



Guiding Positive Student Behavior Cue Cards

What to do: Use these cue cards (a) to improve or refresh your knowledge about student behavior; (b) to prompt discussion among staff and volunteers about key terms, concepts, and strategies related to student behavior; or (c) to support training and practice. You can use the template at the end of each set to create cards specific to your program.

Why it matters: Staff and volunteers may vary in their ideas, experiences, and beliefs about behavior and behavior management. Establishing a shared language and understanding helps everyone guide and respond to student behavior consistently and appropriately to ensure a positive learning environment.

There are three sets of cards:



Key terms — Each card defines a term or concept that’s relevant to student behavior, provides an example, and explains its importance (“why it matters”). The cards include language and ideas that school-day staff may use when they talk about student behavior. Knowing how to “talk the talk” can help improve communications between your program and the school day.



Assumptions about student behavior — Each card describes a student behavior, an assumption some people might make about why the behavior is happening or what it means, the “reality” of why it might be happening, and a tip. These cards are cautionary tales about the perils of implicit bias, jumping to conclusions, and making assumptions that may or may not be true.



Challenge/solution scenarios — Each card presents a challenge scenario (for example, “Homework Time Meltdown”), strategies to consider if a similar situation arises in your program, and tips for putting those strategies to use.

Three Things to Know About Guiding Positive Student Behavior

- Your beliefs about behavior and discipline influence how you react to students’ behavior.
- Managing your own emotions, biases, and responses to student behaviors is essential to guiding students toward positive behavior.
- Standard approaches to student behavior (like “behavior management” and “discipline”) emphasize rules and consequences. “Guiding student behavior” introduces strong elements of teaching and community building.



Key Terms




ABC Chart (Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence Chart)

Definition: A direct observation tool that can be used to collect information about the events occurring within a student’s environment.

Example:

ABC BEHAVIOR FORM				
DATE	SETTING EVENTS <small>(events that precede and influence the problem behavior. List if there is more than one. Indicate dates, times, and locations.)</small>	ANTECEDENT <small>(what happened immediately before the behavior.)</small>	BEHAVIOR <small>(what does the behavior look like? Be specific.)</small>	CONSEQUENCE <small>(what happened during/after the behavior.)</small>

Why it matters: Using an ABC chart helps your staff observe behavior and gather data objectively to better understand why behaviors occur and how you might provide support.



Antecedent

Definition: Event that occurs before a behavior. There are two types of antecedents — setting events and triggers.

Example (setting event): Lara’s older sister got her ready for school, but they were running late and had no breakfast. Lara struggled to focus in math class right before lunch.

Example (trigger): Anna’s red marker ran out while coloring her cardinal, making her picture look streaked. She ripped it up and started crying.

Why it matters: Identifying antecedents can help explain student behavior and help supervising adults understand student triggers and the impact of prior events.



Behavior

Definition: Observable actions and functioning in response to everyday environments and situations.

Example: Jenny sat at the table with her head down for 10 minutes before starting her homework.

Why it matters: Observing and measuring behavior can help reduce subjective decisions related to student interactions, and help to create an objective, informed response plan.



Consequence





Definition: Event that occurs immediately after a behavior.

Example: The 10th-grade students left to go home without cleaning up their trash from snack. The following day they were asked to spend 10 minutes helping the art teacher clean his room.

Why it matters: Some consequences make it more likely that a behavior will recur, and some make it less likely.







Key Terms

 Direct Instruction Definition: Specifically teaching students the skills or behaviors we want them to exhibit. Example: For students to help keep the out-of-school space tidy and safe, the staff spent 25 minutes showing students where materials and equipment were stored. Why it matters: Many times, students are expected to do certain things or behave in a certain way. Without direct instruction, we can't assume they have acquired the skills to do so.	 Expectations Definition: The behavior or level of performance desired from a student. Example: When moving from homework time to snack time, students should do so quietly so they don't disturb students who are still working. Why it matters: Students aren't always aware of how to act in certain situations, so expectations must be stated clearly and specifically.
 Implicit Bias Definition: A form of bias that occurs automatically and unintentionally, that nevertheless affects judgments, decisions, and behaviors. Example: A young male volunteer in the out-of-school time program was assigned to play sports with the boys. Why it matters: Adults, as well as students, have a wide variety of interests, talents, strengths, and weaknesses. Every effort should be made to maximize talents and strengths without preconceived assumptions about who is the "best" choice for a given role.	 Negative Reinforcement Definition: Taking something unpleasant or undesired away to make a desired behavior more likely to occur. Example: Third-grade students did not have to do their flashcards on Wednesday because all of them got a C or better on their multiplication test. Why it matters: When used correctly, this strategy can be as effective as positive reinforcement in generating a desired behavior.







Key Terms

 Outcomes Definition: The intended goals or learning experiences of a course or program. Example: By the end of the semester, second-grade students should be able to write three related sentences that include transitions. Why it matters: It is crucial to understand what you're trying to help students achieve so that the program has a specific, workable plan in place to help them get there.	 Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Definition: An evidence-based, three-tiered framework to improve and integrate all the data, systems, and practices affecting student outcomes every day. Example: Setting clear expectations and routines in the classroom and the program, using positive dialogue to reinforce desired behaviors, and applying behavior support strategies to elicit desired behavior. Why it matters: Research shows that PBIS effectively promotes positive behavior, resulting in increased social skills, safer schools, and more effective learning environments.
 Positive Reinforcement Definition: Adding something pleasant or desirable to make a desired behavior more likely to occur. Example: The seventh-grade students worked consistently and effectively during homework time. They received 10 minutes of free-choice time at the end of homework time. Why it matters: It creates a pleasant, rewarding experience for students and increases the likelihood that the desired behavior will be repeated.	 Precorrection Definition: Proactively correcting problems by prompting for appropriate behavior before problem behavior occurs. Example: The afterschool activity leader reminded students of expected behavior just before the guest speaker arrived. Why it matters: Operate under the assumption that students want to exhibit appropriate behavior. However, many times they don't know or have forgotten what that is. Precorrection gives them the information they need to meet expectations.







Key Terms

 Proximity Control Definition: Moving closer to a student who's engaged in an undesirable or inappropriate behavior with the aim of discouraging that behavior. Example: Lucas is distracting another student during homework time, so the homework facilitator moves across the room to be near Lucas. Why it matters: This can be a subtle way to influence student behavior without calling out a student or using verbal prompts.	 Redirection Definition: A proactive teaching strategy used to address challenging behavior before it escalates. Example: Jamal climbs on a chair to hang his science experiment poster. You grab a ladder, walk over to him, and ask him to use that instead. Why it matters: Stopping unwanted behavior before it gets out of control promotes desirable behavior and reduces negative consequences.
 Reinforcement Definition: One type of consequence that increases the likelihood of a behavior recurring. Example: When the activity facilitator called on Micah to give his opinion, he made a derogatory joke about a certain nationality, causing the other students to laugh. The activity leader said, "Does anyone else have an opinion? And please remember to follow the agreements we made about using respectful language." Why it matters: The way students react to another student's language can reinforce the student's use of that language, either positively or negatively. Stay calm and guide students toward appropriate choices.	 Replacement Behavior Definition: A behavior a student is taught to use to replace a challenging behavior (sometimes called target behavior). Example: Travis calls other students names when they get something he wants. You teach him appropriate ways to express his needs and to address others. Why it matters: Anytime you tell a student to stop a certain behavior but don't suggest a replacement, you're missing an opportunity to teach an important skill. Also, without a replacement, the student will likely revert to the problem behavior under stress.







Key Terms

 Restorative Practices <p>Definition: Processes that proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community and/or address the needs of all people impacted after an action or event has caused harm.</p> <p>Example: Each Monday the ninth-graders form a circle and share their goals or concerns for the week.</p> <p>Why it matters: Creating a sense of community gives students an interest in being more responsible to one another and more aware of how their actions impact others.</p>	 Setting Event <p>Definition: A type of antecedent that indirectly “sets up” a problem behavior by temporarily increasing or decreasing the value of a consequence. A setting event can happen at a time that is removed from the behavior, so it can be difficult to pinpoint.</p> <p>Example: Two weeks ago, Nicco, his mother, and his sister moved in with his aunt, uncle, and cousins.</p> <p>Why it matters: Students can already be emotionally upset about a previous event. When “one more thing” happens at school, even if it seems small, it can trigger undesirable behavior or an extreme emotional reaction.</p>
 Target Behavior <p>Definition: The behavior we want to decrease or eliminate.</p> <p>Example: Bella consistently takes materials from the other students without asking.</p> <p>Why it matters: Being specific about noting the behavior that we want to replace enables us to observe and measure the effects of redirection, reinforcement, and other strategies.</p>	 Trigger <p>Definition: Antecedent event that happens just before the unwanted behavior occurs, and actually seems to prompt the behavior to happen.</p> <p>Example: The teacher asks Mathias to try to sound out a word he doesn’t know how to spell. Mathias then crumples his paper and refuses to continue his writing assignment.</p> <p>Why it matters: Identifying what triggers a specific student behavior informs staff and allows them to structure proximity, activities, and transitions accordingly. It also helps students gain self-awareness that hopefully leads to greater self-control.</p>







Key Terms

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Assumptions About Student Behavior

<p> Eric</p> <p>Behavior: Eric jumps line during snack time.</p> <p>Assumption: Students should know how to behave.</p> <p>Reality: Behavior expectations have to be learned, and some students need more time than others. Also, if program rules and expectations haven't been taught or modeled, students may not be aware that a certain behavior is not appropriate in that setting.</p> <p>Tip: Explicitly teaching students about what behaviors are expected in your environment (and in other settings) can benefit them for years to come.</p>	<p> Jayden</p> <p>Behavior: Jayden puts his head down on the table every day during homework time.</p> <p>Assumption: Students who sleep during program time are lazy.</p> <p>Reality: Students may come from a home environment that's not conducive to a good night's sleep. They may not have guidance regarding appropriate bedtime, may be working late in the evening, or may have a medical issue that impacts their sleep.</p> <p>Tip: Designing a program activity that includes information about sleep, nutrition, and physical activity could incorporate a variety of academic skills and improve health and wellness.</p>
<p> Kaia</p> <p>Behavior: Kaia arrives at school 15 to 30 minutes late at least twice a week, which puts red flags on her attendance record.</p> <p>Assumption: Students who are tardy are disorganized.</p> <p>Reality: Students may not have anyone waking them or seeing them off to school in the morning or may not have dependable transportation to school.</p> <p>Tip: This could be an opportunity to build rapport with the student and the family to implement change.</p>	<p> Blake</p> <p>Behavior: To get a program volunteer's attention, Blake calls out, "Yo, teach!"</p> <p>Assumption: Students who use slang or informal language to address authority figures are disrespectful and rude.</p> <p>Reality: Students often mimic language and behaviors they see in movies, on social media, at home, or elsewhere. They may not know that what's appropriate in one setting may not be appropriate in another. Also, what's "acceptable" may vary by region or culture.</p> <p>Tip: Build community by having students brainstorm appropriate ways to address one another and adults within the program.</p>







Assumptions About Student Behavior

<p> Ernesto and John</p> <p>Behavior: After fighting at school, Ernesto is sent to the principal's office, but John isn't.</p> <p>Assumption: Students of color are more likely to cause problems in the classroom than white students.</p> <p>Reality: Numerous studies show that a disproportionate amount of disciplinary action affects Black and brown students.</p> <p>Tip: Establish program expectations and consequences and be consistent.</p>	<p> Jada</p> <p>Behavior: Jada erases and redoes her math worksheet multiple times, frequently causing her work to be incomplete.</p> <p>Assumption: Students with attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit/ hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are always fidgety and disruptive. Since Jada's a fairly quiet student, she doesn't have ADD/ADHD.</p> <p>Reality: Girls with ADD/ADHD frequently exhibit traits like anxiety and perfectionism.</p> <p>Tip: Program staff may benefit from training to increase their awareness of individual needs and behaviors and ways to provide support.</p>
<p> Mario</p> <p>Behavior: Mario's always fidgeting, and he has trouble following instructions.</p> <p>Assumption: All students who fidget or lack focus have attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).</p> <p>Reality: There are many reasons other than ADHD that students may lack focus. They may be hungry, tired, worried, or have a medical issue. For example, enlarged tonsils and adenoids can cause sleep apnea, and the sleepy child may fidget to stay awake.</p> <p>Tip: Collaborate with school-day teachers, the school nurse or counselor, and special educators to help you understand behaviors and provide appropriate support.</p>	<p> Aliyah</p> <p>Behavior: Aliyah does all of her math homework except the problems about measuring length.</p> <p>Assumption: Students who don't complete their homework are lazy or don't care.</p> <p>Reality: A brief discussion reveals that Aliyah's family doesn't have a ruler or a yardstick. Students may lack the resources at home to complete a homework assignment or may have responsibilities (or jobs) that don't allow time for homework.</p> <p>Tip: Make resources and materials available during homework time. Help students prioritize which assignments to do during out-of-school time.</p>







Assumptions About Student Behavior

 Penny <p>Behavior: Penny sits cross-legged on the floor during circle time, bouncing her knees slightly as the facilitator gives instructions.</p> <p>Assumption: Students should be able to sit still and listen.</p> <p>Reality: Many students can wiggle around and listen at the same time. Research shows that students need to move throughout the day to maximize focus.</p> <p>Tip: Allow students to move in ways that don't disturb others. Incorporate movement breaks into academic sessions like homework time.</p>	 James <p>Behavior: Mrs. Stewart doesn't acknowledge James as he makes goofy faces, causing other students to giggle during homework time.</p> <p>Assumption: If I ignore a student's behavior, it will go away.</p> <p>Reality: Ignoring inappropriate behavior that's persistent or repeated, despite previous strategies and discussions, can signal that you think it's acceptable.</p> <p>Tip: Moving closer to James might be the first thing to try. Also, be sure to set expectations and to specify desired replacement behaviors for inappropriate ones.</p>
 Bryson <p>Behavior: Bryson ignores his homework and stares out the window. He's falling behind.</p> <p>Assumption: Students who aren't mastering content aren't trying hard enough.</p> <p>Reality: There can be many reasons a student isn't mastering content. Maybe Bryson can't see the words in textbooks clearly, and his family can't afford to buy glasses.</p> <p>Tip: Collaborate with school-day teachers to determine learning strategies that might help specific students. If you think a student needs glasses, for example, talk with the program leader about exploring ways to help Bryson get an eye exam (and glasses, if needed).</p>	 Samantha and Kelsey <p>Behavior: Samantha pulls Kelsey's hair to keep her from getting in front of her in line.</p> <p>Assumption: Some students are violent by nature and just like to fight.</p> <p>Reality: Some students live in homes or neighborhoods where they learn to use violence to resolve conflicts.</p> <p>Tip: Model appropriate, expected behavior. Also, use restorative practices to help students build relationships and explore alternative ways to resolve conflict.</p>







Assumptions About Student Behavior

 Juliet <p>Behavior: Juliet, who recently moved to the U.S. from France, rarely participates in academic discussions or group activities.</p> <p>Assumption: Students who refuse to participate in activities are antisocial and uncooperative.</p> <p>Reality: It may be difficult for English learners and students with receptive or expressive language delays to process language fast enough to participate. Or, some students may be insecure or suffer from social anxiety.</p> <p>Tip: Communicating with the school day can help you get a fuller picture of a student's behavior across settings.</p>	 Allie, Bryan, Chris, and Others <p>Behavior: All but two students keep talking as the activity leader gives instructions about the next activity.</p> <p>Assumption: There's no sense in setting high expectations for all students because some students will never meet them.</p> <p>Reality: With the correct supports in place, all students can meet appropriate academic and behavioral expectations.</p> <p>Tip: Try engaging students in a physical activity (like doing jumping jacks for a minute or playing "Simon Says") before you start a new activity. This can help students make the transition more smoothly.</p>
 Shawna <p>Behavior: Shawna refuses to complete the 10 word problems in her math homework.</p> <p>Assumption: Students who refuse to do an assignment or complete an activity are just being stubborn or lazy.</p> <p>Reality: Adults have autonomy about what we choose to try. If someone asked us to jump over a building, we wouldn't even try because it seems insurmountable. That's the way some schoolwork may seem to students.</p> <p>Tip: Help students see assignments or activities as "doable." For example, show them how to break a large task into small chunks, and model positive self-talk.</p>	 Zayden <p>Behavior: Zayden bursts into tears when he doesn't get the orange ice pop.</p> <p>Assumption: Some students blow up over insignificant things.</p> <p>Reality: Sometimes it looks like students blow up or have meltdowns over "nothing." In reality, something triggers that behavior, and we need to figure out what came before to help the student learn to understand and manage the response.</p> <p>Tip: Emotional regulation is a skill that can be learned. Helping students gain that skill may require compassion, patience, explicit instruction, modeling, coaching, and encouragement.</p>







Assumptions About Student Behavior

 Luca Behavior: While the activity leader writes a poem on the whiteboard, Luca puts a pencil in each nostril. Assumption: Students who are always cracking jokes and acting out just want to be popular with their peers. Reality: Students may use distracting behaviors to avoid something uncomfortable or to get positive reinforcement in the only way they know. Tip: Be intentional about giving students roles and responsibilities that help meet their needs and use their strengths productively. Help the “class clown” channel that creative energy!	 Felicia Behavior: Felicia tells another student that she is a “pain in the a**” after the student asks Felicia for the glue. Assumption: Students should know better than to use foul language at school. Reality: This may be common vocabulary for the student outside the school and program environment. It could be something they heard on TV, for example, and they may not know it’s inappropriate in some settings. Tip: Give students ownership of the language they use in your program by having them generate norms that emphasize using positive, kind words and phrases.
 Noah Behavior: Noah often calls other students “dumb” or “stupid.” Assumption: Students who are verbally abusive are bullies. Reality: The student may be mimicking a verbal interaction heard elsewhere. Or the student might be projecting his own feelings of being “dumb” or “stupid” onto others. Tip: Without naming individual students, open a discussion about resisting the urge to repeat negative language and ideas encountered on social media or elsewhere. Help them see that setting their own course and choosing their own words and actions (rather than following the crowd) is a way to take back their power.	 Name or Title: Behavior: Assumption: Reality: Tip:







Challenge/Solution Scenarios

 <h3>Homework Time Meltdown</h3> <p>Challenge or situation: Susan often cries or breaks her pencil during homework time.</p> <p>Strategies to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check in with each student if possible. • Offer help. • Break it down. Help students set mini-goals. • Use homework buddies. • Reward effort and celebrate achievements. • Include student choice. <p>Tip: Make students aware of intrinsic rewards. Feelings of relief, satisfaction, and confidence are part of a natural, built-in reward system they can access anytime.</p> <p>Reminder: Homework time is “hopework” time!</p>	 <h3>The Animal Cracker Fiasco</h3> <p>Challenge or situation: Alison says she wants the last giraffe, but Bella races to take it.</p> <p>Strategies to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge the situation and the impact on each student involved. • Explain that being upset doesn’t change the situation. • Remind students of alternate, appropriate behaviors; model them and provide opportunities for practice. • Have both students discuss alternate solutions. • Have students apologize for inappropriate behavior. <p>Tip: Help students realize they don’t have control over the supply of animal crackers, but they <i>do</i> have control over their actions and behaviors!</p>
 <h3>Alone on the Playground</h3> <p>Challenge or situation: Eli often sits alone on the playground during group activities.</p> <p>Strategies to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a group discussion about making sure everyone feels welcome to play together. • Talk about how someone might feel when they’re left out. • Discuss reasons someone might have for not participating. • Role-play how to ask someone to join in — and how to ask others if you can be included. <p>Tip: Help students learn to be inclusive while respecting individual preferences. Help them to practice empathy and not feel rejected or offended if a peer turns down their invitation.</p>	 <h3>Hey, You!</h3> <p>Challenge or situation: When Henry needs help finding art supplies, he yells, “Hey, you!” to get the activity leader’s attention.</p> <p>Strategies to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss appropriate ways to address teachers, adults, and other students. • Have a community circle to ask students to express how they want to be addressed (and make sure you’re pronouncing their names correctly). • Allow students to share how they feel when someone addresses them incorrectly or in a verbally aggressive manner. • Play a “name game” as a fun conclusion. <p>Tip: Post name strips in an area of your out-of-school time space so students have a visual reminder of appropriate ways to address others.</p>







Challenge/Solution Scenarios

 <h3>The Long and Short of It</h3> <p>Challenge or situation: Liz said she'd finish her homework at home, but later her teacher tells you Liz turned in an incomplete assignment.</p> <p>Strategies to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When checking to see what homework a student might have, consider what resources they might need. • Help them to prioritize homework based on resources they may need to use during out-of-school time because they may not be available at home. <p>Tip: Students may not have basic tools like rulers or counting cubes at home for math. Resources like magazines, construction paper, or even notebook paper may not be available at home.</p>	 <h3>Practice Makes Perfect</h3> <p>Challenge or situation: Tyler has trouble finishing homework because he keeps starting over.</p> <p>Strategies to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss with the student why he or she frequently erases and starts over when completing an assignment. • Celebrate mistakes by having conversations to highlight what was learned from them. • Use acronyms such as NO (for Next Opportunity) and FAIL (for First Attempt in Learning). <p>Tip: Gently try to uncover the source of the perfectionism. Communicate with the school-day teacher to coordinate strategies. Be aware that perfectionism can be (but isn't always) a sign of anxiety and ADD/ADHD, particularly in girls.</p>
 <h3>Jumpin' Jack Flash</h3> <p>Challenge or situation: Isabella jumped ahead of other students in the snack line — again!</p> <p>Strategies to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Younger students in particular delight in being the line leader. Consider having multiple "special" spots so students feel included. • Introduce body space and body awareness concepts to help students maintain their space in line. • Have students verbalize why they feel the need to jump line as well as how they feel when someone jumps in front of them. <p>Tip: Use a mix of strategies when having students line up. Calling students by first letter of their name, a color of clothing, or some other strategy can reduce the problem with line jumping.</p>	 <h3>Sleep Tight</h3> <p>Challenge or situation: Zack seems tired and disengaged when he arrives.</p> <p>Strategies to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may need time to rest and transition before engaging in out-of-school time program activities. • Consider having a quiet space where students can rest when needed. • Provide headphones with quiet music or white noise to block out other activity commotion. • Teach yoga or other relaxation techniques that students can use as needed. <p>Tip: Consult with school-day teachers to determine the level of concern regarding a student's fatigue and possible ways to provide support to the student and possibly the family.</p>



Challenge/Solution Scenarios

 <p>The One-Two Punch</p> <p>Challenge or situation: Ella says Lee pushed her during an argument on the playground.</p> <p>Strategies to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let each student tell their version of what happened rather than asking, “What did you do?” • Discuss appropriate consequences and allow the students involved to voice what they think those ought to be. • Include all students who experienced harm. Remember: Students who witnessed the fight may also feel traumatized. <p>Tip: Make sure you know and understand relevant school and district policies related to fighting. Follow protocols and report incidents as required.</p>	 <p>Movin’ and Groovin’</p> <p>Challenge or situation: David’s moving around a lot during homework time.</p> <p>Strategies to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate the situation — is a student’s movement impacting instruction or distracting other students? • Build movement breaks into activities, particularly homework time. • Are there materials, resources, or strategies you can try to give students the movement they need? Consider fidgets, wiggle seats, chair bands, and other approaches. <p>Tip: Students <i>need</i> to move and should be allowed to move. The challenge is when, where, and how much movement is appropriate so it doesn’t distract others and interrupt instruction. Many students need to move to improve focus.</p>
 <p>Scenario Title:</p> <p>Challenge or situation:</p> <p>Strategies to consider:</p> <p>Tip:</p>	 <p>Scenario Title:</p> <p>Challenge or situation:</p> <p>Strategies to consider:</p> <p>Tip:</p>





*Understanding why a kid is challenging is the first
And most important part of helping them.*

— Dr. Ross Green

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