

PLANNING AN INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN FOR A PUPIL WITH BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES

This section should enable you to convert the information collected by the checklist into a behavioural programme.

Questions 1 and 2: Is the teaching material appropriate?

It is possible that the material is too difficult for the pupil at this stage of his development and the behaviour problems may be a result of this. Pupils who experience failure regularly become very good at disguising their difficulties in understanding. They are more afraid of being thought of as stupid, than of being thought of as a nuisance. It is always important to seriously consider the view that a child's behavioural difficulties may be a symptom of underlying difficulties in understanding the task, or how to do it.

Question 3: Rules

It is quite common for pupils to be confused about what is and is not acceptable in different teacher's classrooms. A first step in planning a programme is to explain check if the pupil understands what is regarded as acceptable or unacceptable behaviour and what will happen if unacceptable behaviour occurs. Ask the pupil first and then clarify any confusions in a non pressurising way. Check if the pupil feels the rules are fair. With older pupils it is often helpful to negotiate written rules with each group at the beginning of a year, and then provide clearly defined written rules for them.

Question 4: Be positive

Children who present problems very often evoke negative feelings and expectations in those adults coming in regular contact with them and this may lead to low expectations and low self-esteem in the pupil. Focusing on the pupil's positive attributes, may begin to increase acceptable behaviour. Pupils need to feel that significant adults in their life value them and care about them despite their poor behaviour. They need to feel they are important as people.

If you have the following list:

- a) Arrives on time
- b) Has a nice smile
- c) Cares about animals

You could comment on these behaviours when they occur with a positive remark. In some circumstances older pupils may react negatively to positive comments. This is often because the pupil does not believe the comment is genuine, and sees it as an attempt to manipulate them. Teachers have to find ways in which they can believe themselves in the positive things they say to such pupils. In these instances teachers may need to gently persuade pupils over time that they are not stupid, that they can achieve and that they have good qualities. Praise needs to be specific, genuinely meant and delivered privately. This creates a climate in which the pupil feels he or she can improve.

One effective way of reminding oneself to have positive interactions with troublesome youngsters, is to decide to remember to make a certain number of positive comments to the pupil each lesson or each day. It is sometimes helpful to record these to remind you how often you are doing this. It is very easy to think it has been done more often than is in fact the case.

Question 5: Teacher expectation

The questions have been set out in this way because different teachers may have differing standards of behaviour according to the setting, eg it would be perfectly in order for a pupil to be out of his seat in a PE lesson but not in a session when the teacher was explaining something to the group. This list should help you identify whether the pupil is behaving in different ways in different settings.

It is very important that teachers are encouraged to make clear and specific statements of behaviour:

'Fred is disruptive in class' is fuzzy, but
'Fred pokes another pupil with a pencil, interrupts the teacher and bangs his desk down' is clear and specific, ie. it describes exactly what is happening in the lesson.

This helps in the selection of a priority behaviour to focus on.

Questions 6 and 7: Taking a baseline

In order to change behaviour, you need to be clear not only about the definition (*see question 5*) but also how frequently the problem occurs. In this way you will know:

- a) Whether the problem is as extensive as you think it is
- b) Whether your programme is producing real change.

All people will at times exhibit unacceptable and inappropriate behaviour, it is important to judge whether the pupil's behaviour is significantly more inappropriate than the behaviour of others.

If you are the classteacher you can now select a behaviour for your programme. It is helpful to do this in consultation with the pupil. If you are co-ordinating the checklists from several different teachers you will need to meet together with them to agree which behaviours to tackle. It is important for you to experience success initially and this is more likely to be achieved by selecting from your list behaviours that you feel would be less resistant to change. You can then move on to tackle more difficult problems.

Question 8: What happens before a child misbehaves?

We sometimes find that behaviours are triggered by immediately preceding events. This could be something as basic as:

The teacher giving vague, imprecise instructions, eg. *'Get on with something useful'*, is often an open invitation to muck around.

That the pupil has been placed in a failing situation, eg. asking a poor reader to read a complicated piece of text to the class.

That physical contact with an angry pupil may escalate a confrontation.

Having decided if anything significant happens before your behaviour in 6 occurs, you will be able to keep this in mind when designing your programme. Sometimes the reason why a particular behaviour occurs depends not only on immediately preceding events but on past learning experiences. Looking at what happens before the pupil misbehaves can provide some clues towards why the pupil is experiencing difficulties. It can highlight problems with work, with social relationships with lack of confidence etc. This can suggest ways of helping the pupil to improve the situation.

Question 9: Conditions under which behaviour improves

Events do not only trigger inappropriate behaviour, they can also produce acceptable behaviour, eg sometimes a problem can be avoided by making sure that clear precise instructions are given to the pupil.

Another way of managing behaviour is to substitute good news for bad, eg instead of saying *'Finish your work'*, the teachers could say *'When you have finished your work you can choose a friend to work with on the next activity'*.

Question 10: Recognition and rewards

It is important to recognise that positively reinforcing a behaviour will tend to increase the recurrence of that behaviour in future, therefore catch the good, eg. *'I see Mary is well organised today, everything is ready'*, or *'That was an extremely relevant comment John, well done'*.

Often you will have to make a special effort to praise behaviour which in the rest of the class might well be taken for granted. Some teachers seem to find this difficult but research evidence shows it does work.

We all tend to repeat behaviour which has had a positive outcome. If you produce a play for the school and the headteacher, colleagues and parents all congratulate you on the success of the production, you are more likely to produce a play the following year than if there were a total lack of acknowledgement of your time and effort. Similarly, most pupils are likely to work when they receive regular specific praise.

Additional recognition may sometimes be valuable. In the primary classroom this might be stars, tokens, positive comments on a report card, extra playtime. In the secondary classroom, private praise, choice of seating, chosen activities, positive chat with a senior member of staff, and a positive letter home might be more suitable. It is very important not to use rewards in a controlling way eg. I will give you this if you do that. It is preferable to give them spontaneously to reinforce your pleasure in the behaviour.

Effective Extrinsic Rewards are:

- 1) Initially given *Frequently, Immediately* and *Consistently*.
- 2) Given with conviction and enthusiasm by the teacher, ie. they are genuine.
- 3) Linked with very specific praise for achievement, ie. "I think you've fully understood percentages now. That was a problem you solved."
- 4) Withdrawn gradually. Many of our programmes break down because the rewards are withdrawn too suddenly.
- 5) There may be times when the pupil exhibits only a small part of the behaviour you are trying to encourage. This is called shaping; gradually your demands can be stepped up until the whole is attained, eg if the long term aim is "*Darren to bring pen, pencil, books, homework to each lesson*", at first the reward could be given if Darren brings only one of the items. The teacher's demand can then gradually increase to include all of them, as the relationship with Darren improves and he learns to plan for himself.

There are problems with the use of Extrinsic Rewards; their use should be avoided unless positive and specific praise has not been found to be effective.

- 1) It is often difficult to find a suitable reward (*see Question 13*) as an alternative to praise.
- 2) Rewards can be seen as a control mechanism. If they are perceived as controls by the pupil, they will not work. They have to be a celebration of success.
- 3) Sometimes rewards available for use by the teacher cannot be used immediately and therefore lose their impact.
- 4) It is vital that the teacher remembers to provide the rewards.
- 5) Teachers are often afraid that other pupils in the group might feel deprived. Teachers who have worked through behavioural programmes have usually found that other pupils accept different pupils need to be handled in different ways.
- 6) Ultimately you want the pupil to behave from intrinsic motives, rather than just because a reward is available. This is likely to occur if a pupil can be given more responsibility and be helped to feel more confident. This takes time and depends on building good relationships.

Question 11: Consequences

If there are several teachers teaching the pupil, you may find there are a number of different answers to Question 11. One way to improve a pupil's behaviour is to increase the consistency in management. Therefore when you have ascertained what is an effective encouragement for appropriate behaviour or sanction for inappropriate behaviour, it is important that all staff teaching the pupil respond to the pupil's behaviour in the same way. Although the handling in one room may be consistent, it is not necessarily consistent across classes or during the lunch hour. It is therefore necessary for all staff teaching the pupil to agree and carry out the same management strategy.

Sanctions are in effect a form of punishment. Effective punishment results in a decrease in the frequency of inappropriate behaviour. If this decrease does not occur, the sanction is not working for that pupil and alternatives should be sought. It is particularly important that when the teacher uses consequences as an aid to controlling behaviour an initial baseline is obtained so that the effectiveness of the action can be closely monitored.

Problems with the use of punishment:

- a) It does not show what appropriate behaviour should be.
- b) Any aggression on the behalf of the teacher will serve as an inappropriate model to the pupil.
- c) It may generate emotional reactions such as fear, anxiety or withdrawal in the pupil.
- d) Punishment can lead to the pupil trying to avoid or escape from the person doing the punishing. This could lead to lying, cheating or truancy.

Effective consequences:

- a) Are given immediately in a calm, matter of fact way.
- b) Rely on withdrawal of privileges and provide clear steps for regaining them.
- c) Are accompanied by strong reinforcement of behaviour incompatible with the behaviour being punished, eg if the pupil receives a detention for not completing homework, the pupil should be praised enthusiastically when he does produce homework.
- d) Make use of a warning signal, eg. '*If you don't complete your work, you'll have to stay in at lunchtime*'. This may prevent the behaviour from escalating but the warning signal should never become an idle threat. Never give a warning signal that you cannot or do not follow through. This will lead pupils to ignoring instructions.

Time Out

This is a phrase which is often misunderstood in school settings. Time out is actively removing access to rewards when the pupil is indulging in behaviour which we wish to happen less often or not at all, eg:

- The teacher turning her back on the pupil when the pupil makes a silly noise.*
- Moving the pupil to sit alone, facing away from the room (the time out space should always be non-rewarding).*
- Sending the pupil outside the classroom for a few minutes.*
- Sending the pupil to a room or area in the school reserved as time out space.*

Teachers should take care that when removing a pupil from the classroom, they are not inadvertently rewarding both themselves and the pupil. All of these actions should prevent the pupil from gaining positive attention or positive feelings, such as relief at leaving the room. Research evidence suggests that you do not need to leave the pupil in time out for too long for it to have an effect - a few minutes are enough.

Question 11: Responding immediately, but with minimal attention:

This is most effective when behaviour is attention seeking.

In many instances, silly and inappropriate behaviour is attention seeking. Attention seeking behaviour can be a signal that a child is under-stimulated or bored. Some research indicates that disruptive children have lower levels of arousal than other children and that they seek attention because they want some stimulation and excitement. It may help to identify ways in which these children can be encouraged to engage in active learning tasks which can keep them focused and interested. They are then less likely to disturb you or other children.

Attention seeking behaviour is often maintained because it always succeeds in provoking some form of response, even a negative one. Behaviours of this kind are best treated by interventions that are less than 20 seconds in duration. The most effective interventions avoid eye contact but clearly signal to the pupil, they should return to the task.

- eg. • praising a pupil next to the misbehaving one
- introducing the pupil's name into the teaching eg. 'this point was made by Darren last lesson'.
- standing close to the pupil while talking to others.

Question 12: Self Esteem:

Sometimes pupils will misbehave in order that they can avoid being thought stupid. They prefer the teacher to blame them for being disruptive, than to expose their own difficulties in understanding.

Many disruptive pupils have become disaffected because they do not experience any feelings of achievement at school work. Some of them in fact may get a greater sense of achievement from disrupting a lesson, than from completing work. A Records of Achievement Scheme can help to redress this balance but it is highly likely that schools will contain many pupils whose regular experience of failure has led to a deep seated lack of confidence in their own academic ability. To protect their self-esteem they will prefer to promote the view that work is useless and school is boring. Convincing pupils that this is not the case is a long process which involves a detailed analysis of an individual's needs, interests and skills, and a commitment to valuing and building on any interests within school or leisure pursuits that the pupil has some competence in. Praise for the pupil needs to be delivered carefully (*see question 5*).

Question 13: Selecting suitable rewards and consequences

Different people find different things rewarding. It is helpful to get the pupil's perspective on what motivates them and helps them to learn before embarking on a programme.

In the same way, what the teacher regards as an appropriate consequence for the pupil may not be seen as an appropriate by the pupil, eg. a pupil may deliberately misbehave in order to be sent out of a lesson.

Questions 14 and 15:

It is very important to get the pupil's perspective on what is going wrong for them in school, and how the teachers might help. If pupils feel the teacher is genuinely interested in their difficulties, they can be quite articulate about what might be changed. Then if the staff are able to respond, even in a small way, the pupil's attitude to learning can change also.

Questions 16: Setting Conditions

Some pupils experience greater difficulties:

- a) In certain situations, eg the pupil who needs a great deal of structure might well find some less structured lessons more difficult than others.
- b) With groups of pupils who are reinforcing their misbehaviour, by eg., provoking it/ laughing at it.
- c) In certain subject areas that the pupil finds more difficult.
- d) With teachers that have different teaching styles.

Question 17: What Have You Already Tried?

A behavioural programme needs careful planning and although very effective can be time consuming. It is therefore unwise to embark on a programme for all pupils presenting problems.

WRITING AN INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN (IEP) FOR PUPILS EXPERIENCING BEHAVIOUR DIFFICULTIES

If you have used and collated the information from the checklist, you now have access to much of the information necessary to write an IEP at Stage 2 of the Code of Practice.

It is helpful to meet with parents, prior to planning as they may be very willing to support what you are doing, particularly in providing ideas of strategies, (they have had to manage the child for years), Stage 2 IEP form can provide a structure for this meeting.

With older pupils, it is also enormously helpful to involve the pupil in drawing up a contract or agreement about change. They may well be able to indicate things the school could do to help them improve their motivation to work and their behaviour. The LEA's Pupil Interview Record is particularly helpful in drawing out these factors.

You will be able to gain from this process:

- a) A clear statement of the priority problem.
- b) A statement of what happens before the behaviour.
- c) The background in which the behaviour occurs.
- d) Effective reward and punishments.
- e) What everyone in the situation would like to happen.

The steps in planning a behavioural programme are illustrated on the next page.

STEPS IN WRITING A BEHAVIOURAL PROGRAMME

STEP 1:

Decide what you would all like to see the pupil doing in a set period of time. This should be expressed as a clear objective, if possible in a positive way.

eg. 'Tracey to work alongside another child for 20 minutes without engaging in physical contact' as opposed to 'Tracey will not hit other children' or 'Darren will stop interrupting'.

STEP 2:

Agree on what staff and parents are going to do to help the pupil succeed.

eg. Tracey will plan her daily work with her teacher each day.
Every 20 minutes teacher to look at Tracey and if she is working well to go over and comment positively on what she has done.
Tracey to keep a record of her work to take home to her parents.

If Darren puts his hand up to ask a question he obtains a smile from the teacher, a touch on the shoulder and an interest in what Darren has to say. Positive comments can be made on a report card which goes home to parents.

STEP 3:

Agree on what staff are going to do as a consequence if the inappropriate behaviour you have identified as a priority occurs.

eg. If Tracey hits another child she will be moved immediately to a desk by herself away from the other children for 10 minutes. If Darren interrupts he will be ignored and another pupil will be asked a question.

REMEMBER TO BE CONSISTENT

STEP 4:

Decide how you or the pupil are going to keep an ongoing record of the frequency of the priority problem.

eg. Teacher keeps a record of how often Tracey hits other children, or how often Darren interrupts the teacher.
Tracey keeps a record of work completed

STEP 5:

Before you initiate the programme, make sure the pupil is aware of the general classroom rules and the specific expectations you have of his or her behaviour. Make sure the pupil understands the programme. Remember that we are trying to increase acceptable behaviours and that all teachers need to be aware of the need to provide recognition in the form of specific praise.

EVALUATING THE PROGRAMME

After a set period of time, this should not be longer than a fortnight, check on the frequency of the priority problem. If there has been a decrease, well done. you will now have to decide whether to introduce a second problem to tackle. Remember to maintain and then gradually phase out the first. Hold regular reviews with the pupil and parents and give positive feedback first and then improvement suggestions.

If the programme is not being effective check with all involved including the pupil:

That recognition of appropriate behaviour is being given.

That the programme is being recorded consistently.

That the consequences are being implemented.

If none of the above appear to be contributing to the programme failure, re- examine the priority problem. You may have set unachievable goals. Reset your goals and try again. If you are still not successful, you will need to move to Stage 3 of the Code of Practice and consult your Educational Psychologist.

REFERENCES

Association of Educational Psychologists (1984) *Alternatives to Corporal Punishment* available from AEP, 3 Sunderland Road, Durham. This is in booklet form.

Robertson, J (1981) *Effective Classroom Control*, Hodder and Stoughton. This book reviews the research on classroom management and contains a checklist for successful reading. It is excellent for both primary and secondary pupils.

Westmacott, E.V.S and Cameron, R. J. (1983) *Behaviour Can Change*, London, Macmillan. This is a very readable book which goes through the steps in planning behaviour programmes at school and in the home in a practical way. It is most suitable for primary pupils.