



For the purpose of this factsheet and other training opportunities, we use the term “interfering behavior” because it focuses on the impact the behavior has on the student’s emotional well-being, access and achievement in academics, social interactions, and other aspects of life. We also believe the term “interfering” carries fewer negative connotations associated with terms like problem behavior, inappropriate behavior, or challenging behavior. Interfering behavior exists on a continuum of severity that a team can use to more precisely describe behaviors and prioritize interventions. When discussing interfering behavior, remember that words matter and choosing the right words can strengthen relationships, reduce misunderstandings, and improve outcomes.

Below are tips for creating collaborative conversations around interfering behaviors.

Express concern about the impact the behavior is having on the student and that your goal is to help the student. The conversation should center around the impact the behavior has on the student's learning and access to instruction.

Avoid talking about the negative impact the behavior has on you, other staff, and students. Often, parents already know their child exhibits interfering behaviors. Focusing on the negative impact those behaviors have on others can create a feeling of isolation and embarrassment. Restating the problem through the lens of how it makes other lives more difficult will send a message that the student is not welcome in that environment.

Approach interfering behavior through a trauma-informed lens that explores the impact of trauma across team members. Discuss interfering behavior using clear language to describe the student's history, environment, and other factors with a focus on student growth.

Engaging families and building collaborative relationships can profoundly impact student success. Developing plans and agreements can help align efforts and improve collaboration. Consider what parts of the plan are under your control and what you cannot control. You can uphold your end of the agreement by implementing strategies, monitoring progress, and reporting back to the team. A well-crafted plan will outline these expectations and responsibilities. When defining the family's role in the plan, remember that families have an entirely different relationship with the student, with different priorities, responsibilities, and emotional and cognitive bandwidth.

Strong relationships and communication provide the parents and caregivers the opportunity to express their concerns when implementation at home is not going as planned. Offering support and opportunities to collaborate avoids placing blame while ensuring the plan meets everyone's needs and capacity. School and home settings are very different environments, and adjustments to the plan should be expected and celebrated as a collaborative effort to support the student.

In instances where a child is displaying a new interfering behavior, teachers and staff should attempt to define, in observable terms, what the student is doing. Defining the behaviors and being able to describe what each behavior looks like in clear terms will help keep the the conversation focused on opportunities for growth.

Avoid terms like “always”, “all the time”, and “never” when describing student behavior. It is rare that these terms accurately describe the occurrence of interfering behaviors and do not help develop a growth-oriented approach to behavior change. When behaviors are accurately described, communication is improved, reducing opportunities for misunderstanding. Team cohesiveness improves when stakeholders have the same information and everyone’s voice is heard.

- ***Prioritize interfering behaviors with the parents and caregivers.***

Often, students exhibit more than one interfering behavior. It may be necessary to prioritize behavior interventions based on the severity or impact of a specific behavior. Provide a rationale for why one behavior is being prioritized over another. Seek input from other stakeholders so that the team can reach a consensus. When prioritizing behaviors to target through interventions, teams may consider student and staff safety, time spent outside of the learning environment due to interfering behavior, relationship development, access to the general curriculum, etc.

- ***Identify a replacement behavior.***

Only focusing on reducing an interfering behavior may result in teachers and caregivers avoiding situations that trigger the behavior and artificially reduce the instances of the interfering behavior. Avoiding specific triggering events is typically not a sustainable solution. A more productive outcome is to teach the student to use their skills to work through the challenge without engaging in interfering behavior.

When we discuss interfering behavior as a skill the student has developed to get their needs met, we lay the groundwork for teams to discuss teaching new skills. When setting up interventions designed to reduce behavior, discuss what you will teach the student to do instead. This requires knowing the function or why the student engages in the interfering behavior and identifying new ways for the student to meet the same outcome. Focusing on new behaviors offers a roadmap to success, opportunities to generalize the skills to new environments, and more opportunities to succeed. Discussing progress on developing new skills is much more positive and a growth-oriented conversation to have with parents and a great way to include the student in monitoring their own progress.

- ***Communicate clearly about the process.***

Behavioral change does not occur overnight. It is a reflective process guided by how a student responds to interventions. Talk openly about what the process looks like. Define how you will know when the student is making progress or not responding to interventions. Talk about what the next steps might look like when the progress is made. Additionally, discuss what happens if the student does not make the anticipated progress. Sharing your problem-solving process and steps for remediation will help clarify your expectations, reduce surprises when changes occur, and keep parents informed and involved in the process.

- ***Clearly and honestly communicate progress.***

In the same way that we should be clear when describing what the behavior looks like, we should be clear in communicating the progress the student is making. Identifying a data collection method that accurately captures student performance and presenting that information in a way that makes sense to parents can help develop a line of communication focused on progress rather than waiting until a problem arises. Periodic summaries help ensure that parents regularly receive accurate information and that all communication coming from the school is not a result of student disciplinary action. It is important not to shy away from communicating when the student is not making progress. Discussing the lack of progress and how the intervention will change communicates to parents that you are continuously monitoring and responding to their child’s needs.

- ***Behavior is not personal, and does not define the student.***

It may feel like student behavior is directed at an individual or is a personal attack on a teacher, caregiver, or other students. It is important to refrain from using words like abuse and manipulation when describing student behavior as these terms are loaded with emotional context.

Use discussions regarding interfering behavior as an opportunity to identify and develop new skills in a student. When a student struggles to apply a math concept, we build in support, provide additional opportunities to practice, and monitor their progress. The same should be true when a student struggles to meet the expectations for school behavior.

For additional information, visit the ACE website:

www.vcuautismcenter.org

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