Out of the Classroom — Into the Street — Applying Classroom Management Techniques During Crises

A number of classroom management techniques have been established as being essential for successfully intervening with emotionally disturbed or behaviorally disordered students. These techniques have been taught to teachers at universities, teacher training institutions, inservices, and workshops. Not only can these techniques be implemented effectively in school settings, but in other environments where disruptive or acting-out behaviors are encountered. These techniques may be implemented at various times as the client or student progresses into a crisis state. Through early recognition and identification of the client's or student's crisis behavioral level, staff can select and incorporate one or more of these management techniques to successfully alleviate a disruptive or out-of-control situation.

Techniques

Let's first examine some of the behavioral and counseling techniques that can be implemented during an intervention with a student, client or other individual. Familiarization with these techniques will help appropriate usage.

- **Activity Time Out -** *Remove student from activity for a limited period of time.*

For example, the group is involved in an art project. Mary, who should be participating is non-compliant and disruptive. The staff member may then say, "Mary, work on your art project quietly or you will have a time out."

If Mary complies, reinforce her appropriate behavior specifically noting the desired behavior; i.e., "Mary, great job. I knew that you could work quietly."

If Mary should continue to misbehave, direct her to a specific area - away from distractions, interactions, etc. The staff member may say, "Mary, go to the time out area and sit for two quiet minutes." Mary's time would not start until she was seated quietly. Also, staff and peers would not converse with her until she completed a successful time out. At that time Therapeutic Rapport would take place.

- **Contingency Contracting -** *Written agreement with student establishing consequences for behavior.*

Contracts would be if-then type agreements. For example, Jim is having a great deal of difficulty in following staff directives without challenging back talk. In gathering data it is discovered that back talk occurs 50% of the time. The teacher, deciding to intervene, discusses the problem with Jim, and gathers additional information. It is discovered that

Jim's favorite activity of the week is computer time. As a result, that will be used to reward appropriate behavior.

A formal agreement is drafted and signed in which Jim follows staff directives without comment 80% of the time; then he will earn one-half hour of computer time at the end of the day.

It is important to keep track of Jim's progress. If there are not changes in his behavior, I would go back to the "drawing board." Obviously, computer time is not as reinforcing as talking back. The teacher may want to increase the reinforcer (computer time) or consider consequences for lowering the percentage.

- **Extinction -** *Negative behaviors are extinguished through planned ignoring on a regular basis.*

This technique is most beneficial when all staff working with the student meet and agree upon specific behaviors to ignore. However, it is important to note that if you want all students to work quietly, praise Susie when she is working quietly as well as those around her.

Many teachers have found it helpful to develop an individual behavior program for each student. This may be shared with other staff working with the child to insure consistency.

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<u>**Behaviors to reinforce**</u>	1. Quiet working
	2. Task completion
	3. Good sportsmanship
	4. Etc., etc.
<u>**Behaviors to punish**</u>	1. Physical aggression toward staff and peers
	2. Verbal abuse
<u>**Behaviors to ignore**</u>	1. Mumbling to self
	2. Grimaces

Needless to say, behaviors causing a health and safety concern to self and/or others would not be considered for extinction. Also, as more severe behaviors are extinguished, milder ones may be considered for remediation at a later time.

- **Home Notes -** *Notes are sent home on a daily or weekly basis in order to keep parent/guardian informed.*

Positive notes are as important as the negative. When the parents/guardians are willing to provide privileges for good behavior or consequences for poor behavior, more progress is usually seen with the student.

- **Instructional Detention -** *Detaining a child after/during school hours.*

For example, Jim has been having a difficult morning. The staff involved may say, "Jim, complete your assignment and you may go to lunch (or home) on time. If not you will have to stay after school until it is completed.

Oftentimes the student will initially challenge the teacher and not complete the assignment. The parents are then contacted and the child remains after school to finish his/her assignment.

- **Proximity Control -** *Teacher/staff member maintains a close distance to the student.*

Consider a situation in which Sue is talking to her partner while you are presenting a lesson. While you don't, perhaps, want to stop the lesson, you do want Sue back on task. As you continue your lecture you walk by Sue and her partner. They quiet as you near. At that point you choose to walk around that area, while making eye contact with the rest of the class.

In addition, this technique is quite useful when the whole group seems a bit more agitated than usual. The staff member would spend the period walking among the group. He/she would move quickly while maintaining awareness of individual needs.

- **Planned Ignoring -** *Teacher ignores inappropriate behaviors in certain situations.*

For example, Jim is involved in a volleyball game. Tension is high and he is putting forth a great effort. The staff member standing nearby hears a barely audible "d___" as he misses the ball. Because of the situation, the staff member may choose to not administer the regular consequences for inappropriate language.

- **Positive Reinforcement -** *An action following a response which causes an increase in desired behavior.*

It is extremely important to note that what is reinforcive for one student may not be for another. Having the student discuss items or privileges to work for is beneficial.

Consider the staff that wishes to reward appropriate behavior with apples, because they are nutritious. While the intention is noble, it is hardly likely that a room full of teenagers would remediate a behavioral deficit for an apple. While several students may, there may be just as many or more that don't care for the fruit.

The number of reinforcers is limitless. Some which have proven successful include:

- stickers
- computer time
- praise, recognition
- edibles; i.e., candy, gum, cereal, etc.
- field trips
- room privileges; i.e., teacher helper, peer tutor
- small toys/trinkets; i.e., rings, cards, etc.
- school supplies; i.e., paper, pencils, pens, erasers.

Again, a positive reinforcer is effective if a desired behavior increases. When beginning a specific reinforcement program with a student, outline expectancies and rewards with him. Follow up in a consistent manner.

- **Restitution -** *A student compensates for his actions monetarily or with labor.*

For example, Mary scratched or wrote on her desk, causing about $5.00 worth of damage. Since Mary's funds are somewhat limited, it was decided that Mary would clean desks at school for 3 hours.

- **Successive Approximation -** *Teacher rewards successive steps toward desired behavior.*

If a staff member is attempting to teach a student to tie their shoes, the task should be broken into steps: i.e., 1) pick up the laces; 2) cross; 3) bring under, etc. The student is then presented several steps at a time, dependent on independent functioning level, and reinforced accordingly. If he is presented the first 2 steps and he can perform them upon command, a reward may then be given.

- **Token Economy -** *Concrete reward for desired behaviors.*

For example, consider the elementary ED student, Joe, that has difficulties in remaining seated. Upon gathering baseline information, it is noted that Joe gets out of his seat every six minutes. The staff member decides to develop a program to remediate this disruptive behavior. She discusses this with Joe, noting that for every 10 minutes in his seat, he will receive a sticker. When 20 stickers are earned, he may choose a trinket from the classroom treasure chest.

The staff member would want to continue collecting data in order to insure Joe's progress.

- **Depersonalize Issues -** *To reduce student's defensiveness, the teacher depersonalizes issues by using "we" or "students your age."*

Consider a situation in which Mary, a 15-year-old, has slapped a classmate in anger. The staff member may say "students your age keep their hands to themselves." Mary is then being told what is expected of all children her age instead of personalizing it directly to her.

- **Guided Imagery -** *Teacher elicits pictures in students' minds to reduce stress.*

For example, Steve is quite agitated. In addition, attempts to calm him have failed because he tends to dwell on the recent crisis situation. At that point the staff member would want to isolate Steve and talk to him in a calm, quiet voice. Staff may choose to say, "Steve, close your eyes. Imagine that you are on a raft in a warm, calm pond. You feel the warm sun on your skin." Continue until Steve settles.

Also, many companies now have relaxation tapes on the market. They are wonderful to use individually or during a group activity. When paired with **Biodots** (a small dot placed on the skin which reacts to body heat), students can become more aware of what affects them and how.*

- **Interpretation -** *Staff connects behavior with certain incidents.*

Consider the student who exhibits a temper tantrum three times a week after a certain therapy class. The staff member may then attempt to determine why the problem exists; i.e., change in regular routine, intensity of session, etc. Upon discovering the reason for the tantrums, a plan for remediation may then be developed. This may be as simple as having a trusted staff member join the therapy session. If this proves successful, the student could gradually be weaned from this to the point where maybe the child is escorted to the room by the staff member.

- **Life Space Interview -** *A comprehensive technique to counsel students after an outburst or crisis.*

The intent of life space interviewing is to determine what happened before and during the incident. Also, why the incident occurred. Upon obtaining that information, a plan is developed with the child to prevent future reoccurrences.

- **Non-judgmental -** *Teacher obtains information from student in a matter of fact manner.*

Consider a free time situation in which two students were engaged in a physical confrontation. They are now both calm and ready to discuss the problem. The staff member's intent is to glean as much information as needed in order to develop a plan to prevent further disturbances.

- **Reflection -** *Teacher states feelings and/or content of student's actions.*

Steven has just been separated from a wrestling match with another student. He is taken to a room to discuss the difficulty. When asked how the fight started, Steven states that Tom is a big show off and a bully. The staff member might then say, "It sounds as if you are really upset with Tom." Steven replies that, yes, Tom was doing tricks on his bike and in the process ran into him. At this point the staff member could say, "So Tom ran into you; that must have really hurt. Do you think he did it on purpose?"

By reflecting on Steven's thoughts and actions, consideration is given to his feelings. In addition, he may then become more active in the solution - ownership of problem.

- **Role Play -** *Teacher and/or student act out incidents that occur.*

Consider the student who consistently greets others in an inappropriate manner - looking away, mumbling, etc. Staff may decide that improving this behavior needs to become a priority.

During a scheduled social skill lesson* the students are presented specific behaviors to use when greeting others. These could include:

- choose the right time and place to introduce yourself;
- greet the other person and tell him/her your name;
- ask the other person his/her name if you need to;
- tell or ask the other person something to help start your conversation.

The student is then given time to practice, master and transfer the skill to his own environment.

- **Use of Humor to Neutralize Situations**

Caution should be used with this technique in order to not appear sarcastic, flip or insensitive to the student. Also, it is helpful if the staff member knows the student. A while back, I was in an ED classroom to discuss a student problem with the teacher. A different student appeared somewhat upset and asked if I were in the room to talk about him. I replied that we would wait to talk about him until he was out of the room. He smiled and continued on task, his anxiety apparently diffused.

Keys to Usage

The main key to successful implementation of these classroom management techniques is knowing when to use them. Some techniques may have greater impact upon the client when he is in the earlier stages of crisis, while others may be more helpful during periods of further loss of control. It is also best to use the least restrictive approaches first. Through examination of the stages of crisis development, as developed by the Crisis Prevention Institute, staff can obtain a clearer idea as to the most appropriate usage of each management technique. The techniques used may vary depending upon the environment in which the incident is taking place.

- **Anxiety Level**

The student begins to send cues that he is upset. While responding in a supportive manner, staff may initially use proximity control to convey his presence to the student. As soon as possible, the teacher will acknowledge the student and take opportunity to discuss his concerns. In doing so, the teacher could incorporate guided imagery and reflection in a non-judgmental manner to alleviate the student's anxiety. If successful, the student could be returned to the learning environment. He could then be directed back to task and reinforced both verbally and with a token.

- **Defensive Level**

Management techniques may differ, depending upon where the student or client is. Initially, when the client begins to question staff, staff should answer all questions relevant and productive to the task. Staff may want to consider planned ignoring to deal with challenging type questions. Redirection would assist in obtaining compliance.

If the student or client would continue to escalate in her inappropriate behavior and refuse to comply, staff may implement proximity control, redirection and successful approximation. These techniques may be combined with positive reinforcement and the token economy; i.e., "John, if you begin your math, you will earn your token to buy some computer time. If not, you will have a time out."

Crisis Development	Staff Attitude	Behavioral Techniques
1. **Anxiety** An observable and unusual change or increase in behavior.	1. **Supportive** A staff attitude which is empathic, conveying to the individual that you know he/she is anxious and would like to help alleviate the anxiety.	**a)** guided imagery **b)** proximity control **c)** non-judgmental **d)** reflection **e)** positive reinforcement **f)** token economy
2. **Defensive** An individual begins to lose rationality at this point; oftentimes becomes belligerent, challenging you or the	2. **Directive** A staff member takes control of a potentially escalating situation and sets limits.	**a)** planned ignoring **b)** positive reinforcement **c)** successive approximation **d)** token

authority you represent. The individual begins to give you cues verbally and non-verbally that he/she is beginning to lose control.		economy **e)** depersonalize issues **f)** flexibility of rules **g)** guided imagery **h)** life space interview **i)** reflection **j)** activity time out/isolate
3. **Acting-Out Person** An individual who has lost control of his/her behavior which often involves physical acting-out episodes.	3. **Nonviolent Physical Crisis Intervention** Safe, nonharmful control and restraint techniques to physically control the individual's behavior until he/she can regain control of their own behavior.	**a)** guided imagery **b)** successive approximation **c)** positive reinforcement **d)** activity time out/isolate
4. **Tension Reduction** After a person has physically "acted-out," energy subsides. In tension reduction, the individual regains rationality and in many cases realizes he/she has done something inappropriate.	4. **Therapeutic Rapport** Communication with an individual during tension reduction. An attempt to cope with the crisis and affect positive growth from the experience.	**a)** life space interview **b)** guided imagery **c)** interpretation **d)** non-judgmental **e)** depersonalize issues **f)** reflection **g)** contingency contracting **h)** role play **i)** home notes **j)** instructional detention

		k) restitution **l)** positive reinforcement

When the client begins to verbally release and/or verbally threaten and intimidate, staff would want to take a more active role. If not already attempted, implement an activity time out. In addition, reflection, depersonalized issues and interpretations may assist in calming the client.

- **Acting-Out Person**

When encountering a physically out-of-control person, staff must decide if physical intervention is necessary. If the client is not harming anyone or anything, you may let him expend energy. If he is dangerous or damaging property and his behavior cannot be allowed, nonviolent physical intervention is the appropriate staff response. Staff, using a team approach, should initially utilize the least restrictive approach with the client, with the goal of providing for the best care, welfare, safety, and security for the client and staff.

At some point, the team leader may be able to establish verbal contact with the acting-out person. The leader may initially use guided imagery to reduce tension. Successful approximation may then be used along with positive reinforcement, to bring the acting-out person's emotional level down.

- **Tension Reduction**

After the incident when the client has calmed down, staff should attempt to redevelop a relationship with the client, so that a therapeutic rapport is established. Various management techniques may be implemented in this process. Some possibilities may include the usage of the life space interview as the person regains control of him or herself. In an attempt to gather information and understanding of the incident, staff may use reflection and non-judgmental approaches with the client to clarify the facts. Once the facts of the situation are gathered, staff may notice patterns in the client's behavior through interpretation and review of past situations.

Through depersonalization of issues, staff may investigate ways to break or interrupt the behavior pattern. Through contingency contracting, staff may introduce an alternative behavior to the client, obtaining his commitment to change. Staff may also use role play techniques to give the client the opportunity to practice the new behavior. Depending on the individual, consequences for the client's actions may include home notes, instructional detention or restriction.

Summary

Trained teachers of the emotionally disturbed/behaviorally disordered have used a variety of classroom management techniques for remediating inappropriate student behaviors for a number of years. These techniques can be utilized by other direct care professionals who provide services outside of the classroom setting.

While the techniques examined here are by no means all inclusive of the techniques available, it does represent a fair sampling. By incorporating these classroom management techniques at the appropriate stage of crisis development, along with the appropriate staff attitude, teachers and other direct care workers are provided with many more possibilities to positively intervene with clients possessing behavioral difficulties.

*Available form Biodot International, P.O. Box 29097. Indianapolis, IN 46229.

*Goldstein, Arnold P.; Sprafkin, Robert P.; Gershaw, N. Jane; and Klien, Paul. **Skillstreaming the Adolescent,** Research Press, 1980.

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