Strategies for Social and Emotional Behavior:
A Teacher's Guide

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This book is dedicated to the memory

of

Dr. William. R. (Bill) Center

Time was his only enemy and it has slain him.

(See **A Tribute** at http://www.davidcenter.com)
(then load the **Memorials** page)

Table of Contents

Introduction: Read Me First

1. **Biological Influences**

   a. Bio-medical Model
   b. Medication
   c. Allergies
   d. Temperament
   e. Personality
   f. Educational Implications
   g. Activities
   h. References

2. **Ecological Antecedents for Behavior**

   a. Setting Events
       1. School Climate
           a. Discipline Policy
           b. Recognition of Diversity
           c. Recognition of Accomplishment
           d. Flexibility of Response
           e. Comfort and Safety
           f. Parent Involvement
           g. Community Involvement
   b. Curriculum
       1. Curriculum Adjustment
       2. Developmental Curriculum
   c. Teacher Expectations
   d. School Climate Checklist
   e. Activities
   f. References

3. **Basic Behavioral Intervention**

   a. Behavioral Model (Operant)
       1. Antecedents
       2. Consequences
   b. Stimulus Control
       1. Decontamination
       2. Proximity Control
       3. Teacher Behavior
           a. Behavioral Expectations
           b. Signal Control

              c.   Deescalation

    c.   Physical Management
    d.   Informal use of Consequences
            1.   Attention for Compliance
            2.   Ignoring
    e.   Structured use of Consequences
            1.   Group Consequences
            2.   Individual Consequences
            3.   Individual Contracts
            4.   Self-management
    f.   Activities
    g.   References

4.   **Individualized Behavioral Intervention** (Operant)

    a.   Introduction
    b.   Assessment Based Intervention
    c.   Selecting Behavioral Intervention
    d.   Individual Behavioral Strategies:
            1.   Differential Reinforcement of Other Behavior
            2.   Differential Reinforcement of Low Level Behavior
            3.   Differential Reinforcement of High Level Behavior
            4.   Over-Correction
            5.   Response Cost
            6.   Time-Out from Reinforcement
            7.   Presentation of an Aversive Stimulus
    e.   Evaluation and Accountability
    f.   Recording Techniques
    g.   Behavioral Intervention Planning
    h.   Intervention Planning Forms and Examples
    i.   Activities
    j.   References

5.   **The Comprehensive Classroom Token Economy** (Operant)

    a.   Introduction
    b.   Promoting Educational Development
    c.   Positive Consequences for Behavior
    d.   Behavior Management
    e.   Balancing the Economy
    f.   Records
    g.   A Level System
    h.   Feedback
    i.   Instructional Use
    j.   Planning Form

k. Activities
l. References

6. **Behavior Therapy** (Respondent)

a. Introduction
b. The Respondent Model
c. Some Cognitive Factors
d. Assessment
e. Checklists and Rating Scales
f. Observation Scales
g. Observational Recording
h. Emotional Self-Management:
    1. Introduction
    2. Teaching Common Indicators
    3. Self-relaxation Techniques
i. Planned Individualized Intervention:
    1. Introduction
    2. Respondent Extinction
    3. Counterconditioning
j. Intervention Planning Forms and Examples
k. Activities
l. References

7. **Social Skills** (Social Learning)

a. Introduction
b. Social Learning Theory
c. Assessment
d. Curriculum
e. Instruction
    1. Social Modeling
    2. Opportunistic Teaching
f. Activities
g. Prosocial Interaction Training: A Curriculum Guide
h. References

8. **Character Development** (Social Analytic)

a. Introduction
b. Moral Development
d. Identity and Reputation
e. Curriculum and Strategies
    1. Knowledge of the Rules
    2. Socialization

Introduction: Read Me First

The first two chapters in this text cover essential considerations for good behavior management. First, knowing and making allowances for inherent, individual differences among students reduces the need for behavior management. Second, good behavior is a natural outcome of appropriate setting events. Many behavior problems are due to a Apoor fit≅ between a student=s and a teacher=s temperament or personality. In such situations it is incumbent upon the teacher to make most if not all of the accommodation needed. Further, behavior problems are often reactions in some students to the setting events in their school or classroom or both. Policies and practices perceived by a student as aversive, that is, harsh, unreasonable, arbitrary, and so forth will often provoke counter controlling responses that may be called acting-out in some students or withdrawal in others. The type of response made will vary according to a student=s temperament or personality. In either type of response the objective is to subvert the effects of the policies and practices perceived as aversive. Thus, good behavior management requires knowing your students well and creating a school climate that will be perceived as positive.

When looking at the types of problems that are observed in students, it appears that most if not all can be classified into one of three *domains*. These domains are *academic learning*, *social behavior*, and *emotional behavior*. There are two basic approaches that can be taken to problems in each domain. *Reactive* approaches are best suited to dealing with immediate presenting problems. These are problems that need to be addressed as they occur. *Proactive* approaches are best suited to preventing future problems and usually have little immediate impact on current presenting problems.

The academic domain will not be discussed in this text. However, a highly recommended reactive approach for this domain is *direct instruction* (Becker & Carnine, 1981; Center, 1989; Shapiro, 1996). Both the social and emotional domains will be discussed. The reactive approach recommended for social behavior is *behavior modification* based on *operant learning theory*. Chapters Three, Four and Five look at a wide range of behavior modification strategies and will be discussed briefly below. The reactive approach recommended for the emotional domain is *behavior therapy* based on *respondent learning*. This approach is covered in Chapter Six and is also briefly discussed below.

Chapters Three through Six address behavioral approaches to social and emotional behavior that can be applied to problems ranging from mild to serious. Techniques in Chapter Three are most suitable for *mild problems* in social behavior. The section in Chapter Six on *emotional self-management* is suitable for mild problems in emotional behavior. Mild problems are troublesome behaviors that occurs in most classrooms. You would probably describe a mild problem as routine. Most such problems can be handled with informal, easily implemented techniques. If one of these problems doesn=t respond to an informal technique, reclassify it as a moderate level problem.

A *moderate problem* is a disturbing behavior that exceeds that found in typical classrooms.

However, it doesn't create a serious classroom disturbance or a significant impediment to learning. If only a few students exhibit this level of problem behavior, add to your informal techniques more formal and individualized interventions based on the techniques covered in Chapter Four for social behavior or Chapter Six for emotional behavior. Such techniques are individually structured interventions that are time consuming but usually effective. Less time consuming is *Crisis Counseling*, which is discussed in Chapter Nine. It too can be useful in working with moderate level or even serious problems that have an emotional component. One of these techniques or some combination of them will usually be successful when added to your basic procedures. If you have a large number of students requiring individualized interventions, you should consider your problems as serious.

Serious problems are highly disruptive, dangerous or significantly interfere with learning or are at the moderate level in the majority of your students. When serious problems are the norm in the classroom, replace your basic techniques from Chapter Three with the *classroom token economy* discussed in Chapter Five. This highly structured intervention is time consuming. However, it is a very effective approach when properly planned and executed. It will actually save you time if you are using significant amounts of instructional time for behavior management. A student who has a social behavior problem that doesn't respond to a classroom token economy should get an individualized intervention based on Chapter Four. Students who have significant emotional problems should also get individualized interventions based on Chapter Six. Crisis Counseling discussed in Chapter Nine can also be useful as an individual intervention within the context of a token economy.

The acronym **SOPE**[3] summarizes the secret for successfully working with social and emotional behavior in school settings. Briefly, this acronym's message is as follows:

SO: Set objective. You must determine what you need to do and set a clear objective to follow. The objective should specify the problem behavior. It should also specify the degree of change you want in this behavior.

P: Plan. Once you have clearly stated your objectives, you must develop a plan of action to accomplish each objective.

E[1]: Execute the plan. Execution is everything. A great plan poorly executed is worthless. Be sure you know how to do what you have planned. Finally, monitor yourself to ensure that you carry out the plan properly.

E[2]: Evaluate the effects of the plan. Collect data on the behavior of your students. First, monitor the level of the problem behavior before you put your plan into action. Second, monitor the level of the behavior after you put the plan into action. Compare the pre-intervention and intervention data with the level of behavior stated in your objective.

E³: Experiment. If the plan doesn't produce the results you want, change the plan. Execute the modified plan and evaluate the results. If the results are still short of what you need, change the plan again. There are no perfect plans, nor magic plans, only trial-and-error plans.

For the longer term and with prevention in mind, a recommended proactive approach for the academic domain is *learning strategies* (Deshler, Ellis, & Lenz, 1996; Center, 1989), which is not covered in this text. Proactive programming in the social domain includes *social skills instruction*, which is covered in Chapter Seven. Chapter Eight, which discusses *character development*, views socialization as an essential piece of character formation and is another important proactive consideration in programming for the social domain. It should also be mentioned that the *Responsible Thinking Process* discussed in Chapter Ten is a methodology for facilitating socialization based on a new and somewhat controversial theory of human behavior, *Perceptual Control Theory*. The recommended proactive strategy for the emotional domain is *Rational Emotive Education*, which is discussed in Chapter Nine.

In Appendix 1, you will find a copy of the *Profile of Negative Classroom Behavior*. This informal instrument will help you evaluate your classroom for types of problems present, their seriousness, and their frequency. Analysis of the data from this instrument will give you a profile of how serious your problems are and the domains to which they probably belong. The profile will be helpful in developing a classroom program employing both reactive and proactive approaches. This text contains a very diverse collection of perspectives and approaches to social and emotional behavior. No single approach, in my opinion, is adequate for addressing the needs of troubled students. The practitioner, whether teacher or school psychologist, must draw on a variety of sources and weave together a program that in his or her best professional judgment addresses the unique and common needs of his or her students.

A Personal Perspective

I recently wrote a paper that was presented at a national conference on behavior disorders (Center, 1997, 1999). In that paper, I made the argument that *self-agency* is an important force in human behavior and one that needs to be factored into the thinking of education professionals serving troubled students. One major implication of accepting a role for self-agency is the need for working with a student to bring about behavior change, rather than working on a student=s behavior. Working with a student means forming a *cooperative alliance* with that student. The following is adapted from the second half of that paper.

McClelland (1994) discusses four basic approaches that behavior change strategies are based upon: *force*, *threat*, *incentive* and *persuasion*. The first two rely on the use of *coercion*. The effects of coercive strategies have been extensively discussed by behavioral psychologist Murray Sidman (1989). Clearly, force and threat can change behavior, but there are ethical and logistic reasons for not employing such strategies under most circumstances. However, McClelland argues that incentive too is a form of coercion when it is used as leverage to externally manipulate an individual=s

choices. The effects of such manipulations are the bane of incentive-based interventions, because all too often, as soon as the imposed incentives are reduced or removed, the distortion being produced in an individual=s behavior by these contrived incentives ends. Or, as a behaviorist would say, there is no generalization. There is also some evidence that reinforcement like punishment can have troublesome negative side effects (Balsam, & Bondy, 1983). The last strategy, persuasion, does not have the power to produce quick results as is the case with force or threat, nor does it have the power of incentives to artificially modify choices. However, persuasion is better suited than any of the other three for facilitating a long-term change in an individual=s goals and priorities and thereby facilitating a relatively permanent change in behavior.

Looked at from the perspective outlined above, one could say that interventions directed at students with behavior problems should be conceptualized in terms of strategies that affect goals and behavior. Thus, for maximum effect, individuals need to understand and be actively engaged in the change process. Certainly, mechanistic approaches like the behavioral approach can produce change, but the changed behavior needs justification and must be integrated with an individual=s goal system if it is to be a generalized and lasting change. In other words, a change in behavior that is brought about only through external influence may not be accepted as relevant to one's goals. I am reminded of a poster from the Vietnam War era that read, "Just because you've shut me up doesn't mean you've changed my mind." This statement clearly implies that while there has been a coercively-induced change in behavior, the speaker's goals have not changed. Remove the source of coercion, and behavior will realign with the individual's goals.

The success of programming for students with behavior problems is all too often determined by their ability to Ashut-up≅ students. A model that takes into account the role of self-agency in behavior suggests that changing behavior, at least in intellectually adequate human beings, needs also to be about changing minds. Ultimately, changing minds depends upon both persuasion and a cooperative effort. The general strategy for change that is implied is recognition of and involvement by an individual in the process of self-change through modification of goals where those goals are dysfunctional or finding more appropriate ways of meeting goals where the goals are acceptable but the means of achieving them are dysfunctional. Such a strategy must also grapple with the issue of how to define what is acceptable and unacceptable relative to both goals and behavior. Ultimately, such a definition must take into account both the interests of the individual and of society. The most important use of persuasion should be to convince a student to engage in a *cooperative alliance*. Persuasion should focus on rationales for changes in goals, priorities or behaviors. Persuasion should also attempt to convince a student of the importance of his or her choices and the implication of those choices for interaction with the world.

There are a number of existing approaches that have possibilities for persuasion-based interventions to facilitate self-directed change in behavior disordered students. One is the Perceptual Control Theory (PCT) approach to behavior change (Ford, 1994) based on the theory of Powers (1973, 1998). The PCT approach of Ford emphasizes self-directed change in one=s goals and the behaviors employed in meeting those goals. Adlerian psychology (Adler, 1964; Stein & Edwards,

1997) recognizes the role of self-direction in the change process and employs Socratic questioning as a way of helping clients understand and change their goals and behavior. Narrative psychology (McAdams, 1993; Wood, 1996) describes an approach emphasizing self-direction through the identification and modification of the *life-stories* or *personal myths* that one uses to organize and guide behavior. Personal myths might be thought of as a narrative description of one=s control system and the goals implicit in the system. Rational-emotive psychology (Bernard & Joyce, 1984) employs the concept of underlying or *root beliefs* as the basic organizing principle for guiding behavior. In this model, one can think of root beliefs as representing the supra ordinate goals in one=s control system. Interventions directed at changing these beliefs require a cooperative effort between a student and professional change agent. There are no doubt other possibilities; however, the point is that it is not necessary to invent new strategies in order to implement the approach implied by a model emphasizing the role of self-agency in behavior. The model doesn't invalidate existing strategies, but rather suggests a different conceptual framework within which to employ and adapt existing strategies as well as to create new strategies.

Thus, accepting the reality of self-agency leads to de-emphasizing manipulative strategies of behavior change that focus on agent-directed change in favor of persuasive strategies that emphasize client-directed change.   There probably are some circumstances where persuasion-based and self-directed change may not be possible. For example, when an individual is suffering from a condition in which biological factors play a dominant role, e.g., schizophrenia. However, once the biological component of such a disease is being successfully managed medically, I think the intervention philosophy is still apropos. Medical management of such diseases may still leave such individuals with serious psychological problems that are the by-product of their experiences prior to successful medical treatment. Mental health problems that are diseases, in the medical sense; however, probably account for only for a small percentage of troubled children and youth (Albee, 1968).

I like to make a distinction between what I think of as agent-directed, reactive methods versus client-directed, proactive methods based on persuasion. Agent-directed methods are methods that are suitable for reacting to an immediate presenting problem to prevent injury and to prevent disruption of an instructional program. Behavior modification is an example of such a method. Client-directed methods are often not suitable for dealing with an immediate presenting problem but rather are best suited to avoiding future problems. Rational-Emotive problem-solving is an example of a client-directed method. It should also be clear that permanent, long-term change probably requires focusing on client-directed methods. Reactive methods largely rely upon manipulation, e.g., contrived reinforcers and coercion, e.g., response cost. Persuasive methods largely rely upon cooperation, e.g., an alliance between a student and a teacher to identifying and changing irrational thinking that is causing the student difficulties.

You will find a set of study questions for each chapter in Appendix 3. These questions attempt to help you focus on some of the more important concepts covered in each chapter. However, the questions are not comprehensive in the sense of covering each and every important point made in the chapters. You might find it useful to supplement the questions with your own.

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Note: All references to materials on my web site at GSU in the above list and reference lists for all subsequent chapters of this book will now be found on my personal web site: http://www.davidcenter.com