defined and relevant goals.

Students who consistently meet their CICO goals over a determined period of time can also “graduate” from the intervention, after celebrating their success.

SOCIAL STORIES

The strategy of creating social stories can be useful when a student fails to grasp or needs reinforcement of classroom rules, social norms, routines, and expectations, like walking down the hall, using restroom facilities, following lunch procedure, being respectful, asking for help properly, etc. This strategy can also be useful when a student is disorganized, does not respond to cues or pre-corrections, and it can be very beneficial for students who are on the autism spectrum or have ADD/ADHD.

Social stories present information in a story format, with visual examples of behavioural expectations. The basic steps to creating a social story include working with the student to:

- Create a list or outline the steps in the routine or procedure being addressed;

- For each step of the process, develop a simple sentence to explain the step, such as “walk to back of the line and pick up a tray;”
- Next to each step / sentence, add a picture to represent the action - which could be a hand drawn image, a generic graphic from the computer, or an actual photo of the student performing the step;
- When the social story is complete, review it with the student daily before the activity or task is performed;
- After the student learns the social story well, let them review it independently before performing the activity;
- Gradually stop using the social story as the student can consistently perform the task with the appropriate behaviour.

BREAK CARDS

“Break cards” is a tool that is commonly used when a student becomes easily overwhelmed, as a way to help the student remain calm and avoid outbursts or anxiety. For example, break cards are sometimes recommended for students who have autism or sensory processing challenges. By taking a moment to collect themselves, do something to distract themselves, or relax (e.g., deep breathing, taking a walk,

talking with an adult), many students can better deal with stressful situations without incident.

Break cards are physical reminders of productive activities a student can undertake while on a break - such as draw or colour, walk to the gym and back, meditate or take some deep breaths, use a stress relieving object like a stress ball or stuffed animal, read a book, etc. Break cards can also include coping skills, suggestions, and steps for the student to use to calm down, such as some simple exercises to “get the wiggles out” or some ways to relax the body. These tools can be especially helpful for students who have limited coping skills or are unable to independently use their coping skills when they become upset. In a classroom setting, break cards can allow a student to discretely choose an appropriate alternate behaviour.

- Break cards can be personalized for a specific student.
- Having break cards with a variety of options allows students choice, which helps them learn to make appropriate decisions and provides an opportunity for students to learn and try a variety of coping techniques to find the ones that work best for them.
- It is helpful to involve students in creating their own break cards to give them a sense of ownership and

control, making them more likely to perceive the break activities as their decision and, therefore, make them more likely to perform the activity willingly.

- Once the cards are created, it is important to establish clear procedures for how and when it is appropriate to use the break cards, and sometimes it is useful to set a limit on how many break cards can be used in a specified period of time, such as each class, each day, or each week. The cards should not be over-used so students miss too much class time; they should be a tool to help increase students’ coping skills and maximize the amount of time they are able to actively participate with the class.
- Practicing how to use the break cards can help younger students understand the appropriate way to ask for a break and can provide an opportunity to provide feedback and teach how to do the activities on each card.

If break cards are used, it is important to determine and teach their appropriate use so they do not become a way for a student to avoid expectations or unwanted tasks. For example, if a student is becoming overwhelmed with a difficult assignment and uses a break card to calm down, the student should then be expected to complete the assignment after the break.

Also, break cards are not always appropriate for every child, and it may be helpful to do a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) prior to their use – as described below.

FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOUR ANALYSIS (FBA)

The aim of Functional Behaviour Analysis (FBA) is to assist education staff in collectively determining the factors that can support behavioural improvements for a student who is experiencing serious challenges. The primary goal of FBA is to prevent unwanted behaviours and identify the most appropriate interventions by understanding the purpose of a student's actions (such as wanting attention, not understanding how to perform a task, etc.) and reducing rewards for unwanted behaviours (such as not providing the desired attention or not simply eliminating an activity that the student is trying to avoid).

An Informal FBA can be conducted by staff who regularly interact with the student. It may take the form of a planned discussion amongst staff regarding personal impressions about the target behaviour and staff opinions about the purpose the student is really trying to achieve. Individual staff may also share strategies that they have successfully utilized in other circumstances to manage similar types of behaviours.

When a more formal FBA is needed, it can be implemented utilizing an FBA document that guides school staff, possibly family members, and any relevant specialists who are needed through a systematic investigative process by directing questions toward the target behaviour. A formal FBA is the recommended approach when a challenging behaviour is pervasive and has persisted in spite of intervention efforts.

Sample FBA forms can be found on the internet, including the following links.

Simple FBA form: <https://www.resa.net/fs/resource-manager/view/b6af17cf-2f74-47a5-9ff7-c2251cb0328c>

Intensive FBA Form: <https://www.resa.net/fs/resource-manager/view/8b8551ce-e756-4420-9a3d-a1977736d8dd>

BEHAVIOUR INTERVENTION PLANS

Using the findings from a Functional Behaviour Analysis, it is then possible to create a Behaviour Intervention Plan (BIP), which should include:

- Target behaviour(s) to be addressed
 - Specific goals that are measurable
 - Appropriate intervention(s), including a clear description of what will be done
 - When the intervention will start and the frequency of implementation
 - The method of evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention
 - The person / people who will be responsible for each aspect of the intervention and evaluation
- A sample **Positive Behaviour Intervention and Support Plan** form can be found at the following link.
- <https://www.resa.net/fs/resource-manager/view/8d45ba5d-2a30-4442-b584-761edacf1194>

POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR STRATEGIES DURING ONLINE / DISTANCE LEARNING

Implementing positive behaviour strategies can be much more challenging in the context of online / distance learning, but it is still important to find ways to interact positively with students who may be experiencing behavioural challenges. The following suggestions, among others, may be helpful.

- Build in routines or activities that are familiar to the student and are usually incorporated into in-person learning opportunities the student may be used to.
- Schedule regular check-ins with students who have exceptionalities and their families.
- Explicitly teach and review expectations and routines for distance learning.
- Take time to recognize and acknowledge new anxieties that relate to the new learning environment.
- Take time to discover and build on the student's unique strengths and needs related to an on-line context.
- Help the student to develop strategies for managing stress and anxiety, including taking breaks when needed.
- Engage one-on-one with the student as often as possible.

CONCLUSIONS

All students can be supported in achieving their own personal goals and aspirations, although at times mental health conditions and challenging behaviours may create barriers to particular students reaching their full potential.

Fortunately, specific strategies can be used to help students whose behaviour difficulties might be interrupting their learning and social experiences in school. A range of interventions can help to reduce a student's challenging behaviours and increase their social and emotional management skills.

School staff can help by using positive behaviour approaches when working with all students - especially students who have exceptionalities and serious behavioural challenges. Teachers and other school staff can also engage with families to access help from mental health professionals, such as psychologists or specialists such as occupational therapists, when a student might benefit from a formal assessment and more intensive interventions to ensure that the right strategies are selected to address their unique needs.

SOURCES USED:

Understood.org (Positive behavior strategies: What you need to know)

Understood.org (Understanding response to intervention)

<https://www.pbis.org>

https://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=gse_fac

<https://www.resa.net/>

<https://www.sjcoe.org/selparesources/tiers/The%2016%20Proactive%20Classroom%20Management%20Skills.pdf>

https://ed-psych.utah.edu/school-psych/_documents/Break-Cards-How-to-Use-Them.pdf

VOLUMES AVAILABLE IN THE

TALKING ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION SERIES:

VOLUME 1: AN OVERVIEW

VOLUME 2: AN INTRODUCTION FOR PARENTS / FAMILIES

VOLUME 3: INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS

VOLUME 4: A PARENT'S GUIDE TO INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS

VOLUME 5: SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY

VOLUME 6: ATTENTION DEFICIT / ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVE
DISORDER

VOLUME 7: FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS

VOLUME 8: AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

VOLUME 9: GIFTED EDUCATION

VOLUME 10: TRAUMA

VOLUME 11: OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

VOLUME 12: PHYSIOTHERAPY

VOLUME 13: ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

VOLUME 14: POSITIVE BEHAVIOURAL INTERVENTIONS

FOR MORE INFORMATION:



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