

BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

As Christian school administrators we should be familiar with a number of behavior management techniques. This is necessary especially when dealing with disabled young people. When our teachers have been unsuccessful in correcting a student's behavior and come to us for assistance, we must be prepared to provide additional recommendations.

Those of us who work with young people realize that whether we are attempting to teach, inspire, or discipline not all students respond in the same way or to the same degree. We vary our teaching methods to meet specific needs. Likewise, we should vary our discipline methods to meet specific needs.

The Purpose

For the Christian school administrator, teacher, and parent the purpose of behavior management is far more than managing the behavior of our young people. The purpose of behavior management is to disciple individuals with the expectation of producing in them a specific pattern or character of behavior, especially moral or mental improvement. The pattern of moral improvement is Christlikeness. The character of mental improvement is having the mind of Christ.

The principle to follow in changing unacceptable behavior to acceptable behavior is found in Ephesians 4:22-24, which can be summarized as "put off, renew your mind, put on." If we keep the purpose and the principle of behavior management in mind, the process will not only include discontinuing certain behaviors (put off) but changing our mind about those behaviors (having the mind of Christ) and then replacing the wrong behavior with the right behavior (Christlikeness). The hope is that by taking this approach to behavior management, our young people will not only begin to do right but will begin to do right for the right reasons.

The Techniques

Behavior management techniques vary. Undoubtedly as the techniques are discussed, many will recognize methods presently used in

their classrooms. Often we intuitively respond to situations without realizing someone has adopted an official term for what we do. We may not necessarily agree with the term, but this should not deter us from using methods based on principles we know to be true. With this in mind, the information presented includes preventative, short-term, and long-term techniques used in behavior management programs.

Preventative Techniques – The best way to prevent certain behaviors from occurring is to stop them before they get started. To do so, we must communicate to our students what is acceptable and unacceptable classroom behavior. An easy way to do this is to post a list of four or five classroom rules in the classroom where they can be seen most of the time. This list may include such rules as (1) stay in your seat; (2) raise your hand before speaking; (3) do not bother other students; and (4) keep your hands to yourself.

Review the rules with the students, informing them of the rewards and consequences that will be provided if the rules are or are not obeyed. Consistently carry through with the rewards and consequences so students will understand that you mean what you say. Many students will not attempt certain incorrect behaviors because of the consequences they observe others receiving when participating in those behaviors. Developing and maintaining a consistent schedule will also prevent certain behaviors from occurring. Students with disabilities need the security of structure. If that structure is taken away, their security is also taken away. This could and does lead to some very unwanted, undesirable responses. At times an undesirable response may be misunderstood as a discipline problem. It is important, therefore, to learn to distinguish between discipline problems and other struggles the child may be having. If a change is going to occur in a child's daily schedule, every effort to

The information in the section, *The Techniques*, is adapted from *Managing Behavior*, in *Strategies for Struggling Learners* by Joe P. Sutton and Connie J. Sutton (1997), pp. 177-202, Exceptional Diagnostics. Adapted with permission.

immediately inform the child of that change should be made. Frequent reminders that things are going to be different will also help to successfully prepare the child for the change.

Short-term Techniques – There are those times when a child must be dealt with in the classroom immediately. Short-term techniques are used for these occasions. These techniques take little time to prepare and implement. When they are implemented properly, the undesirable behavior will be short-term as well. Examples of short-term techniques include planned ignoring with praise, proximity control, urge to self-reflect, and humor as a tension diffuser.

Planned ignoring with praise is a technique used when an inappropriate behavior is ignored on purpose. As soon as a desirable behavior is performed, however, the desirable behavior is rewarded with praise. Example: Billy is tapping his foot on the floor disturbing the students in his class. He stops for a short while and his teacher says, “Billy, I really appreciate the way you are sitting there so quietly.” His foot tapping stops for the rest of the day. This being the case, his teacher has successfully implemented this technique.

Physically moving to the source of a problem or potential problem is known as **proximity control**. Most of us have participated in this form of behavior control. Our close presence indicates to the student that the behavior participated in must stop. Often times words are not necessary to stop the behavior and teaching can go on unhindered.

The **urge to self-reflect** will cause a child to understand that what he or she is doing is not acceptable. If a student is drawing during math class, a series of questions should get the child back on track. The teacher may ask, “Mary’ what are you doing?” If Mary answers honestly the next question should be, “Are you supposed to be drawing right now?” followed by, “What should you be doing right now?” This helps the student realize that he/she is doing something wrong and gives him the opportunity to correct the wrong.

Using **humor as a tension diffuser** often prevents a potential time bomb from exploding. Proverbs 17:22 says, “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.” Humor, properly timed, and laughter, in appropriate situations, can cut through frustration very effectively and turn unpleasant situations into refreshing situations.

Long-term Techniques – There are those behaviors that, quite frankly, have become sinful habits in our lives that will take time, effort, and the grace of God to overcome. The methods used to overcome these behaviors take more time to develop and implement. The desired change will not occur immediately but over a period of time. Enhancement and reduction techniques are two long-term techniques used in changing inappropriate behaviors into behaviors that are appropriate and acceptable.

Enhancement techniques are used to increase the rate of and/or maintain good, desirable, appropriate behaviors. Positive reinforcement, token systems, and behavior contracts are three of the most commonly used enhancement techniques.

“**Positive reinforcement** is the most powerful strategy in managing behavior”(Axlerod, 1983, as cited in Sutton & Sutton, 1997, p. 184). It includes rewards and positive consequences for appropriate behavior. The Scripture contains many verses promising rewards for right behavior. James 1:12 promises a crown of life to the man that endures temptation. Revelation 22:12 states that the Lord will reward every man according to his deeds. Joshua 1:8 promises success and prosperity to those that do not forget the law of God, who meditate in it, and who are careful to do all that is written in it.

Rewarding behavior encourages the continuance of that behavior. In classroom situations and in other environments, this has proven to be true. Classroom rewards include but are not limited to tactile or sensory rewards (hugs, a pat on the back, a handshake), token rewards, rewards that are tangible or edible, special activity rewards (computer games, free time), and social reinforcers. Social reinforcers are the highest level of reinforcer. The more mature, more responsible adolescent/adult will do right when provided with words of encouragement and appreciation. Proverbs 25:11 says, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” Kind words often provide the impetus needed to continue doing what is right.

The best way to determine which reinforcers work with which students is to ask the students themselves. A personal inventory sheet for a student can be developed by asking a series of questions and noting the responses. The questions include the likes and dislikes of the student. Determining such things as a student’s favorite color, food, hobby, activity, and favorite person to

spend time with, provides a variety of ideas for rewards that can be used to continue desired behavior.

Token systems require a little more thought and planning but when implemented correctly can be effective in bringing about changes in behavior. In this system a student is given a token for accomplishing predetermined tasks. Tokens can be in the form of stickers, checkers, tickets, or hole punches on a card. The student then exchanges the tokens received for items provided by the teacher. The items may be tangible, edible, or anything that the student and teacher have agreed on.

When considering the use of a token system, the following guidelines should be observed regarding the token itself:

1. The token should be safe. It should not be something the child might be tempted to place in his or her mouth to be swallowed.
2. The token should be fool proof. The student should not be able to duplicate the token.
3. The token should be durable.
4. The token should be inexpensive.
5. The token should be undesirable. The student should have no desire to keep it.

A token system may be implemented by the following steps:

1. Determine the items to be exchanged for the tokens. The only limits to the items available for purchase are the limits of one's imagination. There are items teachers can supply (e. g., pens, erasers, candy, free time, notepads). There are items teachers and parents can provide cooperatively (e. g., television time, computer game time, visiting a friend, a special time with Dad or Mom). Hall and Hall (1980), in *How to Select Reinforcers*, also provide additional suggestions for items to be exchanged for tokens.
2. Establish token-exchange prices. Start prices out low so students can purchase items soon after the program begins. Gradually increase the price of future items as well as the variety of items.
3. Establish how and when tokens are exchanged. Clearly display the cost of the items so that students can plan to work for specific items. Exchange times can be as often as two or three times an hour, once a day, once a week, or once every two weeks. The frequency will depend on the maturity level of the student.

4. Define rules for acceptable behavior or tasks. The child should receive the reward only after meeting the specific goal. Behaviors to be rewarded might include these:
 - Complete homework assignments (each complete assignment would receive a token).
 - Start work on time.
 - Stay in seat for ___ minutes.
 - Be prepared for class (bring notebook, pencils, paper, and textbooks).
 - Raise your hand before speaking.
5. Limit the number of behaviors needing to be changed. Work on a maximum of four or five at a time.

Again, there is no limit as to what can be used in exchange for tokens. The thing to be certain of is that the child is willing to work for the items being offered. The personal inventory responses will help to determine this.

A **behavior contract** is an agreement entered into by the administrator and/or teacher and the student's parents with the student. The wording of the contract indicates a willingness on the student's part to change, decrease, or increase a specific behavior. The child must know that the teacher is going to do everything he/she can to help him succeed in meeting the terms of the contract. If the terms are met, a reward is given. If the terms are not met, a consequence is meted out. Both reward and consequence should be stated in the contract. The teacher and the student should go over the contract together so the student understands what is being required of him. Depending upon the age of the student, he/she may make suggestions or appeals as to the terms of the contract. Once the contract is developed, the conditions of the contract must be met. It should not be left open-ended even though progress is demonstrated. Contracts should include the following information:

- A description of the specific behavior needing to be changed.
- The degree of improvement or proficiency level at which the conditions of the contract will be deemed successful (Sally will stay in her seat for 20 minutes during a 30-minute period).
- The beginning and ending dates of the contract.
- The reward the child will receive for the successful completion of the contract.
- The consequence the child will receive if the terms of the contract are not met.
- The signatures of the child, the child's parents, and the teacher.

- A written commitment on the part of the teacher and parents to pray for the child while under the terms of the contract. (This is optional but recommended. Committing to pray for the child communicates your desire to see the child succeed.)

Reduction Techniques – It would be ideal if students would respond entirely to positive reinforcement. Unfortunately, this is not the case with children or adults. The goal of enhancement techniques is to increase positive behavior, while the goal of reduction techniques is to decrease negative behavior. Reduction techniques, both positive reinforcers, and punishers include, differential reinforcement, reprimands, time out, overcorrection, restitution, extinction, and corporal punishment.

Differential reinforcement can be used in a positive way to reduce inappropriate behaviors. If the inappropriate behaviors are reduced to a low rate, the child may receive a reward. A teacher using a tally system, for instance, might notice that a child is receiving five tallies every day. In order to encourage the student, the teacher might tell the child that if she can get the tallies down to three a day she will receive a reward. The undesired behavior is not completely eliminated, but it is being reduced. Upon successful completion of reducing the initial number of tallies, the tallies may then be adjusted down until the behaviors are no longer a significant problem.

“**Reprimands** are the mildest, most common, non-controversial form of punishment that can be used to reduce inappropriate behavior. A reprimand is any expression of disapproval directed toward a child that may include verbal statements . . . gestures . . . and facial expressions . . . ” (Sutton & Sutton, 1997, p. 197). Reprimands should be given before behaviors have a chance to escalate. They should take place in close proximity to the child while making eye contact with him. When appropriate a light touch on the shoulder or arm should accompany it.

Time out, interestingly enough, was a form of punishment used by God. Jonah spent three days in the belly of a fish in order to think about whether or not he was going to do what God told him to do. This is not to say we should use the same procedure, but the concept does have merit.

Time out can take place for as little as two minutes or as long as ten to fifteen minutes. The amount of time spent in time out would depend on the

problem and on the maturity level of the student. It should not be used to escape doing what is expected. It should be used to allow a child time to think about the effects of his misbehavior and come to a point where he agrees to submit himself to doing the required task.

Time out can take place in close proximity to other students with the child not participating in the activities. It can be spent in an isolated area of a room where the child can hear what is going on but cannot see what is going on. It can also take place in a secluded setting where the child is removed from the classroom and other students.

Overcorrection requires a child to restore a situation to normal and then practice the right behavior repeatedly. A student who turns in an assignment without properly formatting it should be required to resubmit the assignment properly. Along with the resubmitted assignment, the student might be required to submit five other sheets of paper properly formatted.

Restitution is a form of overcorrection in that the student is required to restore the situation to normal and then perform the right action. This is not necessarily the same action repeatedly, but the right action. In a situation where a student is found guilty of stealing, the first step taken is to restore the stolen item (put off). Restoring the item, however, is not sufficient. The student needs to know what God says about stealing (renew your mind). He then performs the right behavior (put on). In this situation, the right behavior is working with his hands “that he may have to give to him that needeth” (Eph. 4:28). Arrangements may be made for a student to work after school, be compensated for the work, and then be asked to contribute part of what he is compensated to a needy family or a needy student. The joy that comes from working and helping others may be the motivation needed for the student to cease from stealing.

Extinction is the complete cessation of an inappropriate behavior. Behaviors as annoying as foot tapping or as serious as swearing can be targeted for extinction. Extinction can be achieved by using a combination of the reducing techniques described here.

Corporal punishment is an aversive technique that produces physical discomfort. Paddling is the most common form of this punishment. It is also the most controversial form. Scripture, however, is clear concerning its use. Proverbs 13:24, 22:15, 23:13-14,

29:15 all speak to the benefits of this form of discipline. When administered properly, paddling teaches a child that sin is painful and that its consequences are to be feared. When the one administering the paddling is grieved over performing it, he or she demonstrates the grief that God feels when chastening one of His own. After the chastening is complete and fellowship is properly restored through the confession of sin, the reconciliation that God desires takes place between the offender and the offended. This form of discipline is a process that one goes through with another to bring about restitution. It is not a single action that inflicts punishment. Corporal punishment, when performed in a loving, caring manner, demonstrates God's love and God's justice and is an effective form of discipline.

Conclusion

Behavior management is not a program that is implemented in a classroom to get children to conform to a set of rules. It is a process of molding individuals, creating in them a desire to be like Christ and to implant in their minds the mind of Christ. As we seek to change the behaviors of young people, let us attempt to do so with the same compassion and concern that Christ used. Let us also seek to have the mind of Christ as we determine what methods will best meet the needs of the young people God has entrusted to our care.

References

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- Sutton, J. P., & Sutton, C. J. (1997). *Strategies for Struggling Learners*. Simpsonville, SC: Exceptional Diagnostics.