Having a consistent response is so important for kids, especially when it comes to behavior. A behavior plan is the best way for all of the school staff, parents and the student to be one the same page about how behaviors will be handled at school so that no matter who is involved the response to a problem behavior is the same, and the strategies used will be most effective in deescalating the situation.

Many schools utilize a school wide system for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), like "Character Counts", which reinforces the kind of good behavior that we want to see from kids. These programs focus on preventing challenging behavior, and are effective for most kids, but don't work for everyone.

If a student has behavior that gets in the way of their learning or learning of their classmates, the school team should consider individualized strategies to address that behavior. A behavior plan could be created by parents and school staff through a 504 Plan or Special Education process or with no formal plan at all.

If parents or school personnel recognize that a student has developed a pattern of behavior that is getting in the way of their learning, the student should be evaluated for services and supports through an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) (Special Education services) if they don't already have one. In Iowa a student doesn't have to have a diagnosis from a doctor in order to be considered for Special Education services, but if a diagnosis is known it can be helpful if the parent chooses to share that information with the team.

A Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) is an ongoing process that should be used to help the team with the development of a student's behavior goals, interventions, accommodations and the Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). The FBA attempts to identify the purpose of the child's behavior and some supports or interventions that might work well for the student.

Parents can help the team to decide the kind of data that would be beneficial for the team to look at. Information could be gathered from existing school records, interviews with the student, parents and school staff, observations, standardized checklists, or other assessments. The data may be collected by a teacher, associate or a variety of school staff but analysis and interpretation should be led by someone with knowledge and training in FBA's. The level of behavior should determine the level of intensity of the FBA.

Steps for developing the FBA and BIP include:

- Defining the problem behavior
- Collect data about the behavior. When? Where? How often? Who is involved? With behavior we often talk about the ABC's.
    - Antecedent- what happened right before the behavior?
    - Behavior- what did the behavior look like?
    - Consequence- what happened right after the behavior?
- Hypothesize reasons for the behavior: what is the behavior telling us? What is the purpose of the behavior? To escape or avoid something? To gain access to something?
- Develop a plan: the plan should help the child to use appropriate behavior to get what they want and include the specific steps that adults should take to help the student meet their goal.

Although this process is more formal than most parents have done with their child at home, they are a wealth of knowledge for the team in understanding the kinds of things that have worked well or not worked well at home or in other settings, and should be part of the brainstorming process with the team to develop interventions and plans. Once the team has an idea about why the child is having the behavior, they can develop a plan to help teach the child the appropriate way to get what he/she wants without the need to have the behavior.

A Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) is the written plan that describes the behavioral supports and strategies that will be in place to support a student's needs. A student can benefit greatly by the consistency of a behavior plan that is written well and followed when it's needed.

A standard BIP includes many important pieces:

- **Prevention Strategies**: Ways to help reduce problem behavior from happening Changes to instruction, choices, accommodations, and environment needed to prevent or decrease problem behavior. Ex: scheduled movement breaks, visual schedule, check-in with adult.

- **Replacement Behaviors**: Instead of the problem behavior the student will be taught to use a replacement behavior to get what they want. Ex: coping skills, requesting to take a break

- **Teaching Strategies**: Appropriate strategies to teach the replacement behavior Ex: social skills, coping skills, how to take a break

- **Response Strategies**: how to react to behavior when it happens- strategies that do not reinforce the behavior of concern and do reinforce the replacement behavior; for de-escalation? Ex: minor behaviors will be ignored, if the child displays behavior A, the team will respond by…

- **Safety Plan**: define what a crisis or "meltdown" is for the child and identify actions to be taken to ensure safety. Ex: If child has left the building or is danger to self or others, the team will… Call parents

- **Monitoring Plan**: could include gathering data for the student's behavior goal, replacement skills, or the implementation or integrity of the plan. How we will know if the plan is working.

Issues surrounding suspension of students are often complex and multiple factors must be considered. Students with disabilities are subject to the same code of conduct as any other student, but consequences could be different than for other students when the IEP or Behavior Plan describes something different. For example, an IEP team may decide that rather than going to the principal's office for disruptive behavior in the classroom, a child should be instructed to take a break and go talk to the Special Education Teacher to practice using coping skills.

A student with a disability can be suspended for up to 10 school days in a school year before the team needs to consider the 10 Day Rule and whether the child's IEP is appropriate to meet their needs.

A meeting should be held anytime things aren't going well for the team to discuss which pieces are working and which are not and to consider whether additional assessments would be helpful at that time. Sometimes the adults working with the child would benefit from training about the child's disability or behavior strategies in general in order to better understand and problem-solve the child's behavior or the team would benefit from the expertise of someone with special training on planning for challenging behavior. If training is needed for the staff to be effective working with the child, it can be written into the IEP.

Responses to behavior like sending home early, shortening school days, any regular use of the "time-out room" or restraining the child, police involvement, discussions by the IEP team about moving the student to a more restrictive setting or looking at specialized placement options for behavior needs are indicators of a need for a high level of behavior assessments to be done and expertise at the table. Iowa has a system of Challenging Behavior Teams at each AEA and some school districts that are available to problem-solve with IEP teams upon request.

Regardless of the child's disability, they should have access to the supports they need to make appropriate progress in school.

Related Resources

Look for the following information sheets on www.askresource.org/resources

- Ten Day Rule
- Seclusion and Restraint
- Manifestation Determinations

ASK Essential Questions
- What is the purpose of my child's behavior?
- Does the behavior plan include ways to prevent the behavior of concern and respond in a way that will help to reduce it?
- What kinds of things work or definitely don't work at home that I can share with the team?