



Proactive Strategies for Supporting Student Success

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At a team meeting, Mr. Richards** (all names fictitious) expressed concern and frustration regarding the behaviour of one of the students in his class. Michael is an eleven-year-old in his class who frequently becomes upset when he is given corrective feedback or when answers are marked as incorrect on an assignment. In these instances, Michael “shuts down” by either putting his head on his desk, crying or storming out of the classroom. While Mr. Richards realizes that Michael has some challenges in the area of emotional regulation and rigidity, he has moments when he feels like he is walking on eggshells. So, in order to avoid setting Michael off, he avoids giving him constructive feedback. Other moments, he is sterner because Michael “just needs to learn to deal with it because that’s how it is in the real world.”

“Shouldn’t we have a formalized individual behaviour support plan to help Michael with this?”

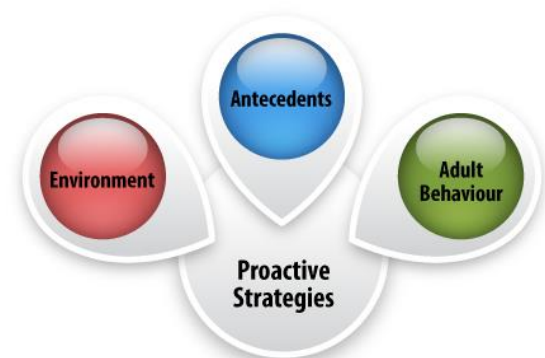
While there are certainly instances when an Individual Behaviour Support Plan is required, such as when a student is engaging in chronic and/or severe behaviour that puts at risk the safety of others, there are other instances where less complex interventions may be required. In a case such as Michael’s, where there is concern that his behaviour is impacting his functioning in the classroom, even though in a relatively mild way, there are likely some proactive strategies that can be attempted. We are thinking here about strategies to support a learner who is engaging in challenging behavior.

Just as additional support is required for some students to acquire academic skills, some students require more explicit teaching and reinforcement to learn key skills to experience success in meeting classroom behavioural expectations and develop social and coping skills.

You may wish to consider whether certain proactive strategies would be beneficial to address a student’s challenging behaviour prior to the developing of a more formalized behaviour plan.

Proactive Strategies Checklist

The **Proactive Strategies Checklist** (Appendix A) is intended to guide teams in identifying accommodations to help meet a student’s needs. You will note that many of the strategies listed in the checklist are beneficial to all students. However, they may need to be carried out with greater intentionality and planning for students who are engaging in challenging behaviours. Proactive strategies may involve changing the (1) environment, (2) antecedents, and/or (3) adult behaviour.



Adaptations to the Environment

Making adaptations to the environment is often a simple proactive measure that can provide fast results. Possible environmental adaptations may include:

- Modifying seating arrangement
- Providing access to a quiet area
- Rearranging the room or furniture
- Using visual supports and schedules
- Reducing stimulation when appropriate
- Posting all classroom rules and daily schedules in prominent locations

Antecedent-based Adaptations

An antecedent is what occurs immediately prior to a behaviour. Sometimes, it is possible to pinpoint specific antecedents related to a challenging behaviour. In that case, the team should consider whether it is appropriate and/or possible to modify the specific antecedent to reduce the likelihood of the challenging behaviour. For example, a learner may protest when presented with writing tasks. An example of a proactive measure would be for the learner to be made aware of accommodations that are available to reduce his or her frustration prior to being presented with the task.

The following are additional examples of antecedent-based interventions that you may consider if the learner is experiencing behavioural challenges.

Using learner preferences: tasks and activities are modified to increase interest and engagement

Implementing pre-activity interventions: intervention is implemented before a situation typically associated with the challenging behaviour

Using choice-making: choice of materials or tasks is offered

Altering how instruction is delivered: instruction and explanations are altered so that the learner clearly understands what is expected

Enriching the environment: making the task itself and the environment more appealing and enjoyable

Adaptations to Promote Skill and Relationship Building

While the learner will need to learn new replacement behaviours, staff members may also need to adapt their own behaviour. The following list is by no means exhaustive, but provides some factors that staff members should consider if a learner frequently engages in challenging behaviour.

Communication: Staff members can significantly influence how well the learner understands what is expected by providing the necessary visual supports, obtaining the learner's attention prior to giving an instruction and using language that is appropriate for the learner (e.g. level of comprehension, emotional intensity).

When learners demonstrate initial signs of agitation, the following strategies can be effective in de-escalating the situation:

- Remaining calm
- Using a quiet voice
- Taking a deep breath
- Preventing power struggles by recognizing that the student may require support
- Being flexible
- Using non-threatening body language



Engagement: Ensuring that students are motivated and engaged can help to prevent behavioural challenges. Staff members who are particularly skilled at motivating learners are invested in finding out learners' interest to increase student engagement. Additionally, reminding the learner of a preferred upcoming activity can be beneficial (i.e. "Once we finish this, it will be lunch time" or "First____, then ____").



Reinforcing positive behaviours: Reinforcing appropriate behaviours should always be a top priority for staff members working with students with challenging behaviours. Some learners may require frequent reinforcement, such as praise or a break from the task, while others can tolerate receiving reinforcement after longer intervals.

Relationship (pairing self with reinforcement): The learner's relationship with particular staff member(s) may be a contributing factor to behavioural challenges. Sometimes, there are limited options for pairing the learner with a compatible staff member. Fortunately, there are behaviours associated with developing a positive relationship that can be learned. If the relationship between the staff member and the learner appears to be a contributing factor, consider the following strategies:

- Embedding time for the learner and the staff member to engage in a preferred activity
- Having the staff member provide access to preferred items/activities without placing demands
- Having the staff member control access to desired items
- Being sure the staff member is aware of the ratio of positive versus negative comments (4 :1 ratio of positive to negative comments)

If proactive strategies are not effective, it could be because some behaviours may require a functional behaviour assessment, a more formalized behaviour plan, and support from other professionals. This would be the case in situations when a challenging behaviour is repetitive and:

- poses a barrier to inclusion and interferes with the learner being included in the learning environment and in activities with his or her peers or family
- impacts relationships with peers
- interferes with the learner's ability to be successful in everyday activities and independence
- is a threat to the environment, health, or safety for the learner or others

In conclusion, the use of proactive strategies can be the key to success in reducing the occurrence of challenging behaviours by some learners. In many cases, proactive strategies reduce the need for reactive interventions, but they cannot prevent all challenging behaviours. Teams should be strategic in their selection of proactive strategies and choose those necessary for the learner's success. The selected strategies should take into consideration the learner's needs and which behaviour the learner should be adopting instead of the challenging behaviour.

Proactive Strategies Checklist

If a student is engaging in chronic and/or severe behaviour that puts at risk the safety of others, an Individual Behaviour Support Plan should be developed. For students demonstrating less severe behavioural concerns, ESS teams may wish to review whether additional proactive strategies are required to address a student's challenging behaviour prior to the development of an IBSP. The following list is not a comprehensive list of all proactive strategies, but rather it is meant to serve as a guide for ESS teams when making recommendations to meet a student's needs.

Please note: Many of the strategies listed in the checklist are beneficial to all students. However, they may need to be carried out with greater intentionality and planning for students who are engaging in challenging behaviours.

Environmental Adaptations

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Modify seating arrangement | <input type="checkbox"/> Separate or designated work areas | <input type="checkbox"/> Task completed in another location |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Access to a quiet area | <input type="checkbox"/> Preferential seating on bus | <input type="checkbox"/> Place student first in line, or avoid lines altogether |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rearrange the room or furniture | <input type="checkbox"/> Only needed materials are easily accessible | <input type="checkbox"/> Limit access to materials and activities associated with challenging behaviour |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visual supports and schedules | <input type="checkbox"/> Use of timer for non-preferred tasks | <input type="checkbox"/> Assistive technology devices or services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reduce stimulation when appropriate | <input type="checkbox"/> Peer tutor/mentor | <input type="checkbox"/> Structured daily schedule |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Post all classroom rules and daily schedules in prominent locations | <input type="checkbox"/> Needed materials are easily accessible | <input type="checkbox"/> Structuring non-instructional periods, including recess |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Planned activities for transition times | <input type="checkbox"/> Routines or signals to prepare for transitions | <input type="checkbox"/> Cue students to stay on task (private signal) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supervise closely during transition times | <input type="checkbox"/> Increased level of support - peer support, adult support: | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

Antecedent-Based Adaptations

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> School-wide Positive Behaviour Support Plan | <input type="checkbox"/> Class-wide expectations clearly defined | <input type="checkbox"/> Student involved in planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interest-based work projects | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-preferred activities scheduled among preferred activities | <input type="checkbox"/> Preferred activities scheduled in daily routines |

- Obtaining the learner's attention prior to giving an instruction
- Social stories and/or video-modelling
- Adjust the amount of assignment given to the student at once
- Allow flexible seating positions (e.g., stand, sit on knees)
- Intersperse difficult assignments with easier assignments
- Adjust the difficulty of the assignment
- Require active responses in instruction (talking, moving, organizing, working at board, interacting with computer)
- Provide oral instructions
- Using appropriate language for the learner's level of comprehension
- Modeling and practice of desired behaviours prior to situation
- Increase opportunities for physical activity
- Limited number of instructions provided at once
- Assign tasks that require active participation
- Provide extra time to complete assignments
- Proximity control
- Inform in advance, if possible, of changes to schedule/routine
- Preview rules and behavioural expectations
- Begin day or period with relaxation and guided imagery exercise
- Provide opportunity for 'seat breaks' (structure with errands, physical activity, etc.)
- Multiple modes of instruction (visual, auditory, hands-on)
- Outline for assignments/Break assignments into manageable steps
- Modify task length
- Written study guides for tests/exams
- Other:

Adaptations to Promote Skill and Relationship Building

- Discover student's passions and interests to incorporate in daily schedule
- Focus on student strengths, talents and accomplishments
- Provide recess/lunch opportunity indoors with friend (w/structured games, etc.)
- Participation in extracurricular activities
- Ensure student has at least one adult mentor at school
- Planned time to engage in preferred activity with student
- Provide opportunities for student to provide assistance to others
- Parent/community volunteer support
- Planned time for student to talk with trusted adult
- Provide opportunities for student to display responsibility and/or leadership role
- Encourage cooperative learning tasks, if appropriate
- Arrange for peer buddies during unstructured times

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|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Establish behaviour contract with 1-3 SMART goals | <input type="checkbox"/> Implement home-school communication system | <input type="checkbox"/> Send positive notes home |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teach appropriate request for breaks during difficult work activities | <input type="checkbox"/> Teach how to obtain peer/teacher attention in prosocial ways | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide instruction in self-monitoring (e.g. hand-raising, using cueing) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Provide feedback using written/symbol/quantitative feedback every _____ minutes | <input type="checkbox"/> Implement positive reinforcement system | <input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledge other students' positive behaviour |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Catch 'em being good: compliment positive behaviour and work | <input type="checkbox"/> Ratio of positive versus negative comments (4 :1 ratio of positive to negative comments should be kept vigilantly in mind) | <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid interrupting reinforcing activities unnecessarily |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Provide "freebies" (access to preferred items/activities without placing demands) | <input type="checkbox"/> Ignore minor, inappropriate behaviour | <input type="checkbox"/> Participation in social skills/friendship groups |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Controlled response to agitated student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remain calm - Use a quiet voice - Take a deep breath - Prevent power struggles by recognizing that the student may require support - Be flexible - Use non-threatening body language | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional learning for personnel: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |

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