



# MASP

Michigan Association of School Psychologists

## Tip Sheet Presented by your School Psychologists: Behavior Management in the Classroom



### Proactive Measures

Most of what happens in a classroom must be closely controlled by a caring, trustworthy adult. Order, limit setting, and structure are essential in a classroom setting. Teachers should take every possible **proactive measure** using the following steps:

- Arrange desks/classroom furniture to meet social/emotional needs as well as instructional and organizational needs.
- Adjust schedules to provide a balance between highly structured periods and more stimulating activities.
- Establish a group behavior management plan that incorporates individual needs.
- Provide direct instruction, programmed learning, and precision teaching lessons. These will build students' self-confidence while establishing a knowledge base from which to expand problem-solving and higher-level thinking skills, as students demonstrate readiness for learning experiences that require less external structure.
- Initially, keep student-to-student interactions to a minimum. This is especially important during times when adult monitoring would be difficult. Trust and safety cannot be established if individuals within the group continually undermine each other or the adults, with problems created in secret.
- Provide group-building opportunities that move students from an "I" to a "We" orientation without overstimulating or threatening them. These activities and opportunities are most effective when integrated into the affective, academic, and recreational arenas.
- Select a group peer leader. The group will select a leader whether the teacher assists with this process or not. Qualities of leadership include being perceived as similar to other group members and being reinforced for modeled behavior.
- Be aware of how individual needs affect group dynamics. Group members typically assume roles early in the establishment of the group dynamics.
- Show empathy and unconditional regard at all times, but especially when students are in the midst of a crisis.
- Attend with extreme care to students' physiological as well as psychological needs.
- Much of acting-out behavior reflects a need for power or attention; therefore, attempt to give as little emotional response as possible to inappropriate behavior while making responses to appropriate behavior obviously animated and positive.

## **Characteristics of Effective Behavior Managers**

Effective behavior managers:

- Respect their own strengths and weaknesses as seriously as those of their students.
- Understand that social-emotional growth is a never-ending process.
- Clearly communicate rules, goals, and expectations.
- Respond to behaviors consistently and predictably.
- Discriminate between issues of responsibility and problem ownership.
- Exhibit high degrees of empathy and self-efficacy.

Behaviors teachers exhibit that contribute to successful classroom management include:

- having materials organized
- using a pleasant tone of voice
- being aware of multiple elements of group functioning simultaneously
- being able to anticipate possible problems and react quickly to avoid them.

## **Behavior Problems**

What steps can be followed to resolve a child's constant misbehavior?

- If possible, meet with the child and describe in exact terms the behavior you find unacceptable in the classroom
- During the discussion, explain the reason(s) why you find the behavior unacceptable.
- Be sure the child understands that it is not he/she who is unacceptable, but rather the behavior.
- Let the student know exactly what will happen if the problem continues.
- If the misbehavior occurs again, follow through with the previously planned disciplinary action.
- Throughout the process, keep the parents and the principal informed of the progress or lack of progress.
- If the child continues to misbehave and you feel that you have utilized all of your options and resources, send the child to the principal's office. Explain to the child that he/she is welcome to return when he/she is ready to follow the classroom rules.

### **Resources:**

**You Can Handle Them All!**

<http://www.disciplinehelp.com/teacher>

**Dr. Mac's Behavior Management Site**

<http://www.behavioradvisor.com/>

**National Technical Assistance Center for Positive Behavioral Support**

<http://www.pbis.org/main.htm>

**NASP Fact Sheet on Positive Behavioral Supports**

[http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/pbs\\_fs.aspx](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/pbs_fs.aspx)



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## Tip Sheet Presented by your School Psychologists

### School Refusal



#### What is School Refusal?

Historically called “school phobia,” researchers today prefer to use the term “school refusal” to refer to and describe the behavioral pattern in children and adolescence of avoiding or refusing to attend school. This broader term recognizes the fact that children have significant problems attending school for *many* reasons that are not necessarily the expression of a true phobia. There is also considerable variation in the severity of this behavior. Severity of school refusal ranges from frequent complaints about school attendance to part or full day absences from school. For some children absences may last for entire weeks of school or more. School refusal occurs in approximately 2% of school-age children although some estimates are as high as 5%.

#### Development of School Refusal

- **Separation Anxiety:** Normal “separation anxiety” occurs at about the age of 18 to 24 months when children cry, cling, and have temper tantrums when separated from their caregiver. While many children experience separation anxiety in preschool and kindergarten, the behavior is more serious when separation anxiety is so extreme that it results in *refusal* to attend school. Some older children, who have had difficulties or have experienced a trauma during this stage of development, continue to have a hard time making this separation. Additionally, sometimes school aged children who were previously able to negotiate this stage without a problem will suddenly become anxious or fearful for a variety of reasons. A recent crisis in the community (such as 9/11) or family (such as death, divorce, financial problems, or abuse) may cause a child to fear that something terrible will happen at home while they are at school. These students may be worried about the safety of a caregiver or other loved one and fear something bad will happen to that individual when they are apart from them.
- **Performance Anxiety:** Some students have extreme anxiety about taking tests or giving speeches, or athletic competition in physical education class. Those who have anxiety about these types of performance situations worry about being embarrassed or humiliated in front of their peers.
- **Social Anxiety:** Some students may feel social anxiety or worry about social interactions with peers and/or teachers. They are extremely uncomfortable in social situations and may dread socializing with classmates.
- **Generalized Anxiety:** Some students have a tendency to perceive the world as threatening and have general worries about something bad happening. These children may also have specific fears of disastrous events like tornadoes or war.
- **Depression:** Some children experience depression or both anxiety and depression. A very serious symptom of depression is suicidal ideation. A child who is talking about harming himself/herself should be referred to a mental health professional in order to ensure his/her safety.
- **Threat of Danger at School:** Some children live in neighborhoods or attend schools that are unsafe or chaotic. These children may want to avoid school because of very real situations in which they are physically threatened, teased, or left out by other children. Many students have been bullied at school or on the school bus.

- **Transitions:** Children that have missed a lot of school due to illness, surgery or vacations/summer break may have difficulty in returning to classroom routines and find the demands of school to be overwhelming. The transition from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school may also feel overwhelming to children, as may changing schools due to family moves.
- **Reinforced behavior:** There are also other children who simply want to stay home because they can play, watch TV, and enjoy their parent's attention. School refusal may develop if these behaviors are reinforced by allowing the student to engage in these preferred activities when home from school.

### Characteristics of School Refusal

Common characteristics of students who refuse school owing to emotional reasons are varied, and may include:

- > Frequent complaints about attending school
- > Frequent tardiness or unexcused absences
- > Absences on significant days (tests, speeches, physical education class)
- > Frequent requests to call or go home
- > Excessive worrying about a parent when in school
- > Frequent requests to go to the nurse's office because of physical complaints
- > Crying about wanting to go home

When a teacher or school staff member sees any of the signs of school refusal behavior it may be a good idea to speak with the school psychologist, school social worker, or other school support staff and the child's parents. It is important to develop an intervention plan as quickly as possible when these warning signs occur to increase the probability of a successful outcome. Prolonged consequences of school refusal are severe, from lack of academic progress, failure to develop satisfactory social relationships, and significant family conflict to adult emotional disorders. *The longer this behavior occurs, the harder it is to treat.*

Students who are truant may be distinguished from this group by their antisocial or delinquent behaviors, their lack of emotional distress about attending or missing school, their attempts to hide their absences from their parents, and the fact that they are not in contact with their parents or caregivers when they are not at school.

### What Teachers and Other School Personnel Can Do

- **Be alert for signs of school refusal.** Speak with parents and school support staff to intervene early. For example, reinforce positive behaviors (participation, effort) and ignore negative behaviors (crying, whining).
- **Welcome separation-anxious children when they arrive at school.** Help them to become involved in getting organized for the day, performing special jobs such as handing out papers or collecting books, or in socializing with other students. Assure parents that school personnel can support a child who is anxious about separation.
- **Help children who have anxiety about giving speeches or other performance situations to feel more comfortable.** Modifying requirements for public performance, such as reading silently and answering questions rather than reading aloud in class. Students with test anxiety may benefit from having a quiet place to take tests as well as some low-key practice with sample test items. Brainstorm strategies to help students feel more comfortable if they are avoiding school because of the locker room or due to anxiety about athletic competition.
- **Assign a peer buddy at recess or lunchtime to help socially anxious children feel more at ease.**
- **If academic difficulties are present, adjust assignments to the child's level.** Provide tutoring and/or request an evaluation to determine if there is a learning problem or disability requiring other services.
- **Provide a quiet and safe area in the school for a child to go to when feeling stressed.**
- **Ensure that the child feels safe at school.** When a child feels threatened about going to school because of bullying or a chaotic, unsafe school environment, steps need to be taken to make the child feel safe at school (such as anti-bullying programs that teach children how to handle themselves when they feel threatened).

### Resource

National Association of School Psychologists  
[www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)