Positive Strategies for Students with Behavior Problems

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### Functional Behavioral Assessments

**Name:** Nathan Jones  
**Date of Report:** November 30

**Age:** 10 years  
**Grade:** 5

**Positive strategies team:** Teacher, resource room teacher, school psychologist, social worker, school nurse, parents, and Nathan consulted on this assessment. Assessment activities were conducted between October 21 and November 24. Intervention planning is under way and several support strategies are already being implemented.

**Reason for FBA:** From the start of the school year, Nathan demonstrated an escalating pattern of disruptive behavior and disciplinary consequences. His teacher questioned whether placement in a mainstream class was appropriate and eventually requested consideration of alternative placement in a more intensive special instruction class, where Nathan might benefit from the reduced student–teacher ratio and increased support for learning and management of his challenging behaviors.

**Challenging behaviors:** Nathan’s behavior problems include yelling at the teacher often combined with muttering curse words, running out of the classroom, and hitting peers. His FBA identified yelling and cursing as priority behaviors for two reasons—first, they occurred more frequently than the other behaviors (about 5 times per day), and second, yelling and cursing often serve as precursors to hitting and running out of the classroom.

**Assessment approaches:** (Results are recorded separately on Positive Strategies worksheets.)

- **Team consultation and discussion:** Nathan’s parents met with two team members and were also interviewed separately regarding their impressions of behavior both in and out of school. Two team members met with Nathan to discuss his view of triggers for his behavior.
- **Direct observation:** Used by team members to conduct scatter plot and antecedent–behavior–consequence charts.
- **Checklists/Questionnaires:** Team members completed the motivation assessment scale and functional assessment checklist for teachers and staff.
- **Student-environment:** Fit was assessed through informal team discussion, the learning style profile, and observation by resource room teacher.

**Background:** Nathan is classified as learning disabled (language-based) and is enrolled in a general education class. He is mainstreamed for all subjects and attends resource room twice a week. Nathan’s overall cognitive skills are in the average range. He has shown above-grade-level achievement in math, but has substantial difficulty with verbal and written language (significant aptitude/achievement gap). His parents prefer that Nathan maintain a regular education placement, but are concerned that his behaviors may make this difficult. They note that behavior problems occur mostly during school and are concerned a special education classroom may offer less intellectual stimulation and provide more negative role models.

Among Nathan’s strengths is conceptual reasoning. He participates in the student orchestra and intramural athletics; he is a committed member of his basketball team. Nathan’s primary teacher uses a classwide behavior intervention program to which Nathan responds intermittently. Before referring Nathan to the Positive Strategies team, his teachers employed warning cards and extra incentives; Nathan’s behavior sometimes improved, but change was short-lived.

**Findings:** Based on the above-noted assessment, the team worked to clarify: 1) circumstances in which Nathan performed well, 2) slow and fast triggers (setting events and antecedents) relating to problem behavior, and 3) consequences of problem behavior. Nathan works best in small groups, especially early in the morning or just after lunch. He responds best to concise instructions accompanied by gestures or visual cues and repetition of key points. A pattern of escalation was identified: Nathan works intensely for a few minutes (even on reading and writing), then becomes restless and fidgety; from there, he may escalate to mumbling, yelling, screaming, cursing, and storming out of the classroom, depending on the circumstances. Thus, his language-based learning difficulties and limited frustration tolerance are slow triggers. Problems most often occur when Nathan works independently. Motivation assessment scale results indicate that escape is the primary motivation for Nathan’s behavior, followed by attention as a secondary motivator. Following problem behavior, he was often sent to the office, with his work left incomplete; thus, the team surmised that leaving the classroom might unwittingly encourage the problem behavior. These findings are summarized in the hypothesis outlined below.

**Hypothesis testing:** The team tested the working hypothesis by implementing two different instructional conditions: 1) adapting Nathan’s worksheets from open-ended questions to a multiple-choice format (reduce demands), and 2) providing a peer buddy (support). Peer buddy and multiple-choice format were both effective (the buddy a bit more so). When these two approaches were combined, Nathan had no outbursts, compared to about 5 per day at baseline. Ms. Gonzalez conferred with all team members, including meeting with Mrs. Jones and Nathan together, to discuss these findings and seek input. All agree that the FBA conditions appeared to be helpful.

As this summary is written, the team is preparing to meet for initial behavior intervention plan development. Hence, results of this FBA and team feedback suggest that Nathan’s plan should include elements of each component: adapted work and peer support.

This report was prepared by Eileen Coleman, Nathan’s teacher, and Gina Gonzalez, social worker.

**Figure 22.** Nathan’s functional behavior assessment (FBA) summary.
Before we discuss Nathan's plan over the long term, we return to Nathan's team to examine how his BIP evolved over the course of the school year. As illustrated previously in this chapter, Nathan's team developed and initiated a BIP with elements of prevention and replacement skills. They monitored problem behavior, but they also kept track of how often Nathan took breaks, the extent to which he used newly taught coping skills, and his grades. The team met regularly during the first few weeks of implementation (beginning in December), and a bit less frequently as Nathan demonstrated fairly consistent progress. The whole BIP, as developed, is presented in Figure 30 on pages 156–160.

**Student:** Nathan Jones  
**Date:** December 18

**Behavior:** Yelling at teacher, cursing  
**FBA dates:** October–November

**Hypothesis (from FBA):** Nathan yells at the teacher and curses when he has work with language demands, because when he does, he often doesn’t have to complete the work as he gets sent out of the room and peers laugh. This is more likely to occur when assignments require complex written or verbal expression and because he has difficulty tolerating frustration.

**STEP 1. BRAINSTORM POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS**

A. Prevention: List setting event and/or antecedent modifications that might reduce target behavior. Check those validated by the FBA.

- [X] Do not assign written work
- [X] Adapt written work (e.g., multiple-choice instead of open-ended questions)
- [X] Provide social and affective support (peer buddy to help with work and provide attention)
- [ ] Allow frequent breaks
- [ ] Have resource room teacher available for one-on-one assistance

B. Replacement behaviors: List replacement behaviors meeting the same function as problem behavior; consider coping skills that may reduce impact of setting events

1. Request breaks to provide escape
2. Gain peer attention through positive means, asking for help, collaborating on tasks that tap strengths
3. Improve frustration tolerance and time on task—assess task difficulty, rate frustration level, talk to self, take deep breath, ask for assistance, and wait for assistance to be provided.

**STEP 2. PREVENT OR MINIMIZE OCCURRENCES OF PROBLEM BEHAVIOR**

A. Short-term prevention strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting event or antecedent targeted</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Implementation plan</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Low frustration tolerance; language-based learning disability; peer attention | Peer buddy        | When math, language arts, and social studies require complex written or verbal expression, pair Nathan with valued peer who reads questions aloud and supports his responses; rotating peer buddies coordinated by classroom teacher with social worker support | Reduce number of incidents  
Learn from positive peer models  
Increase positive social attention |
| Language-based learning disability | Task accommodations | Resource room teacher to modify content for math word problems, language arts, social studies; resource room and classroom teachers to coordinate Nathan’s work and progress; daily, resource room teacher to meet privately with Nathan to explain and review accommodations | Reduce number of incidents  
Learn to simplify materials via daily meeting with resource room teacher  
Increase academic success |

**Staff responsible:** Classroom teacher  
**Start date:** 12/11  
**1st review date:** 12/20
B. Long-term accommodations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting event or antecedent targeted</th>
<th>Long-term accommodation</th>
<th>Implementation plan</th>
<th>Desired outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language-based learning disability</td>
<td>Make language tasks and verbal instruction easier for Nathan to process.</td>
<td>Resource room teacher to provide continuing consultation to simplify instructions and adapt Nathan’s work; resource room teacher to meet daily with Nathan to preview material and assignments, forecast trouble spots. Decrease frequency (fade) only with extended success.</td>
<td>Better meet Nathan’s learning needs Decrease frustration Increase success Decrease amount of labor Nathan expends on processing tasks and requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low frustration tolerance</td>
<td>Breaks</td>
<td>Nathan permitted breaks from work to walk around room, sharpen pencil, etc. without need for permission; must not be disruptive; at outset, permitted 3 breaks per period. Number of breaks to be altered based upon progress.</td>
<td>Reduce number of incidents Learn to simplify materials via daily meetings with resource room teacher Increase success</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Staff responsible: Classroom teacher  
Start date: 12/15  
1st review date: 12/20

STEP 3. MANAGE CONTINUING INCIDENTS OF PROBLEM BEHAVIOR

Early signs of problem behavior: Escalation.
Nathan sighs, becomes restless, increases motor activity, makes excuse to take break (bathroom, pencil, trash can).

Steps to take in response to early signs of behavior: (Refer to replacement skills.)
Provide verbal prompt for Nathan to rate frustration. Based on rating, Nathan will choose type of break. At end of break, Nathan will be coached to use coping statements and relaxation strategies. When he has deescalated, resume work.

Response to incidents of behavior: Include plan to resume activity or return to context.
1. If Nathan yells at teacher or curses, he will be coached to regain control and resume work as soon as possible by resource room teacher, social worker, or school psychologist depending on scheduled availability. If behavior continues, coach will escort Nathan from room and monitor until he is able to cooperate with coaching (Step 5 of the BIP).
2. If Nathan leaves classroom, he will be required to make up work missed (with support if needed).
3. If Nathan hits another student, his parents will be called immediately. He will be required to discuss episode with social worker, assistant principal, and parents. In-school suspension will apply per school policy.

Steps to take following an incident: Describe procedures for incident review and strategies to minimize inadvertent reinforcement for problem behavior.
Classroom teacher, resource room teacher, and social worker will meet to review. Social worker will then review incident one-on-one with Nathan, discuss “better way,” ask him to share with parents, and confirm/consult with them. Incident review will be opportunity to consider modifying plan.

☐ Preparation required. Consider staff training, student supports, other efforts needed.
In consultation with school psychologist, social worker will develop thermometer for Nathan to rate frustration and anger (see next page) and relaxation strategies. This will be finalized with Nathan and shared with parents in meeting. This will be developed, explained, and practiced prior to implementation.

☐ Crisis intervention plan is needed.

Staff responsible: Social worker  
Start date: 12/15  
1st review date: 12/20

(continued)
STEP 4. REPLACE PROBLEM BEHAVIOR WITH ALTERNATIVE BEHAVIORS OR SKILLS

Alternative #1: Predict trouble spots; use thermometer to monitor mood; use breaks, deep breathing, coping statements; effectively deescalate before losing control.

Skill area: ☑ Self-regulation ☐ Communication ☐ Social skills ☐ Academic skills ☐ Other

Current skill level: ☑ Uses skill inconsistently ☑ Has prerequisites or aspects of skill ☑ Lacks this skill

Support needed: ☑ Formal instruction ☐ Improved motivation system ☐ Assistive or adaptive technology

Long-term goal and benefits: Improve frustration tolerance/anger management resulting in better performance, improved peer relations.

Initial instructional plan: Include procedures, instructor(s), frequency, setting(s), materials, and reinforcement.

Coaching: Social worker will prep materials and meet with Nathan and family before implementation. Social worker will instruct and coach self-regulation skills: mood monitoring, relaxation (deep breathing, imaginary "switch" that turns on calm), and coping statements ("This is hard, but I can do it—step by step").

1. Mood monitoring: Nathan will rate frustration level using numbers 1–10 with corresponding amounts of "mercury" (red) and descriptive terms (1-relaxed, 5-getting antsy, 8-steaming mad).
2. Self-calming: Nathan and social worker will develop strategies for calming and coping associated with each level on thermometer (e.g., 5-take break): relaxation, deep breathing, count to 10, coping statements.
3. Breaks: Based on mood rating, Nathan will take breaks (at desk, walk around room, enter hall, depending on frustration level). Higher mood ratings should prompt breaks and self-calming until deescalated (rating of 4).

Ongoing instruction: Include plan to fade prompts and reinforcement as skill is generalized to other settings.

Nathan will be allowed a limited number of breaks each period—put one chip in jar for each break; initial daily amount established by number or breaks needed during behavior intervention plan to date. To generalize, family will help him practice self-regulation skills. After demonstrated success in school, use on homework assignments at home so frustration tolerance and self-calming skills are practiced there. Since progress should bring natural and programmed reinforcement, team expects more self-regulation over time and corresponding fading of supports.

Staff responsible: Social worker Start date: 12/15 1st review date: 12/20

Alternative #2: Rate task difficulty, predict "trouble spots," develop and use "attack" strategies first with support and then independently.

Skill area: ☑ Self-regulation ☐ Communication ☐ Social skills ☐ Academic skills ☐ Other

Current skill level: ☐ Uses skill inconsistently ☐ Has prerequisites or aspects of skill ☑ Lacks this skill

Support needed: ☑ Formal instruction ☐ Improved motivation system ☐ Assistive or adaptive technology

Long-term goal and benefits: Develop learning strategies for verbal material to improve success on language tasks and overall achievement.

Initial instructional plan: Include procedures, instructor(s), frequency, setting(s), materials, and reinforcement.

1. Adapt materials: After consulting with classroom teacher, resource room teacher will adapt learning materials and assignments in advance. Resource room teacher will meet with Nathan daily to explain how materials were adapted.
2. One-on-one support: Resource room teacher will instruct and support Nathan on writing skills (e.g., main ideas, outlines, narrative writing diamond) and set aside one-on-one time to review and support written assignments.
3. Diary: Resource room teacher and Nathan will keep diary listing of accommodations and summarize them weekly.
4. Supported self-monitoring: After consulting with classroom teacher, social worker and resource room teacher will meet briefly (10 minutes) with Nathan each Friday to review progress. Social worker and Nathan will review with family (call).
Ongoing instruction: Include plan to fade prompts and reinforcement as skill is generalized to other settings.

As Nathan demonstrates success with behavioral control (see alternative #1), resource room teacher will begin to request his collaboration in adapting materials. This will prepare and tutor Nathan in identifying his need for accommodations. To generalize, after stable period of success, resource room teacher and Nathan will meet with parents to review self-accommodation strategies in preparation for homework. Continuing resource room assistance per individualized educational plan.

Staff responsible: Social worker

Start date: 12/15

1st review date: 12/20

STEP 5. MONITOR AND EVALUATE CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR, USE OF REPLACEMENTS, AND OUTCOMES

A. Monitor rates of problem behavior and use of replacement behaviors or skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem behaviors (tracking methods)</th>
<th>Baseline (number per unit of time or opportunity)</th>
<th>Goal achieved (rate at which plan is considered successful)</th>
<th>Review required (rate at which plan modification is needed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yelling at teacher, cursing (tracking form)</td>
<td>2.3 per day</td>
<td>1 in 3 days: 3 per day</td>
<td>More than 1.5 per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storming out of class, out of control (form)</td>
<td>3 per week</td>
<td>1 per month</td>
<td>1 per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitting peers (tracking form)</td>
<td>2 per month</td>
<td>None for rest of year</td>
<td>1 incident</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Replacement behaviors (tracking methods)</th>
<th>Baseline (frequency count)</th>
<th>Goal achieved (rate at which plan is considered successful)</th>
<th>Review required (rate at which plan modification is needed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independently initiates breaks</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3 or fewer per class</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mood ratings and self-calming (binder)</td>
<td>Uses as needed</td>
<td>Less than 1.5 outbursts per week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accommodation strategies (recorded in diary) | Varied | 75% of opportunities | 50% |

B. Evaluate generalized outcomes and impact of changes on academic and social performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill area</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Expected outcomes and benefits</th>
<th>Evaluation method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-regulation</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Improved self-regulation: handle frustration without losing control</td>
<td>Monitoring incidents of problem behavior Daily with weekly review; then at longer intervals with progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Better “attack” strategies for language and writing tasks</td>
<td>Student, parent, teacher report, resource room teacher diary Weekly at first, longer intervals with progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>More confidence and access to strengths</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic skills</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Better performance-average grades in math, language arts, and social studies will increase</td>
<td>Team review of grades in math, language arts, and social studies in 3 months Meeting at report card time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-regulation</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic skills</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td></td>
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(continued)
In February, the team convened to review Nathan’s progress and prepared an interim summary of that meeting. The interim summary appears in Figure 31 and a graph illustrating incidents of problem behavior appears in Figure 32. The solid line in that figure depicts the day-to-day variation in Nathan’s behavior. The broken line shows the overall trend in the number of weekly incidents.

During initial BIP development, team members mused about the eventual need to plan for Nathan’s transition to middle school, regardless of how well the remainder of his school year went. As the end of the year approached, the team prepared for the annual review meeting that was required for all classified students in the school district. The team again convened. They discussed—and praised—Nathan’s continuing progress. While he was not outburst free, he maintained a very low level of problem behavior, attaining better grades, doing better socially, and utilizing learning and coping skills more autonomously. Figure 33 depicts the summary developed in preparation for Nathan’s annual review. It contains progress reports and also details current planning for the transition to middle school, a crucial consideration for his continuing adaptation and improvement. Figure 34 illustrates Nathan’s outbursts and use of his replacement skills; Figure 35 depicts Nathan’s academic performance in English Language Arts over the time period of his BIP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill area</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Expected outcomes and benefits</th>
<th>Evaluation method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-regulation</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Better peer relationships, more friends, not ostracized, contacts outside school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td></td>
<td>Parent and teacher observation and report, self-report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluate in 3 months at time of report card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic skills</td>
<td></td>
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Procedure for modifying behavior intervention plan: (Indicate how changes will be made to plan.)

Team will monitor progress daily and weekly; should behavior incidents increase or worsen, immediate team meeting to discuss and plan. If no or limited progress (see A above), team will reconvene to reconsider plan.

Staff responsible: Social worker

Start date: 12/15

STEP 6. MAINTAIN POSITIVE CHANGES OVER TIME AND ACROSS SETTINGS

Periodic review: Outline plan to maintain change into future and enhance quality of life.

High-risk circumstances: Develop support plan that anticipates predictable future challenges.

Unforeseen changes: Teacher or coach absent, not available for support. Classroom teacher and resource room teacher consult to adapt work several days in advance. In resource room teacher’s absence, classroom teacher provides support; Nathan may obtain extra breaks, reduced work. With success, consider peer buddy support for mood monitoring.

Transition to middle school at end of year; departmentalized curriculum, more teachers, greater demands. Before year’s end, social studies teacher to meet with middle school staff about Nathan. In addition to group orientation, provide Nathan a one-on-one orientation. Have coping plan and resource room teacher support in place prior to 1st day of sixth grade.

Plan for relapse: Assuming initial success, outline plan for managing recurrence of problem behavior.

If change below targets, or problem behavior reduces but positive outcomes not achieved, team will meet within one week to reconsider plan.

Staff responsible: Social worker

1st review date: 3 months

Figure 30. Nathan’s full Behavior Intervention Plan (Key: FBA = Functional Behavior Assessment; BIP = Behavior Intervention Plan.)
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