



## **How to Address a Student's Problem Behavior: Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs) & Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs)**

Schools must provide appropriate and individualized accommodations for students with disabilities whose behavior interferes with their learning. This fact sheet applies to:

- Students with disabilities who are in special education and have an Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Students with disabilities who are not in special education, but have a 504 Plan for accommodations in regular education classrooms.

### **BIPs for Students in Special Education:**

There are two circumstances that require an IEP team to include behavioral interventions in a student's IEP.

First, the student's IEP team must consider positive behavior interventions for any special education student whose behaviors are causing problems and affecting the student's learning. The behaviors do not need to be related to or caused by the disability that qualifies the student for special education.

Second, if a school suspends a student with a disability for more than 10 school days or recommends expulsion, then the IEP team must meet within 10 school days. The IEP team has to determine whether the behavior (1) was caused by or related to the student's disability<sup>1</sup> or (2) resulted from the school's failure to follow the student's IEP. If the IEP team decides the behavior was caused by or related to the student's disability, the student cannot be suspended or expelled.<sup>2</sup> Instead, an

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<sup>1</sup> This decision is called a "manifestation determination." See Disability Rights South Carolina fact sheet on Discipline of Students with Disabilities and other education fact sheets at [www.disabilityrightssc.org](http://www.disabilityrightssc.org)

<sup>2</sup> In special circumstances involving a weapon, illegal drugs, or serious bodily injury, the student can still be removed to an alternative school setting for up to 45 days. The IEP team determines the alternative setting.

evaluation called a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) needs to be done to find out more why the behaviors happened. Then a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) needs to be developed so that the student's behavior is reduced and improves. If the student already had a FBA and a BIP, then the IEP team reviews and changes the BIP as needed. It is difficult for the IEP team to create an effective BIP if an existing FBA does not fully analyze the behaviors. It is also very difficult to address a student's problem behavior if the BIP is inaccurate or not specific enough. See below for more information about FBAs and BIPs.

## Functional Behavioral Assessments:

FBAs help the IEP team understand the cause of problem behaviors, such as hitting, disrupting class, refusing to do work, etc. The FBA should guide the IEP team in the development of positive behavior interventions that will help the student replace his/her problem behaviors with more appropriate ones. The purpose of a FBA is to determine the student's motivation for certain behaviors and develop appropriate interventions for those behaviors; these interventions can then be written into the BIP.

Trying to figure out the motivation for the student's behaviors is a difficult task. Some of the areas that need to be considered when determining why certain behaviors occur include:

- The particular setting or activity the student is in when the behavior occurs (e.g., the classroom vs. the cafeteria)
- The time of day when the behavior does/does not occur (may relate to when a student's medication is effective or when student becomes tired at end of the day)
- Specific conditions when the behavior occurs (was the student alone? working in a group? in a particular subject?)
- What events typically occur before and after the behavior
- Any patterns or circumstances noted when the behavior occurs (e.g., during bad weather, substitute teacher in classroom, or the student didn't take a prescribed medication, etc.)

## Schools must use various means of collecting information for FBA

Direct assessments, such as observing the student in different settings should be used. Indirect assessments are also informative and should be used. Indirect assessments include a review of records, interviews with teachers, parents, resource/special education teachers, and the student. Many times the behavior serves a function that is not directly observable, e.g., the desire to appear smart or being insecure about certain social situations can affect behavior. Additional interviews with bus drivers, after school care providers, coaches, and/or cafeteria workers all may help explain events that are difficult to understand through observation.

After collecting the information, the function of the behavior must be determined. Keep in mind, there may be several reasons why a student engages in poor or inappropriate behavior. It could be a means for avoiding a bad outcome. It may be a result of frustration or anger over the lack of a particular skill. For example, suppose reading is James' weakness. Observation notes may show that most of his misbehavior occurs during "read along" time. Problem behavior could also be a result of performance weaknesses, where certain conditions cause the student to behave poorly. For example, Ellen is unable to complete her reading comprehension assignment when she comes to school hungry and tired.

Once the problem behavior is identified, it should be described as specifically as possible. Rather than "Jack acts inappropriately in class," it should be written as "Jack makes irrelevant and improper comments during circle time." Instead of "Jill doesn't obey class rules," it should read, "Jill leaves her assigned seat without permission and blurts out answers without raising her hand."

When as much information has been gathered about the problem behavior as possible, a written description of the behavior and the function it serves should be developed. For example, "Andi disrupts reading circle by blurting out answers and coughing loudly. She is most likely to disrupt the circle when she has been involved in altercations on the bus before she gets to class."

### Now It's Time to Develop a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP):

Once the FBA is complete, the IEP team develops (or revises) the student's BIP. The BIP should be written so that it focuses on positive interventions, strategies, and reinforcements. These should be individualized to the needs of the student. Punishment has negative consequences without teaching the student how to modify his/her behavior. In addition, such things as being "called down" in class or being put in "time out" may encourage inappropriate behaviors for those students whose motivation is to receive attention or avoid a certain situation.

The BIP should include a number of different strategies for each identified behavior. Each setting where there have been problems may need specific strategies (such as for classroom, cafeteria, and bus).

The BIP will include some or all of the following:

#### Strategies

Strategies are plans that identify skills needed to help students behave properly. The strategies identify ways to teach the student how to get what he/she wants or needs through acceptable behavior. Strategies address how to decrease episodes of misbehavior.

Some helpful strategy-building techniques include:

- Teaching acceptable replacement behaviors that serve the same function as the improper behavior. Example: raise hand to receive attention rather than just blurting out the answer during class.

- Changing the events or activities that often occur just before the inappropriate behavior happens. Example: change the way directions are given, change the order of the line-up process, change the method/timing in which the student transitions to and from classes.
- Improving the outcomes of the desired behavior. Example: change the times for praising and encouraging the desired behaviors, give positive attention.

### Program Changes

Program changes include changing the setup of the classroom, instructional techniques, or curriculum. For example, providing multi-level instruction and encouraging one-on-one oral or written responses.

### Additional Aids and Services

Additional aids and services include supports designed to address factors beyond the school setting where the misbehavior occurs. One-on-one work with a therapist or school psychologist may be helpful for dealing with underlying issues that affect behavior.

### Praise for the Desired Behavior

Praise for the desired behavior is critical for maintaining positive behavior. Praise or encouragement techniques should be based on information from the FBA. If the student was singled out for improper behavior, i.e., was called down when blurting out answers, then the student should be praised twice as much for the desired behavior. So, if Jack was "called down" two times for blurting out answers during the 45 minute reading time, then he should be praised for the desired behavior four times during the 45-minute circle time.

It is important to remember that BIPs can be reviewed and changed as necessary. If a student with a disability already has a BIP, but faces a suspension of more than ten days, the IEP team must hold a meeting to discuss any changes that may be necessary for better behavioral outcomes. Functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans are preventive medicine in the IEP process. If school personnel can understand the reasons for misbehavior through an FBA, then they can "head the behavior off at the pass" through the interventions in the BIP.

### BIPs for Students Who Have 504 Plans:

A Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) should be a part of a student's Section 504 Plan if the student's behavior substantially interferes with the ability to learn in the regular classroom. This includes students who are frequently suspended, including "in school" suspensions.

504 Committees should use strategies and procedures similar to those described in this fact sheet for IEP teams under IDEA. The 504 law and regulations are much less specific than the requirements for special education. However, the U.S. Department of Education has told school districts that if they follow the IDEA

procedures they will be considered to be complying with 504.

## Resources for Additional Information

- A "Dear Colleague letter" to local school districts from Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (U.S. Dept. of Education) dated August 1, 2016. It covers the duty of schools to provide behavior supports.  
<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/files/dcl-on-pbis-in-ieps--08-01-2016.pdf>
- Wrightslaw "Behavior Problems & Discipline" The Website of Pete Wright, national special education attorney.  
<http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/discipl.index.htm>
- "Behavior Assessment, Plans, and Positive Supports" by the Center for Parent Information and Resources.  
<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/behavassess/>

## Sources for the information in this fact sheet:

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA), 20 USC Section 1415(k)(1)(F)

IDEA Regulations, 34 CFR Part 300.324(a)(2)(i), 300.530

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 US Code Section 794(a) and Section 504 Regulations, 34 CFR Parts 104.3 and 104.31

This publication provides legal information, but is not intended to be legal advice. As the law may change, please contact Disability Rights SC for updates. Please let us know if you would like this information in an alternative format.

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