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## ABSTRACT

This booklet explains a system for prevention of and intervention with behavior problems in individuals with mental retardation and autism. The underlying premise is that all behaviors are an effort at communication and that by deciphering the communicative intent or function, one can guide an individual to a more acceptable mode of communication. Other principles of the approach include the importance of distinguishing between punishment and discipline, the importance of the entire behavior episode, and collaborative problem solving. Part 1 focuses on identifying the communicative intent of a problem behavior which usually is about control, attention, or avoidance. Part 2 addresses the specifics of designing the intervention in terms of each of the three goals (control, attention, and avoidance) of communicative intent. A teaching process involving modeling, manding (cuing), independent performance, and fading of support is detailed. Part 3 considers helpful procedures for prevention and intervention, including ignoring, interrupting, redirecting, and rewarding target behaviors. Part 4 offers strategies for proactively managing the home or classroom. Sample scenarios illustrate each component of the system. A glossary is attached. (Contains 20 references.) (DB)

# MRDD

## Prism Series

Vol. 1

# Within Our Reach

## Behavior Prevention And Intervention Strategies For Learners With Mental Retardation and Autism

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By Melissa M. Jones

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# MRDD Prism Series

The Board of Directors of the Division on Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities of the Council for Exceptional Children is pleased to begin publication of the Prism Series. Each volume in the series is intended to provide practical or trend oriented information related to serving children and youth with mental retardation, autism and other developmental disabilities.

We thank Mellisa Jones for authoring this first volume of our ten volume series. We are certain that readers will find the information and perspective offered in Within Our Reach of significant value.

Series Editor,  
Laurence Sargent

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*In loving memory of Tom*

## Forward

I learned everything I know about the true meaning of inclusion from my parents, my sisters, and my brother. I learned about teaching strategies from numerous learners and their families with whom I had the fortune of getting to know. I learned about relationships from my husband, my daughters, and a student I once had who summed it all up when he said, “Ms. Jones, since you’re good to me, I’m going to be good to you.” But I had to look to myself and to what I had learned about inclusion, teaching, and relationships to learn about and to understand behavior.

Behavior prevention and intervention is not about trying to get learners to understand our world and what we want or need from them, but rather learning to understand what they want or need from us. This includes reaching out to learners, understanding what they are trying to tell us, listening to what their behaviors are communicating. Research offers us much valuable information on the subject of behavior interventions, but we have to be prepared to change the way we do things in order for the research to directly impact our lives and the lives of our students and children. By letting go of preconceived notions and opening ourselves up to getting to know the learners with whom we interact, the answers to understanding behaviors are *Within Our Reach*.

## Introduction

No one person has all of the answers when trying to teach a learners who present challenging behaviors. Since most learners interact with a variety of people in a variety of settings on any given day, each of these people can bring a different perspective, experiences and ideas to the planning table as interventions and teaching strategies are designed. Neither parents nor teachers should ever feel that they alone should know what to do, or how to resolve a particular problem issue. Instead, using a collaborative problem solving process, teams of people knowledgeable about the learner, including the learner himself, can work together and use that knowledge to define a problem situation, analyze the problem situation, set goals, design and implement plans, and evaluate the effectiveness of those plans (Allen, & Graden, 1995 ).

Given that solving behavioral issues is best done collaboratively, the practices and ideas outlined in this book can be considered in entirety as an *integrated* approach to problem solving. As Kanter (1983) explains, approaching problems integratively means that people need to have “the willingness to move beyond received wisdom, to combine ideas from unconnected sources,” and to see problems as wholes related to larger wholes. This idea has several ramifications for educators. The first is that facilitators of learning, which can be anyone who interacts with a learner including parents, family members, case workers, teachers, nurses, psychologists, doctors, program managers, direct care workers, administrators, court officers and others, *should look at behaviors of concern not as isolated incidents, but rather as part of a larger picture of the learner.* Secondly, no one theory or practice is best for use with all learners. Instead, *a combination of theories and practices which encompasses the learner as a whole might be best to support the learner.*

An example can be found in the history of the field of education in which on-going debates ensued as to whether phonics or whole language is the only way to teach students how to read. Most educators found that some students learn best with phonics, while other students learn best through whole language activities. In fact, many parents and educators discovered that a combination of the two reading strategies is effective for many learners. It depends on the learner's abilities, learning style, and likes or dislikes. Sometimes an integrated approach requires the facilitator of learning to make a change in educational practices, including the use of new or revised materials, the use of new teaching approaches, and most importantly, the alteration of his or her beliefs (Fullan, 1991). Change means opening ourselves up to something new. Consider this: if our current teaching strategies are not working, **stop doing them and try something else**. So often we try to change the learner instead of changing the way we respond to him or to her.

The content of this text is not intended to be new theory. Instead, this author hopes to demonstrate how a combination of proven practices and theories can meet the needs of a variety of individuals regardless of setting, history, or ability. Through a review of research and a myriad of personal experiences, it has been possible to develop practical approaches that can help individuals control their own behavior. This approach is as specific as it is broad and is adaptable to a variety of settings, learner needs and teaching styles, but the reader must be prepared to change some aspect of her or his current teaching practices.

The basis of the system of prevention and intervention strategies that will be outlined in this text focuses on the belief that all behaviors demonstrated by living beings, with the possible exception of those behaviors caused by neurological or biological functions, are an effort

at communication (Carr, & Durand, 1987; Durand, 1990; Durand, 1993; Durand, & Berotti, 1991; Gutkind, 1993; McGee, Menolascino, Hobbs, & Menousek, 1987). By deciphering the communicative intent or function of these behaviors one can help guide an individual to an alternate mode of communication which would be more conventional. Using a series of consistent steps, the facilitator of learning is able to introduce and support an individual to more effective and acceptable personal control over their lives (Carr, & Durand, 1987; Durand, 1990; Durand, 1993; Durand, & Berotti, 1991; Glasser, 1986; McGee et al., 1987).

Another premise underlying the strategies presented in this book is that there is a significant difference between the terms discipline and punishment. Punishment is based on the theory that unconventional behaviors can be controlled and is often a quick fix strategy for immediately stopping a behavior of concern (Glasser, 1986). Punishment generally focuses on the action or behavior of concern in isolation and is characterized as having little instructional value. Often punishment actually becomes rewarding to learners because the punishing action led to the learner getting a personal need met. If a learner is acting out to avoid a situation and the teacher puts him in time-out, the learner's "punishment" of time-out was what he wanted. The intended punishment becomes a reward, helping the learner to avoid participation in a particular situation or activity. In this scenario, the teacher increased the likelihood that the unconventional behavior will recur because the learner now knows that acting out will get him time-out.

Discipline, on the other hand, is an approach to changing behavior through planning, teaching, and evaluating the use of firm but fair consequences that are logically related to the behavior. Discipline addresses the cause of the behavior, not just the action, and is characterized as a long term process that teaches learners what they

should do instead. With discipline, it is more accurate to think of what I call a behavior episode instead of just a single occurrence of a particular behavior. A behavior episode is a series of events that begins with a learner demonstrating an unconventional behavior and ends with the learner participating and interacting in the learning environment. With punishment, the episode is over when the learner loses a point or a privilege, is sent to time-out, or is sent to the principal's office. With discipline, the episode continues beyond the consequence and is over once the learner returns to the learning environment and is participating and demonstrating the desired behavior.

Within this text, the philosophies of collaborative problem solving and the use of discipline as a teaching tool are woven together with the strategies around analyzing and understanding the communicative function of behavior. This book is intended for use by those individuals who find themselves in a position to help others who have disabilities to become more independent. Although the information is being shared to support primarily learners with mental retardation and autism, the strategies and theories discussed here apply to all learners, regardless of age, diagnosis, or ability. The author has used them effectively to support young and old learners who have severe emotional disabilities, who demonstrate giftedness, and to support those who have no apparent disability.

## Part I

### Understanding the Communicative

#### Intent of Behavior

Initially, when a parent or a teacher notices a problem he or she feels needs to be addressed, a problem definition should be created. This definition should include language that is both observable and measurable and is specific enough to create a visual image of the situation for someone who is unfamiliar with the learner. Once a problem is defined, facilitators of learning need to analyze the problem situation to determine whether or not the issue was defined accurately, whether or not the issue is a priority, and to explore additional information that might influence the design of interventions around the behavioral issue. During this step of problem solving, a team considers the function of the behavior, or rather, ask what need or want does the behavior meet for this learner? Analysis is a critical component to collaborative problem solving and should never be ignored. It is this step of problem solving as well as intervention design (or action planning) that will be discussed in detail throughout this text.

The strategies for problem analysis explained here are based on the theory and belief that what we do, or the behaviors we exhibit, are actually attempts to communicate a personal want or need (Carr, & Durand, 1987; Durand, 1990; Durand, 1993; Durand, & Berotti, 1991; Glasser, 1986; Shea, & Bauer, 1987 ). This is referred to as communicative intent. In addition, based on research and professional practice, it can be proposed that most behaviors fall within three broad categories of communicative intent: 1) control; 2) attention; and 3) avoidance. Other theories exist that include sensory and neurological issues as well, but there is reason to believe that behavioral concerns

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actions of control, attention, and avoidance. Further explanation of each of these categories will prove helpful.

### **Control**

A control issue is a need or a want to take charge of a given situation in order to affect the outcome. With control issues, it does not matter necessarily what the outcome is, just as long as the learner with the need for control gets her way. If you say yes, she says no, and if you say no, she says yes. A learner may need to take control if she has not had many opportunities to have control in her life. This lack of opportunity for control could have occurred for a variety of reasons, including the learners skills or experiences with communication, constraints due to a disability, experiences through divorce, abuse, loss of a loved one, results of foster care, or domineering or authoritative relationships can all contribute to the need for taking control. Many times control issue behaviors are described as power issues (Glasser, 1986), non-compliance, spoildness, a desire for tangibles (Durand, 1990), passive aggressiveness, refusals to respond to requests, lack of respect for authority, manipulation, or a need for revenge. Although many different terms can be used to describe control issues, it is imperative to remember that regardless of the adjectives used to describe a learner's behavior of concern, it is the need for control that should be met through intervention.

### **Attention**

Attention behaviors are those behaviors that are exhibited as a means for getting attention, either from peers, family members, care givers, teachers, or others. It is a means of interacting with others. Some learners are so desperate for attention that they do not care whether or not the attention is positive such as praise or friendly comments, or negative such as yelling or reprimands. It is often an interaction and response from others that an attention seeking person is after (Durand,

Figure 1. Categorizing terms of communicative intent.

<u>control</u>	<u>attention</u>	<u>avoidance</u>
tangibles	acceptance	escape
activities	belonging	solitude
power	interaction	boredom
revenge	gratification	fear of failure
independence	recognition	anti-social
freedom	praise	lacks mastery
manipulation	relationships	sensory issues
sensory issues	friendships	protective
autonomy	attachment	
	achievement	

1990; Glasser, 1992). Although it is not necessary to understand why a person needs attention, it is necessary to analyze from whom the attention is desired. Direct observation and talking to others who have an opportunity to observe and interact with the learner in other environments are helpful ways to determine the object of the learner's attention needs. Attention needs can also exist if a learner has a desire to participate in certain activities.

**Avoidance**

Avoidance behaviors are actions taken to try to stay away from or escape interactions or participation in certain activities. Generally related to fear or fear of failure, avoidance can be exhibited through quiet behaviors, non-participation, and aggressive acts. Understanding what the person is trying to avoid is helpful when designing interventions for avoidance behaviors because fear of failure can lead to a very different intervention than an intervention for avoidance of interactions with

Sometimes it is difficult to decipher what a learner wants or needs because attention seeking behaviors and avoidance behaviors are also control issues due to the fact that the learner is attempting to control his interactions and participation with others. Remember though, the desired outcome for control issue behaviors is simply control. The learner wants to be able to “win,” even if winning results in punishment. Attention seeking behaviors are reinforced when the learner receives attention, either positive or negative, and avoidance seeking behaviors are reinforced when the learner is allowed to escape a given situation as a result of his actions.

Sensory issues usually fall into one of the three categories for a variety of reasons. Although a learner may have a sensory need, the action the learner takes as a result of that need can be categorized as either control, attention, or avoidance. Consider the following examples. If a learner demonstrates tactile defensiveness (in other words, does not like to touch certain substances or to be touched), then the action of pulling his hands away and whining is an avoidance behavior. The sensory tactile defensiveness is the cause of the avoidance behavior, but the need to avoid the substance is the communicative intent. If a learner ruminates after eating because it feels good, then she is demonstrating control over her environment, even though the ruminating is perhaps a sensory issue. A learner with pervasive developmental disorder (PDD) may need structure to help her negotiate the activities of the day. Although the presence of PDD may be to blame for the learner’s need for structure, the need for structure itself is actually a control issue.

The actions learners take as a result of neurological issues may also be categorized as either control, attention, or avoidance. Impulsivity, for example, may not be something a learner has a lot of control over, but the behaviors that result stem from a need to communicate something. Imagine a learner in high school who has severe attention

deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Each time he sees a particular girl walk down the hallway, this learner either screams out or touches the girl in an unacceptable manner. Although it is his lack of control that causes his actions, it is his desire for attention from the female that he is communicating. Many of the other teenage boys in the hall may have similar needs to gain the girl's attention. However, these boys have a larger window of opportunity to think before they act and choose an alternate way to seek attention. The learner with ADHD may have little or no natural window of opportunity to think before he reacts due to a neurological component, but the need for attention is still the same.

### **What Are They Telling Us?**

#### **Guided Practice**

To better understand how observable behaviors can be categorized as either control, attention, or avoidance issues, several examples are provided. After reading each scenario, determine whether the behavior described illustrates a need for control, attention, or avoidance and write your answer on the line. A brief discussion follows the scenarios for further exploration.

#### **Scenario #1**

Moira is an eleven year old girl who communicates non-verbally through gestures and actions. Throughout the day, both at home and at school, Moira reaches for adults, tugs at their sleeves, and points to objects or activities. If the adult ignores Moira, she will continue to tug on their clothes and point. Moira does not seem to show a preference for any particular activity and will often point to several throughout a five minute period. If a requested activity is started with Moira, she will remain on task as long as someone is near her. If left alone, Moira

will remain on task for several seconds and then get up and point to another activity.

**Communicative intent:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Scenario #2**

Shane is a sixteen year old boy who receives most of his special education services in a self-contained special education classroom due to a long history of confrontational, non-compliant behavior. Several times throughout his school career, Shane has made enough progress toward his behavioral goals that his parents and teachers agree to begin including him in a general education class. Shane will do well in the class until he realizes that by continued good behavior he will eventually be in the general education setting for most of his day. At that point, Shane usually sabotages his own efforts and begins to act out. He has stated to his special education teacher that he feels more comfortable in the special education classroom.

**Communicative intent:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Scenario #3**

Michael is a strong willed individual who enjoys getting his way. If Michael is presented with a situation in which his wishes are not granted, he has been known to cuss, throw objects, stamp his feet, and on occasion leave the room, slamming the door behind him.

**Communicative intent:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Scenario #4**

Ellen is an energetic learner and will attempt most any task asked of her. Periodically throughout the day, Ellen has been known to shout profanities, continuing until a teacher sits near her and redirects her back to a task. Initially, Ellen's teachers stated that Ellen appears to shout profanities for no reason. However, upon further analysis of the environment, it has been discovered that Ellen's unconventional actions

occur primarily when given a task and the direction to work independently. Ellen does not exhibit this behavior when interacting with teachers or during any group activities.

**Communicative intent:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Scenario #5

Jonathan is a seven year old boy with cerebral palsy resulting in the limited use of his arms and legs. Jonathan's speech is also affected by the disorder and it is often hard to understand what he is saying. Periodically throughout the day, Jonathan will scream and throw his head back for no apparent reason, lashing out at anyone who is near him. Isolation from the rest of the class usually settles Jonathan down, but sometimes he will become agitated again if the teacher does not understand what he is saying to him.

**Communicative intent:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Scenario #6

Josh is a fairly well natured individual and has a small group of friends with which he feels comfortable. He will participate verbally in class, but when given paper-pencil tasks, Josh becomes agitated. He will often crumple up his paper, throw it on the floor, and lay his head down on his desk. This reaction has been observed both at school and at home when doing homework. Josh has been known to cry quietly during these times. His parents report that it often takes Josh several hours to complete work that should only take 20-30 minutes. When upset and approached by his parents, teacher, or peers, Josh will become unresponsive.

**Communicative intent:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What Are They Telling Us?****Discussion**

**Scenario #1:** It might be argued that Moira has difficulty completing a task, justifying the implementation of interventions for on-task behavior. It may also be suggested that Moira is unsatisfied with the tasks she is given, or perhaps that she fears failure and only wants to work on a task as long as she can get assistance from an adult. However, Moira does not seem to show a preference for any particular activity or type of activity, demonstrating that the activity itself may not be the issue. From the information given, it appears that the issue is actually the *attention* Moira receives from teachers as a result of her tugging and pointing. Since Moira continues tugging on the clothes of the adults when ignored, it is somewhat safe to assume that she has probably been reinforced for that behavior through some sort of eventual interaction when she persists. The fact that Moira will remain on task as long as someone is near her suggests that it is the desire for attention or interaction from the adults around her that Moira is actually communicating.

**Scenario #2:** It is apparent that Shane would rather be in the special education classroom than in the general education classroom. If Shane has a positive relationship with his special education teacher, one might hypothesize that he acts out to gain his teacher's attention. However, it may be that the positive learner-teacher relationship is what makes the special education classroom a safe and comfortable place to be. Therefore, Shane's acting out behavior may actually have the intent of communicating a need to *avoid* environments that are threatening to him. In order to accurately analyze this particular situation, it would be necessary to know how the special education teacher responds to Shane's behavior, and then to determine what impact the teacher's response then has on Shane's behavior. For example, does Shane's

behavior improve if he is taken out of the general education classroom, even if a negative consequence such as time out or loss of privileges occurs?

**Scenario #3:** It is probable that an interventionist might term Michael's behavior as that of a spoiled child, or manipulative. Either way, what Michael really wants is *control* over the situation. For effective intervention design around the control issue, it would be imperative that a team investigate what helps to settle Michael down, and whether or not he will eventually return to the learning environment and participate as requested.

**Scenario #4:** The clues in this situation are that Ellen begins shouting profanities when she is expected to work independently, and that she stops once someone sits near her or when participating in group activities. Although it might be hypothesized that Ellen has a fear of failure, the most probable cause of Ellen's use of profanity is *attention* from her teacher. What a problem solving team might have to investigate to determine the accuracy of this hypothesis is whether or not Ellen exhibits the use of profanities with any given tasks, even those that are familiar and easy for her to complete independently, or only with more difficult tasks or around a particular subject matter.

**Scenario #5:** Most will agree that the greatest concern for Jonathan is his difficulty with being understood. The fact that Jonathan generally settles down once he has been isolated for a time might suggest that he is trying to communicate avoidance of the classroom setting. It could also be suggested that Jonathan is trying to gain his teacher's attention through his screaming and lashing out. However, with most communication problems, the issue is usually one of *control*. When a learner has difficulty verbalizing or making his wishes or needs understood, he will often have little or no control over his environment or what happens to him on a daily basis. Offering the learner a way to

take control over his environment through the use of augmentative devices or other communication strategies greatly increases a learner's independence, thereby decreasing his need to use more unconventional methods to get his wants and needs met. Frustration is often a symptom of a control issue, but frustration is not the primary concern.

**Scenario #6:** It has been noted that when given paper-pencil tasks both at home and at school, Josh becomes agitated and unresponsive. He also takes an inordinate amount of time for him to complete his assignments. For whatever reason, it would seem that Josh is trying to *avoid* working on the tasks. Often times, interventionists will attempt to alleviate this problem by offering work that a learner like Josh can complete, increasing his opportunities for success. He might be offered fewer problems to complete, or more time in which to complete them. His assignments might be modified or made easier for him. Although all of these interventions are adequate for learners who fear failure, these interventions only deal with trying to help the learner not fail. Interventions will also need to be put into place to help Josh request assistance, to request a break from the work, or to offer him "a way out" of participating in certain activities.

### **Prevention and Intervention Design**

Given the similarities between the three categories of communicative intent, the best one can do is make an educated guess as to the communicative intent or function of a particular behavior. Using data sources and some experimentation, it is possible to formulate a hypotheses prior to designing interventions. Once interventions are implemented, continuous documentation of progress will guide decisions about intervention revisions, as well as to the accuracy of the original guess. If it is determined that the behavior communicates something other than what was originally suspected, then a new hypothesis can be formulated with new interventions designed to meet those needs.

Working through behavior issues can be a stressful experience for all involved, but through careful analysis of the problem situation, effective interventions can be created, thereby reducing the amount of stress. Imagine, for example, a dedicated team of parents and educators working diligently to create and implement prevention activities to help a learner deal with an avoidance issue. The team assumes that the learner is acting out to avoid participating in activities he finds difficult, so a great deal of time and energy is spent developing academic accommodations to help the learner experience success. However, if the communicative intent of the problem issue is not thoroughly analyzed, the team members will most likely become frustrated if they discover later that the behavior in question was actually communicating a need for control. In this instance, all of the academic accommodations in the world will not help this learner deal with his control issues. A lot of time and energy can be wasted while the learner continues to use unconventional behaviors to gain control over his environment.

Analysis of a concern is not always easy and may require that a sorting and prioritization of various components of a concern occur prior to designing interventions. One reason for this is that many learners exhibit several needs and use unconventional behaviors to communicate one, two or all three of the needs, control, attention and avoidance. Therefore, it is imperative to decipher which behavior communicates what, and then prioritize one or two of the behaviors from which to start. When prioritizing behavior issues, consideration should be made to the safety of the learner and of others. Self-injurious or aggressive acts that could result in harming others should always be a top priority for intervention design. If the behavior does not pose a physical threat to the learner or to others, then priority should be given to those unconventional behaviors that, if improved, would have a positive effect on behavior issues. The high frequency of certain behaviors is an additional

consideration for prioritizing behaviors of concern. The behavior in question may not be of importance in isolation, but if it happens so often that the learner is unable to participate in daily activities, then it should be a priority.

Isolating causes for behaviors through sorting and prioritization can become confusing when a learner exhibits a variety of unconventional behaviors such as swearing, hitting, biting, and screaming all for the same reason. On the other hand, a learner may exhibit an unconventional behavior such as biting for several reasons. In both instances, the key is to analyze the environment, teaching strategies, and the learner's response to the environment to help sort out the relationship between various causes and communicative intent. For example, consider a learner who swears, hits, bites and screams as a way to avoid participation in tasks. An intervention may be designed to encourage the use of another mode of communication that would successfully communicate a learner's desire to avoid tasks. Since the intervention would be designed around her need to communicate avoidance rather than to extinguish swearing, hitting, biting and screaming the intervention plan would be put into affect, no matter which of the behaviors she exhibits.

Now consider the learner who bites to gain attention and to avoid tasks. Two interventions need to be created; one to teach her ways to receive attention and one to teach her ways to escape participation in certain activities. Due to the severity of the behavior in question, these interventions may be implemented simultaneously. On the other hand, if the behavior is not injurious a team might choose to address one communicative intent at a time. The team may determine that providing the learner with attention getting strategies, more opportunities would be created to reinforce participation in uncomfortable activities. In this example, attention seeking would be prioritized for

intervention with the rationale that if the attention seeking behavior improved, then the avoidance behavior might improve as well. Once again, the intervention designed is focused on the communicative intent of the unconventional behaviors, not the behaviors themselves. That is not to suggest that facilitators of learning will never address other facets of the behavior issue. Eventually, learners will be expected to improve time on task, increase interactions with peers, or complete work, but teaching learners alternatives to unconventional behaviors is the first step.

Many times when trying to create interventions for behavior problems, frustrated adults get fixed the extraneous circumstances that may have caused the behavior issue to surface. Parents blame inflexible teachers or administrators, teachers blame unsupportive or enabling parents, and everyone blames an abusive or neglectful environment. Each of these circumstances certainly have an impact on how one deals with the environment. However, it is the impact that we must consider when designing interventions, rather than the underlying cause.

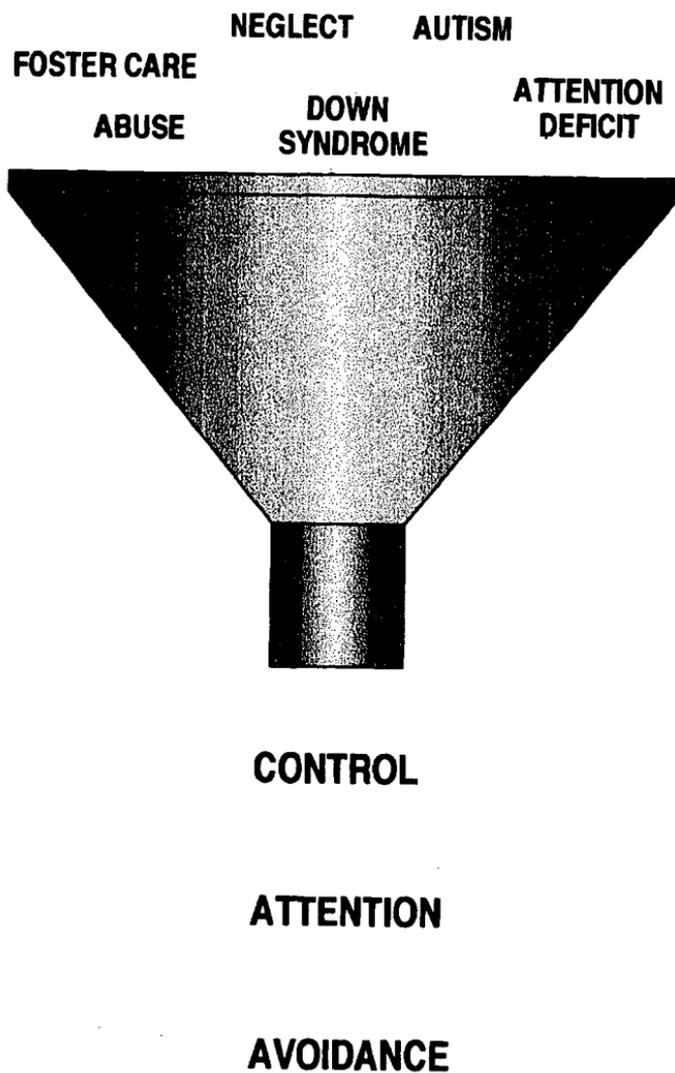
Deciphering why someone has a need for control, attention, or avoidance is always helpful because it assists in guiding decisions around appropriate interventions. By narrowing possibilities as to why someone is doing what they are doing, a facilitator of learning can create a more knowledgeable hypothesis that leads to better decisions and interventions. However, dwelling on these issues when designing behavioral interventions tends to impede the problem solving process. In the end, although additional supports might be added, the basic interventions do not change no matter what the underlying cause for the unconventional behavior. For example, if a team determines that a learner has attention issues, interventions and prevention activities would be created and implement for attention. As a result, perhaps the

would agree to incorporate into the learner's daily activities

regularly scheduled opportunities for her to receive attention through one on one interactions with a teacher or teacher assistant. By doing so the learner would be offered unconditional attention to help meet her need for attention. The goal of this intervention is that the learner would no longer have to resort to unconventional and/or disruptive strategies to gain attention because she would know that those opportunities will occur on a regular basis. After implementing the intervention, however, what if the team then finds out that the learner has been neglected in the past? Would the intervention change? Probably not. The intervention for attention would remain the same. The new information about neglect may verify for the team that they guessed or hypothesized the communicative intent correctly. Although the team may decide to address the neglect issue, ultimately the intervention designed around attention in the school and work environment would remain the same, continuing to offer regularly scheduled opportunities for interactions with a teacher or a teacher assistant. The same would be true if a parent participating as a team member informs the rest of the team that a new baby is on the way. The team would then acknowledge the new addition to the family as being a possible cause for the attention seeking behavior. However, the interventions designed for attention would continue as planned.

The important thing to remember is that extraneous information only provides additional data from which educated guesses or hypothesis can be made. In order design effective interventions, all information gathered about a learner should be placed in a funnel, with the result being a determination that the intent of the behavior is to communicate either control, attention, or avoidance. Always remember to ask "So what?" and "How does this affect how this learner handles certain situations or participates in this environment?" The answer will guide m to design a relevant intervention.

Figure 2. Funneling information for deciphering communicative intent.



**Part II****Planning for Intervention Design**

When designing a plan to teach learners alternate behaviors, it is essential to include how facilitators of learning will respond to learners during particular situations and to initiate our interactions with learners in a planned way. This is commonly referred to as behavior planning. The importance of designing a plan for interacting with learners is two fold. Behavior plans provide consistency in implementation and also allows the individual implementing the plan a means for focusing and redirecting their responses to the behavior of concern. Consistency is a key component to any behavior plan because it increases opportunities to demonstrate to a learner that her choice of using conventional methods to communicate her wants and needs will result in her getting her needs met. When done consistently, each learning opportunity increases the likelihood that the learner will use the alternate behavior taught. Written plans that are developed by and shared with others who interact with the learner aid in increasing the frequency and consistency in the use of the plan. This helps the learner to use the newly acquired skill of communicating her wants and needs in a conventional manner across settings. By doing so, the likelihood that the learner is acquiring a life long skill increases and assists the learner to generalize the new strategy across settings.

Dealing with behaviors of concern is often an emotional issue. Having a written plan provides those working with learners who have challenging behaviors means to step back from the situation and respond to it objectively. If we know we have a plan prior to reacting, we can say to ourselves "What did I say I was going to do in this situation?" The moment it takes to ask ourselves that question is often long enough to allow us to regroup and respond educationally rather than emotionally.

**Teaching Alternative Strategies: What We Know That Works**

Once a team determines the communicative intent of an unconventional behavior, certain strategies can be used as a framework for designing appropriate, individualized interventions. Although many teachers and parents often request a menu of behavior management strategies, it is best to first consider the learner's abilities and experiences and then relate those characteristics to what we know might help. This approach is not intended as a quick-fix to intervention design, but rather as a place to begin thinking about interventions for dealing with particular behaviors and their communicative intent.

**Interventions for control**

Often times, learners who have control issues benefit from structured settings in which limits are set with clear expectations and consequences outlined. (Note that consequences are simply those things that result from a particular action. They can be either positive or negative). Written and/or picture schedules, and established routines and procedures often help the learner to feel in control because she knows what is going to happen next. Do not forget, however, that although the learner may benefit from a structured environment, she still may enjoy some variety in her life. Just be sure to prepare the learner for any changes or variations to the daily structure and provide support during transitions. Learners with control issues also need to have opportunities to be in control. One way to provide this is through leadership opportunities. Daily responsibilities, chances to help others, or even being assigned the role of resource person or time keeper during cooperative group work, are all situations during which a learner can demonstrate leadership skills as well as be in control (Glasser, 1986).

Providing choices is another way to offer learners opportunities to be in control. Keep in mind, however, that when providing choices to

ne, limit the choices to only two (If three or more choices are

offered, the learner with control issues may take control of the situation by taking forever to decide which one to choose). If necessary, set time limits for choosing, telling the learner that if he is unable to make a choice in the time allotted, then you will make the decision for him. The choices provided to learners should be fairly equivalent to one another such as choosing between two work activities or choosing between two leisure activities. If choices between inequivalent activities are provided, such as a work activity and a leisure activity, the learner may choose the leisure activity every time, avoiding educationally relevant tasks whenever possible. The facilitator will need to decide if it really matters which activity gets done first, or done at all. For example, a facilitator of learning could say, "You have math and spelling to do, and they both need to be done today. Which one would you like to do first?" or "You can work on your science project or your journal. Which one do you want to work on today?" For learners who are non-verbal or echolalic, offer choices by laying out two objects and requesting the learner to indicate their choice by picking up an item. Otherwise, the learner may respond by simply copying what the facilitator said last. For example, a learner could be asked if she wants the red one or the blue one. The learner with echolalia would say "blue." Then, if the facilitator of learning were to repeat the choice reversing the order of the choices by asking if the learner wants the blue one or the red one, the learner will invariably respond by saying "red." In comparison, learners who are nonverbal will often point to the last option that was pointed to by the facilitator of learning. In these instances, although it may seem that the learner is making a choice, the choice made may actually not be the one preferred by the learner.

An additional caution that should be made around offering choices to learners is to only provide choices when a choice is actually permitted. For example, refrain from asking a learner "Do you want to take a bath

now” or “Write your name on the top of the page.” In order to teach choice making skills, it is necessary to honor the choices made. This means that when a learner chooses not to participate, and the facilitator of learning offers non-participation as an option, then the learner should not be expected to participate. Design the options for choice making around individual learner goals, curricular goals, family and teacher expectations, and learner abilities.

Another useful strategy for creating structure is through the use of social stories. As explained by Gray (1994 ), social stories are simple sentences, constructed at or slightly below the learners’ comprehension level, that describe what the learner can expect to occur and what the outcome will be for a given situation. By repeating the social story prior to and during an event, the learner prepares herself for what is to happen next. A social story is a type of personal plan a learner can use to negotiate stressful situations.

### **Interventions for attention**

Many learners who need attention or need to feel as if they belong to a group benefit by having opportunities to receive attention provided for them on a regular basis. Whether the attention is in the form of one-to-one private conversations daily, reading of bedtime stories nightly, or regularly scheduled times to present or share ideas or information, the attention needs to be provided without contingencies. If a learner has to *earn* attention from others, it is likely that instead he will choose to acquire his attention by unconventional methods rather than by those desired by the facilitators of learning. Creating a sense of belonging is also critical and can be accomplished through a sense of unity in a classroom where there is an interdependence among learners (Shea, & Bauer, 1987) and by the continued improvement of our inclusive practices, striving for quality and meaningful participation of learners

with mental retardation and other disabilities with those who are not disabled (Jones, 1995 ).

Learners with attention needs may also benefit from being taught a procedure for gaining attention such as hand raising or a script for requesting attention such as "Sit with me." Remember, however, that in order to teach the use of these attention-getting procedures, the facilitator of learning will need to reinforce the use of these procedures by providing attention immediately and consistently, fading the support as the learner begins to independently use the procedure taught. There is actually a systematic procedure for facilitators of learning to follow that will help them guide learners toward the independent use of requests. Fifteen years ago, Halle (1982) described an integrative approach for helping learners become more independent in using language. Eight years later, Durand (1990) described a similar approach for shaping learner behaviors. Actually, one process can be used to do both, encouraging the use of language by learners to get their needs met through shaping and fading support. Shaping refers to the reinforcement or rewarding of successive approximations of desired behaviors, leading to the complete demonstration of the behavior (Shea & Bauer, 1987). In this case, the desired behavior is the use of language to communicate a want or a need. The steps for shaping a learner's behavior include modeling, which involves the demonstration of a script or desired response, manding which involves cuing or prompting a learner to use the desired script or response, and eventual independent use of the response. Once independent use of the script is accomplished, the facilitator of learning gradually reduces the amount of support provided to the learner, leading to greater learner independence for communicating his wants and needs ( Durand, 1990; Halle, 1982; Hart, & Risley, 1975; Roger-Warren, 1980) (See *Model Mand, Independent, Faded Support* later in this section for a more thorough explanation).

## Interventions for avoidance

Learners with avoidance issues often have a need to feel safe. Parents and teachers alike are generally adept at providing support to learners in uncomfortable situations, structuring environments so that learners do not need to avoid them. Providing tasks in increments, giving more time to complete a task, and adjusting the task so that it is not as difficult are all strategies commonly used to help a learner feel more comfortable with a task or a situation. Although these are all adequate strategies for learners with the need to avoid certain situations, the facilitator of learning also needs to teach the learner how to get out of those situations which still remain threatening. Teaching the learner to use scripts or signals to request to leave uncomfortable situations or tasks, and providing a safe environment or activity the learner can retreat to are integral components to be included when designing interventions for avoidance behaviors (See *Model, Mand, Independent, Fade Support* later in this section for more information). Whether the “safe place” is a resource room, the learner’s bedroom at home, another teacher’s room or the principal’s office, the procedure for accessing those alternative environments, what occurs when the learner is in the alternate setting, and how long the learner can stay in these environments will need to be decided ahead of time and practiced with the learner. To avoid confusion, the intervention plan should be shared with anyone who may be working with the learner so that everyone is aware of the procedures and expectations.

## Other strategies to consider

Regardless of the communicative intent of a behavior, two additional elements need to be incorporated into intervention or behavior plan designs. These two elements include providing the learner with a way to communicate her wants and needs, and providing opportunities for the learner to be successful. If the communication piece is left out of an

intervention, then the intervention may be met with only limited success. Communication is a life skill that encourages independence from those with whom we work. Without a way to communicate wants and needs, learners will often resort to the previously learned unconventional behaviors to communicate their desires. One parent once told me that it was unnecessary for her family to use an augmentative communication device at home because the family all knew her son well enough to determine what he wanted or needed. This may be true, but by not reinforcing the use of the augmentative device, the family has limited their son to having only successful, positive interactions with those people who know him well. Her son is unable to let his needs known to those less familiar with his unconventional mode of communication and the likelihood that he will continue to use that less conventional mode over the communication device is increased. This parent also once told me that when her son did not like the box folding job he had at a local restaurant he threw the boxes like frisbees. Yes, this indeed was effective for letting his co-workers know that he was dissatisfied with the job. However, he could have also simply said "No" by touching a single key on the communication device without testing the aerodynamics of take-out boxes.

An important point to remember from this and the previous section of this book is that the goal is not necessarily to terminate the need, but to provide support for getting the need met. The support provided should not be contingent on the learner's behavior, however, and should be delivered unconditionally (Tobin, 1991). For example, if part of an intervention is to provide attention three times a day through grooming activities, then regardless of whether or not the learner had a "good day" or a "bad day" the attention should be given as scheduled.

Everyone needs to feel successful in life. For learners with disabilities,

success should be measured in terms of achieving benchmarks toward

a desired goal with positive reinforcement provided along the way. It is often necessary to reward approximations of the goal as the learner begins to initiate the desired activity. For example, if a team has determined that a goal for an individual is to simply participate in classroom and group home activities, and generally, the learner does not pick up his materials to engage in an activity, then interventions and teaching strategies would be put into place to work toward the goal of participation. If the facilitators of learning notice as a result of the interventions that the learner occasionally picks up his pencil and attempts to write the first letter of his name on the top of the page, then that approximation of the desired goal should be reinforced.

A fifth grade teacher once told me about a learner she had that never did any homework. She complained that one day he came back to school with three math problems completed out of an assigned twenty-five. Since he had never brought back any homework before, I asked her if she praised the learner for at least completing three problems. Her mouth dropped before she responded, "You're kidding aren't you? Why should I praise him for only completing three problems?" I explained to her that here is a learner who, for whatever reason, had never attempted to complete his homework. Either he did not understand it, or no one was home to help him or to structure his time for homework, or because of other family or personal issues, homework was not the most pressing thing on his mind. One evening he gathers himself together enough to complete three problems, even with all of the other issues still prevalent in his life. Yet, when he returns to school, he gets the same treatment from his teacher that he received when he did none of the work (as well as a failing grade). What is the motivation for him to attempt completing homework again? If the teacher could have rewarded the learner for making an effort or an approximation of the goal (completing homework), he may have been able to increase the likelihood that the learner

will try again, perhaps completing five problems instead of three. This would have been progress!

### **Model, Mand, Independent, Fade Support**

Once a hypothesis has been made as to the communicative intent of a particular behavior, then interventions and prevention activities as part of a teaching or behavior plan need to be designed to help the learner discover an alternative way to get the need met. Frequently, it is the impulse of the interventionist to try to extinguish or get rid of the behavior as well as the need. Unfortunately, this often leads to failed interventions because no one can take away a personal need that someone else may have. Each of us has our own set of avoidance, control, and attention issues which are inherent to who we are. With luck, most of us learn how to get those needs met regularly. For instance, someone who is academically capable or successful in sports may be able to get her need for attention met through participation in these activities. People take control of their health through diet and exercise routines, they take control of their lives through job or relationship changes. Another way some individuals fulfill their need for control is through employment that embraces those with take charge attitudes. If someone is fearful of large groups, they may avoid parties or choose professions in which they are free to work independent of others.

There are many examples of how people are able to get their needs met without resorting to unconventional behaviors. Sometimes, however, due to various skills or life experiences a learner may need help finding conventional ways to communicate his wants and needs. Learners who do not have a consistent method of communication need to be taught one. Using augmentative devices, either high tech, low tech, or no tech, including picture boards, touch pads, or communicative devices, sign language, facilitated communication (Biklen, 1993), learned

s (Bauer, & Sapon, 1991); Halle, 1982; Hart, & Risley, 1975; Roger-

Warren, & Warren, 1980), and social stories (Gray, 1994 ), can all be ways through which learners can learn to communicate their wants and needs.

Yet taking time to teach a learner how to communicate his wants and needs should not be limited to those learners who do not have verbal language skills. It is common for learners who have language skills to not use those skills to communicate their needs or wants. Due to various environments and/or experiences, a learner may not have been reinforced or encouraged to use his verbal skills because when he did, no one listened. Over time, these learners realized that asking someone for something often does not work, but acting out works 100% of the time. In such an instance, it is necessary to begin reinforcing the use of language, increasing the likelihood that the conventional behavior will reoccur. Keep in mind that each time the conventional behavior is used is one less time the unconventional behavior is used.

In order to teach learners to use the alternative method, it is necessary to prioritize the use of the alternate method over participation in school work, daily living activities, or other activities. Teachers usually have a tough time accepting this because they feel that their job is to teach academics and it is important that all learners participate in the educational activities designed. Parents worry that their child will get out of responsibilities or chores, or that the school will criticize them if their child goes to school unkempt or dirty. Both parents and teachers fear that by responding to learners' requests for control, attention, or avoidance, the learner will become manipulative. All of these concerns are valid and need to be addressed in time. However, none of these concerns can be dealt with if the learner is acting out. Once the unconventional behavior is under control, then the facilitator of learning can begin to concentrate on other issues.

Another way to rationalize prioritizing a behavior issue is to think of this time reinforcing conventional means for getting wants and needs met as an investment. The more time put in during the beginning, the more quality time can be spent later teaching the other things we think learners need to be taught. Without prioritizing, parents will spend many of their evenings and weekends punishing or putting their children in time-out, and teachers will spend class time doing the same. As long as the unconventional behavior is being used to get individual needs met, quality participation in educational and family activities is limited. Why not use the time wisely and teach alternatives to the unconventional behaviors?

One way to teach alternate modes of communication is to use the model, mand (cue), independent method (Durand, 1990; Halle, 1982; Hart, & Risley, 1975; Roger-Warren, & Warren, 1980). With this method, learners are taught and reinforced for using a script as a means for getting their particular need met. Generally, a script is a simple sentence or phrase that is easily understood by others and can be readily generalized across settings. The words or phrase chosen as a script should be one that is easily articulated by the learner. Be mindful when working with learners to create scripts that the script should be appropriate for adult use, refraining from generating scripts that are only appropriate for young children. By using phrases that adults would use, the learned script can then become a life skill that the learner can use through adulthood. In most cases, sing-song type chants or cute phrases do not transfer well to adult use. Also avoid using code words that others would not be able to understand if said when either you or the "decoder" are not around. If a learner is prone to hitting people who invade his space, teaching him to say "move please" or "get away" will be much more effective across settings and over time than "I'm fonna punch you to three!" (If you are skeptical, close your eyes and imagine this

learner encountering a helpful elderly woman in a grocery store). Once a script has been chosen, a facilitator of learning can begin teaching the use of the script using a supportive process of modeling and manding that can be eventually faded toward independent use of the script. This concept is not novel, but was actually conceptualized over twenty years ago by Hart and Risley (1975) in their work around incidental teaching of language. Roger-Warren and Warren (1980) expanded the concept by defining the model-mand procedure, and Halle (1982) integrated both approaches.

### **Model**

To model means to provide the learner with opportunities to observe the desired behavior (Bauer & Sapona, 1991; Halle, 1982; Hart, & Risley, 1975; Roger-Warren, & Warren, 1982). In this case, the desired behavior is a script. For the script, choose a short phrase, picture, gesture, or written word the learner is to repeat. Model the use of the script each time it should be used. Tell the learner that when he says the phrase, he will be rewarded by a specific reaction. Demonstrate this by responding immediately once the phrase is used by the learner. Responses to the desired behavior should be both consistent and immediate in order to teach the learner that the use of the script communicates his need effectively.

### **Mand**

To mand is to cue or prompt a learner toward a desired behavior (Durand, 1990; Halle, 1982; Hart, & Risley, 1975; Roger-Warren, & Warren, 1980). During specific activities, remind the learner about the script. Use a cue phrase such as "How do you ask?" or "What are you supposed to say when..." Once the script is used by the learner, the facilitator of learning should respond immediately by implementing the expected outcome.

**Independent**

The ultimate goal of any intervention plan or teaching strategy should be for learners to demonstrate the desired behavior without modeling or cuing (Durand, 1990). Each time the learner uses the script independently, the facilitator of learning should continue to respond immediately to the request in order to reinforce the use of the script.

**Fading Support**

A learner can not be considered independent if she depends on others to continually provide reinforcement each time she demonstrates a desired behavior. In order to encourage independence, a facilitator of learning needs to systematically decrease both the amount and intensity of the support provided to the learner (Durand, 1990). In this instance, as the learner continues to independently use the script to communicate a want or a need, the facilitator of learning should begin to delay the reinforcement, responding to the script after a brief period.

**The Model, Mand and Independent Method****Sample Scenario**

The following is an example of how this process works:

**Description of the Problem Situation**

A learner demonstrates an increased amount of stress when surrounded by unfamiliar people as in the general education classroom, the shopping mall, on the playground, and during assemblies. In response, this learner spits and uses profanity in an attempt to get out of the situation (avoidance behavior).

**Teaching Goal**

To teach an alternate mode of communication which would have the same affect as spitting and profanity, but would be considered more conventional across settings.

### **Teaching Plan**

Since the learner has verbal skills, create a script that will get the same reaction as spitting and swearing. For example, the statement "I need to leave" could be used to teach the learner an acceptable means to communicate the need for avoidance. The purpose is not to take away the need to avoid certain situations. That is a separate concern to be prioritized at a later time. Rather, the purpose is to teach an alternate way for the learner to get her need for avoidance met.

### **Model**

Initially, the parent /teacher tells the learner "If you need to leave, tell me by saying 'I need to leave' and we will go." During the activity remind the learner at specific intervals (i.e. every 2-5 minutes) to say whether or not she needs to leave. Once the learner states the script "I need to leave" the parent/teacher should respond immediately and escort the learner away from the situation. It will be important to not wait or stop to talk with others during this teaching stage. As a result, the learner will learn she does not need to spit and swear to control her environment. Once the parent/teacher has escorted the learner to a less stimulating or *safer* environment, she should be redirected to an activity that has similar educational value. It is recommended that playing games or allowing the learner to sit alone at this time be discouraged. Instead, encourage continued participation in some educationally relevant activity. By doing so, the message is that the script she uses will effectively remove her from the situation that makes her uncomfortable, but that expectations still exist for participation in home and school activities. As the learner begins to demonstrate an understanding of the modified script, move on to manding.

### **Mand**

During stressful situations, as the learner begins to demonstrate behavior of concern, which in this case is swearing and spitting, the

parent/teacher calmly reminds the learner that there is a script to use. "What are you supposed to say when you want to leave?" If the learner says "I need to leave," then the parent/teacher leaves immediately with the learner. If the learner does not respond, the question or cue is repeated. If still no response, the script is then modeled. Once the learner repeats the script, leave the uncomfortable situation immediately and redirect the learner to participate in a comparable activity in a more comfortable setting. Eventually, move toward independence in the use of the script.

### **Independent**

When in a large group setting, the learner independently states the learned script, "I need to leave". The parent/teacher continues to respond immediately upon the learner's request to leave, continuously reinforcing the use of the script to get her need for avoidance met.

### **Fading the Support**

As the learner becomes more comfortable with the script and understands that her communication will be respected, begin to increase the time between the request and the response. For example, if the learner uses the request "I need to leave" respond by acknowledging the communication and then requesting additional participation. "I'm glad you told me you need to leave, and we will. Let's just take one more turn (or stay five more minutes, or contribute one more idea to the story, etc.) As soon as the learner completes the requested task, the parent or teacher should then honor the initial request and leave the situation immediately.

Eventually the learner will feel in control of her environment and will begin to participate more in activities. Once she has been taught that her verbal communication "I need to leave" will receive the same or even more immediate response as spitting and using profanity, the learner may not need to use the request as often, increasing her

participation in the desired activities. This process takes time, so don't try to hurry it along. Many times we are working with people who have been reinforced to use a more unconventional method for getting their needs met for five, thirteen, eighteen, or more years. Transferring to a more conventional mode of communication will not happen over night. Remember the advantages of making a long-term investment and the eventual payoffs you and the learner will receive as a result of your investment.

Although the example shown here demonstrates a process for teaching verbal scripts, this same process can be duplicated for teaching scripts using touch pads, pointers, signs, gestures, or augmentative communication devices. Modeling might begin with hand over hand assistance. In time, the assistance might fade to a verbal model, and then to a gesture to initiate the use of the learned script. To encourage as much independence from the learner as possible, fading is an important aspect to any intervention plan. However, if the facilitator of learning notices that the behavior issue is becoming apparent again, then supports can be reintroduced to increase the learner's use of the alternate mode of communication chosen.

**Part III****Helpful Procedures For Prevention And Intervention**

When designing interventions for learners with unconventional behaviors, remaining proactive is essential. Create teaching strategies and structure the learning environment in such a way that the unconventional behaviors are replaced by more conventional means for a learner to get her wants and needs met. However, the desired behavior rarely occurs overnight and families and educators are often unsure how to best react when an unconventional behavior occurs. This is why it is necessary when designing intervention plans to consider both prevention strategies as well as intervention strategies. Prevention strategies are designed and implemented to teach a learner a conventional method to communicate her wants and needs, as well as environmental and communication strategies that are designed to keep people safe. The primary purpose of prevention strategies is to keep the behavior of concern from occurring. Intervention strategies are those strategies and procedures implemented when the behavior of concern occurs in spite of the prevention strategies. Since it often takes time to teach learners alternative behaviors, it is likely that the unconventional behavior will continue to occur for a period of time during the teaching process. Therefore, it is necessary to create a plan for intervention activities to redirect the learner back to the conventional behavior being taught.

Focusing on a common philosophy about behavior management and teaching is helpful for keeping a planning team focused when designing intervention strategies. One such philosophy I find most useful during this part of the planning process is the philosophy of Gentle Teaching as described by McGee, Menolascino, Hobbs, and Menousek (1987). They outlined a procedure for responding to a learner when he

onstrating the behavior of concern. As McGee et al. (1987) explain,

the underlying premise of Gentle Teaching is that interactions among individuals resulting in a bonding between those individuals is the ultimate intrinsic reward. Many times, however, learners with mental retardation and autism have not learned to value human to human interaction due to difficulties in communication, socialization or other areas that may have made the majority of a learner's past interactions with others unpleasant or aversive. As a result, many learners with mental retardation demonstrate behaviors of concern such as aggression and self-injury to communicate a desire or a need to either avoid interactions with others or to gain attention and to initiate an interaction (Carr, & Durand, 1987; Durand, 1990; Durand, 1993; Durand, & Berotti, 1991; McGee et al., 1987; Tobin, 1991). The four steps included in Gentle Teaching are IGNORE, INTERRUPT, REDIRECT, and REWARD.

### **Ignore**

To ignore a behavior is not the same thing as ignoring the person. Rather, the facilitator of learning refrains from responding to the learner as a result of an unconventional behavior. The purpose of ignoring is to take away the power given to undesirable responses. For example, the learner is seeking attention, a traditional response of reprimanding might actually reinforce the behavior. When ignoring an unconventional behavior, withhold ALL verbal responses, either positive or negative. Avoid eye contact, physical contact, or other non-verbal communications or interactions related to the behavior while maintaining your physical proximity, neither increasing nor decreasing your distance from the learner. Be careful not to respond too obviously such as turning your back on the learner because by doing so the learner knows that his behavior has triggered a response from you.

### **Interrupt**

Interrupting an unconventional behavior should be done on the occasion that the behavior poses a physical threat to either the

learner or to others. Interruptions should be done in the least intrusive manner as possible, carried out calmly with the facilitator of learning controlling his or her emotional reactions. Interrupting involves the shadowing of a person's hands in case of self-injury, blocking aggression, and environmental management. McGee et al. (1987) point out that if it is necessary to interrupt a behavior once, our future efforts should focus on prevention so we do not have to interrupt a behavior again!

**Redirect**

The purpose of redirection is to communicate an alternate means of human interaction. The primary message is "Do this instead." Redirection can be in the form of physical or gestural cues including pointing, touching the materials, gently touching the person's hand or arm to indicate the desired direction of movements, or even hand over hand as needed during the initial instruction. When using touch or hand over hand, be sure that the person will allow or tolerate touch from others. The goal is to keep people from getting hurt, not to set someone up for it. Redirection should have a clear beginning and a clear end with the intent of focusing the learner's attention on the object of the redirection, which in most cases would be the classroom, work, or home activity in which we would like the learner to engage. Many times, redirection can be made to the alternate behavior the facilitator is trying to teach the learner, including scripts or the use of a communication device.

**Reward**

The focus of rewarding is to teach learners that participation and interaction are valued and consists of positive interactions between people. Many of the learners with whom we work have not learned to value interactions with others so it is necessary for us as facilitators of learning to reinforce this concept through positive interactions that we provide in response to conventional behaviors. Although rewards are

often thought of in relationship to desired objects, tokens, food, privileges or activities, the ultimate reward is respect and positive interactions. If more tangible rewards are used, then they should always be paired with positive responses from the facilitator of learning and should never be used in isolation from praise and positive interactions.

The only exception to this rule would be in those instances when learners request to be left alone (avoidance of interactions). In this case, the rewarding interaction is in the form of acknowledging the request and respectfully leaving the person alone for a designated amount of time. If learners tend to become overly excited or aggressive in response to adult or peer interaction, then care should be taken to keeping interactions calm and low-keyed. On the other hand, other learners respond best to flamboyant interactions and praise. In any case, the type of reward designed for a particular learner should depend on the learner's individual likes, dislikes, strengths and needs. The characteristics of each of the four Gentle Teaching components are further described in figure 3 (page 40-43), with both examples and non-examples cited.

## **Ignore, Interrupt, Redirect, Reward**

### **Sample Scenario**

The following scenario is offered to demonstrate how the ignore, interrupt, redirect, and reward procedure would work.

### **Description of the Problem Situation**

A learner demonstrates aggression by hitting and/or scratching whenever an adult or peer is standing or sitting near him, but working with or talking to another classmate (attention behavior).

Figure 3. Characteristics and examples of gentle teaching component.

**Ignore:** To act as if the behavior of concern had not occurred. This does not imply that interactions should stop. Instructional interactions continue while no comment is made about the behavior of concern. To teach in silence.

### **Characteristic: Withhold verbal response**

Say nothing in relationship to the behavior of concern, avoiding either positive, negative, or even neutral responses. Refrain from reprimands, threats, scolding, or stating rules or consequences.

**Do This:** A teacher is providing one-on-one assistance, during which time the learner pinches the teacher. The teacher continues to provide assistance while saying nothing about the pinch.

**Don't Do This:** A teacher is providing one-on-one assistance, during which time the learner pinches the teacher. The teacher says "Ouch! That hurt! I don't like it when you do that!"

### **Withhold physical response**

Do nothing related to the behavior of concern. This also refers to non-verbal communication. The teacher continues natural movement and actions. Make no eye or physical contact. Avoid mechanistic types of ignoring e.g. looking away or turning one's back.

**Do This:** While in line to go to lunch a learner uses profanity. The teacher stays where she is and does not flinch or respond physically to the behavior.

**Don't Do This:** While in line to go to lunch, a learner uses profanity. The teacher walks over to the learner, grabs the learner's arm, and directs the learner to stand at the back of the lunch line.

### **Maintain proximity:**

Do not increase or decrease physical proximity to the learner unless necessary.

**Do This:** A teacher is working with a student. Another learner shouts that she cannot do the work throwing it on the floor. The teacher remains with the original student.

**Don't Do This:** A teacher is working with a student. Another learner shouts that she cannot do the work, throwing it on the floor. The teacher goes over to the frustrated learner.

### **Continue to teach:**

Whatever activity that was occurring prior to the onset of the behavior should continue.

**Do This:** A learner shouts a an off task comment. The teacher continues to give the class instruction.

**Don't Do This:** A learner shouts an off task comment. The teacher stops instruction and addresses the behavior.

**Interrupt:** To prevent harm while continuing to teach. Includes shadowing, blocking, and environmental management. Relies on the teacher being able to anticipate harmful behavior. Look for signs that aggressive behavior is likely to occur and redirect before you need to interrupt. Oftentimes, to interrupt is not possible the first time a behavior of concern is demonstrated, but as teachers begin to recognize signals that a potentially harmful behavior might occur, it is often possible to interrupt before the second incident.

### Characteristic: Warranted use

Use interruption only for a behavior that threatens harm.

**Do This:** Example #1: A learner reaches to try to pull the teacher's hair. The teacher shadows the learner's hand to interrupt the attempt. Example #2: The class is crossing the street. A learner begins to run into the street while cars are coming. The teacher steps in front of the learner to keep him from crossing the street.

**Don't Do This:** A learner shouts a profane remark in class. The teacher puts her hand over the learner's mouth to quiet him down.

### Remain calm

Do not reveal emotion, maintain a slow rate, and a low pitch and volume of speech. Interruption should be accomplished in a warm, peaceful manner.

**Do This:** During seat work, a learner reaches to hit the teacher. While catching the learner's arm, the teacher's face remains calm and unemotional.

**Don't Do This:** During seat work, a learner reaches to hit the teacher. While catching the learner's arm, the teacher wrinkles up her face in pain and shows anger in her expression.

### Continue to ignore

Even if a teacher has to resort to interrupting a potentially harmful behavior, continue ignoring the behavior by refraining from making verbal or physical responses to the behavior of concern.

**Do This:** During seat work, a learner reaches over and hits the teacher standing nearby. While catching the learner's arm, the teacher does not say anything to the learner about the behavior, while continuing to instruct.

**Don't Do This:** During seat work, a learner reaches over and hits the teacher standing nearby. While catching the learner's arm, the teacher says "stop it. I'll be there in a minute," and then turns away from the learner.

### Minimally intrusive

Use the least intrusive form of interruption as is suitable to the situation. Interruption generally involves the shadowing of a person's hands in the case of self-injury, blocking aggression, and environmental management strategies.

**Do This:** In anger, a learner picks up a chair to throw. The teacher grabs the chair and sets it down away from the learner.

**Don't Do This:** In anger, a learner picks up a chair to throw. The teacher grabs the chair out of the learner's hand and holds the learner's arms down to her sides.

**Redirect:** Generally a non-verbal communication that changes the course of disruptive or destructive interactions. Characterized by the use of physical and gestural prompts. The purpose of the redirection is to reinstate participation.

### **Characteristic: Clear beginning and end**

Use specific and consistent cues that communicate to the learner a clear and exact message. The series of cues used should have a precise starting point and ending point. The longer redirection occurs without resulting in participation and interaction, the more likely it is that redirection itself becomes rewarding.

**Do This:** The teacher requests that a learner leave his desk and join a group at a table in the back of the room. The learner does not respond to the request. The teacher then points to the learner and then to the group. If the learner does not respond, the teacher then joins the group and begins working with them. After several minutes, the teacher repeats the redirection, pointing to the learner and then to the group.

**Don't Do This:** The teacher requests that a learner leave his desk and join a group at a table in the back of the room. The learner does not respond to the request. He then walks over to the group and begins to point from the learner to the group and back again several times. When the learner does not respond, the teacher goes over to the learner's chair and pulls it out for the learner, then begins to repeatedly point from the learner to the group. The teacher walks over to the group table and taps on the table and holds up the materials for the learner to see and then points to the group once again.

### **Hierarchy of cues:**

Use cues moving from the least intrusive to the most intrusive type of cue.

**Do This:** The teacher begins redirection by using a gesture or by pointing. Over time when the learner does not respond, the teacher moves to tapping the materials, placing the item for participation near the learner, bringing the materials directly to the learner, gently nudging the learner, placing the materials or item for participation in the learner's hand and finally to provide hand over hand assistance to the learner in order to gain participation.

**Don't Do This:** The teacher begins redirection by providing hand over hand assistance to the learner in order to gain participation.

### **Instructional task:**

Through redirection, focus the attention on the instructional or interactional activity being used in class as the vehicle for reinstating the learner's participation.

**Do This:** A learner refuses to do his work. The teacher periodically taps the workbook page the learner is to complete.

**Don't Do This:** A learner refuses to do his work. The teacher points to the time-out chair to remind the learner where he will have to sit if he continues to refuse to do his work.

**Reward:** Teacher interactions that communicate value, equity, and acceptance. The purpose is to teach learners that human interaction is a desirable activity and is characterized by a positive interaction with a learner. Involves giving verbal and tactile praise to the learner for any and all minimal participation.

### **Characteristic: Praise learner**

The learner receives a reward for initiating the desired activity, or for initiating an approximation of the desired activity.

**Do This:** The teacher requests that a learner write her name at the top of the page of a worksheet. After redirection, the learner picks up her pencil and traces the first letter in her name. The teacher praises the learner for initiating the task.

**Don't Do This:** The teacher requests that a learner write her name at the top of the page of a worksheet. After redirection, the learner picks up her pencil and traces the first letter in her name. The teacher looks at the worksheet and continues to circulate throughout the classroom.

### **Verbal or tactile praise**

Use a verbal or tactile (touch) response as the mode for communicating pleasure towards the learner's choice to participate. If tokens or tangibles (objects) are used, they are paired with verbal or tactile praise.

**Do This:** A learner completes an assignment and brings it up to the teacher's desk to show her. The teacher smiles, looks over the assignment, and tell the learner that she appreciates his wonderful effort.

**Don't Do This:** A learner completes an assignment and brings it up to the teacher's desk to show her. The teacher looks over the assignment and places a "Good Job!" sticker on the work, handing it back to the learner without saying a word.

### **Related to instruction**

Once a learner has initiated participating in a desired activity, provide praise that clearly communicates to the learner that it is his participation that stimulated the positive response from the teacher.

**Do This:** After redirection, a learner gets out of his seat and joins the group at the back table. The teacher responds by telling the learner he is glad that the learner decided to join the group, and thanks him for coming over.

**Don't Do This:** After redirection, a learner gets out of his seat and joins the group at the back table. In response, the teacher tells the learner "Great job!"

**Teaching Goal**

The goal for this learner would be to teach him a safe method to gain attention from adults and peers.

**Teaching Plan**

The team involved with this learner needs to explore ways in which this learner could easily communicate his need for attention. Whether it is through verbal scripts, sign language, or technology, a process for teaching the use of the communication mode is created as a preventive measure. However, the team also needs to plan how to intervene when the learner uses aggression to meet his need instead of using the alternate mode of communication being taught. In this example, let us say that the team determines that the ignore, interrupt, redirect, reward procedure would be the appropriate intervention plan. The following would occur.

**Ignore:** The teacher is standing next to another student and begins to provide assistance. The learner approaches the teacher and reaches out to scratch her face. The teacher refrains from shouting out, screaming, or reprimanding the learner.

**Interrupt:** The teacher catches the learner's arm, blocking the scratch, and continues to not comment to the learner.

**Redirect:** The teacher models a script such as "Talk to me" or "Help me", or models an alternate mode of communication for the learner to use to request attention, continuing to not comment on the attempted aggressive act.

**Reward:** Once the learner uses the alternate mode of communication to request attention, the teacher responds by saying "That's the way to get my attention! Great! Now let's go over to your desk and I will help you to get started on your work."

In this instance, if the teacher had shouted out or reprimanded the learner, she would have inadvertently reinforced the use of aggression

for gaining attention. Often learners do not care whether the attention is positive or negative as long as they get attention. Although it may be tempting to punish the learner for trying to scratch, the goal is to teach the learner that he can get his attention need met without resorting to aggression. The best way to do that is by redirecting the learner to the desired communication and then rewarding that communication.

In addition to the scenario described above, the facilitator of learning needs to consider other prevention strategies, such as, room arrangement to decrease the possibility of someone getting hurt. For example, this teacher might seat the learner in the front of the room so that he would be less likely to come from behind and catch someone by surprise. In addition, he would be less likely to see the teacher interacting with others behind him and would have more access to attention during whole class instruction. His desk might also be situated so that it is out of arm's reach to other learners, or with an empty desk beside him to provide a safe distance between him and his peers while allowing him opportunities to interact with and to feel a part of the class. As part of a prevention plan, it may be decided to increase this learner's opportunities for attention throughout his day so that he may not need to request attention as often. No matter what the teaching prevention and intervention activities are, it is essential to share the plan with all those involved with the learner so that consistent responses and actions occur across settings.

In less threatening situations, interrupting would not be necessary. For example, if a learner routinely refuses to begin tasks and uses profanity when asked to do so (control behavior), the facilitator of learning would not comment on the profanity (ignore), periodically tap near the task in which he wants the learner to engage (redirect), and respond positively if an when the learner begins a task or attempts an ximation of the task (reward). Preventive activities may include

allowing choice-making or providing incentives to be earned for beginning tasks without comment. In either situation, the teacher refrains from responding to the unconventional behavior, redirects the learner to the desired action or activity, and rewards the learner through positive interactions.

Once a team determines both the prevention and intervention activities to be used with a learner, it is time to create a behavior plan. Although many learners will not require more than individual instructional strategies listed in a lesson plan book or goals and objectives for issues around behavior addressed on the Individualized Education Program (IEP), some learners may need a formal plan. When this occurs, the form that is used is not as important as the collaborative process that was used in designing the prevention and intervention strategies. One benefit to using a pre-designed form is that it may help team members to remember to include necessary components of the plan. With this in mind, a sample learning plan is provided (figure 4).

### Creating a behavior plan

The following is an explanation of how to use the plan provided:

1. **WHO:** In the corresponding spaces, record the learner's name for whom the plan is being created and the date that the plan was developed.
2. **WHAT** (*description of behavior*) : Describe in observable, measurable terms what the learner is doing that is of concern. Use concrete, objective wording.

**Example:**        *crumples up assignment, throws it on the floor, and then refuses to speak to teacher*

**Not:**                *is non-compliant; or refuses to work*

Figure 4. Sample Behavior Plan

Behavior Plan	
WHO: _____	DATE: _____
WHAT ( <i>description of behavior</i> ): _____	
WHEN and WHERE ( <i>conditions</i> ): _____	
WHY ( <i>communicative intent</i> ): _____	
WILL DO THIS INSTEAD ( <i>alternative behavior</i> ):	
PREVENTION ( <i>instruction/modifications to do to keep the behavior of concern from occurring</i> ):	
INTERVENTION ( <i>instruction/strategies to be done after or while the behavior of concern is occurring</i> ): _____	
HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS ( <i>progress monitoring instructions</i> ): _____	
WHO IS RESPONSIBLE: _____	
WE WILL BEGIN THIS PLAN ON ( <i>date</i> ): _____	
REVIEW DATES: _____; _____; _____	
SIGNATURES:	

3. **WHEN/WHERE** (*conditions*): Describe under what circumstances the behavior of concern occurs. Again, use concrete, objective wording.

**Example:** *when given a task which is unfamiliar or new*

**Not:** *when he doesn't get his way*

Common Pitfalls:

\* concern is vague or general

\* description is not observable or measurable

\* team begins generating solutions/

interventions before problem is analyzed

Ask yourselves: "Do we fully understand the problem yet?"

4. **WHY** (*communicative intent*): Using the description of the behavior stated, brainstorm possible reasons for the purpose that this behavior fills - what need is met by exhibiting this behavior? Hypothesize one probable cause by funneling all aspects of the behavior into one simple possible cause. Refrain from emphasizing the underlying issues.

**Example:** *avoidance of difficult tasks*

**Not:** *family doesn't assist with work at home so he has a history of failure leading to low self-esteem*

5. **WILL DO THIS INSTEAD** (*alternative behavior*): Tomorrow, what would you like this learner to do to get her need met? State in observable, measurable, concrete, positive terms. **It is helpful to list learner strengths and needs at this time to assist in creative problem solving.**

**Example:** *When handed an unfamiliar assignment, will raise hand to request assistance from the teacher*

**-OR-** *When assigned a difficult task, will ask a peer to explain directions and to provide assistance when needed*

**Not:** *Will not throw paper on the floor*

**-OR-** *When handed an assignment, will complete it independently without disruption.*

Common Pitfalls:

- \* Goal is vague, not in measurable terms
- \* Goal was stated in “eliminative” terms (i.e. absence behavior), not what the learner will do instead

Ask yourselves: Would we have the goal if we reversed the description of the problem?

6. **PREVENTION** (*instruction/modifications to do to keep the behavior of concern from occurring*): List the accommodations that will be made to keep the behavior from occurring. Create prevention activities that go beyond what is usually done in the classroom for most learners.

**Example:** *Initially, will be given work that is familiar; Will introduce unfamiliar work slowly; Once class instructions are given, will restate the instructions 1:1; Once class instructions are given, will stay with learner until she begins task and is working independently; Will seat learner next to peer for accessing “study buddy;” Will increase opportunities for success throughout the school day; Will periodically review with learner the hand raising procedure for requesting assistance.*

**Not:** *Will call parents when behavior occurs; Will be given an assignment book to write down assignments.*

**-OR-** *Will sit in class quietly without disruption*

7. **INTERVENTION** (*instruction/strategies to be done after or while the behavior of concern is occurring*): Describe in detail what actions you or others will take when the behavior of concern is occurring. All activities should be positive with the intent of the communication in mind. End all activities with reward.

## Within Our Reach

**Example:** *If she should throw a paper on the floor in frustration, the teacher will not say anything about the incident, wait a minute until the learner has calmed down, then approach her desk and hand her the paper. The teacher will remind her to raise her hand if she needs assistance. If the learner does not raise her hand, the teacher will gently raise it for her. Once her hand is raised, the teacher will respond by praising her for raising her hand and then begin going over the assignment with her 1:1. Once the learner has stated the assignment, the teacher will walk away, returning after two minutes to check on learner progress. If she is working independently, the teacher will offer praise. If she is not working, the teacher will repeat the supportive sequence, asking the learner what should she do to get help. Repeat above steps as needed.*

**Not:** *Will remind learner to raise her hand.*

**Common Pitfalls:**

- \* tendency to see a specific place or person as an intervention
- \* selecting interventions that are unrelated to the hypothesized reason for the concern
- \* interventions created for someone else to implement

**8. HOW WILL WE MEASURE SUCCESS** (*progress monitoring instructions*): Decide as a group how you will know that the intervention and prevention activities are being successful - what will you look for?

Usually, success can be measured by an increase in an alternate or replacement behavior and a decrease in the undesired behavior.

**Example:** *chart number of times paper is thrown on the floor and number of times hand is raised independently*

**Not:** *chart number of times work is completed independently*

**Common Pitfalls:**

- \* data collected is not related to intervention
- \* system for supporting the data collector is not created
- \* data collector was not involved in creating the interventions

10. **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE:** List names of all the people who will be responsible for implementing these prevention and intervention activities. Include special area teachers (art, music, physical education, library), bus drivers, cafeteria workers, family members, etc.

11. **WE WILL BEGIN THIS PLAN ON (date):** Write the date that the intervention will begin. It may be the very next day, or it could be a week from the original planning meeting date if certain conditions need to be created in for the prevention and intervention activities to be implemented.

12. **REVIEW DATES:** List dates that the data will be reviewed by to determine success. Review dates may be weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, once a grading period, etc. When reviewing data, the team determines the integrity of the intervention and decides to continue or revise the plan based on the data collected. Revisions are documented and agreed upon by all team members.

13. **SIGNATURES:** Have participants in the behavior planning process sign the behavior plan form, including the learner, family members, teachers, and administrators.

One can easily see how this process, which is a simple problem solving process, is also the same used when writing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). For most learners, a separate behavior plan would not be needed because the information can be readily integrated into the content of the IEP. Once a plan is generated and implemented, it will be necessary to monitor progress toward the learner's goal(s) and evaluate the plan for effectiveness. Team members will need to determine whether or not the interventions were implemented as intended, and whether or not the plan will need to be modified, continued, or discontinued. If the plan is modified, continued, or an entirely new plan is written, then the team will need to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan again (Allen, & Graden, 1995). Care should be taken to create a plan for each behavior of concern and communicative intent, going through the entire problem solving process for each concern prioritized.

The importance of progress monitoring was demonstrated to me during one of my first few years of teaching. One of my students used a variety of swear words to avoid tasks. Prior to designing an intervention, I decided to see how often she actually swore to avoid a task (baseline). During one fifteen minute period, I documented through the use of tally marks that she swore 115 times, non-stop. It was the longest fifteen minutes of my life! Over the next several months, my teaching assistant and I began to teach this student a script to communicate her need for avoidance, periodically collecting data as to the effectiveness of the intervention. Mid-way through the school year, during one threatening walk down a busy hallway, the principal came up to this student and spoke to her, to which the student promptly responded "F--- you b---!"

Needless to say, the principal was quite upset and questioned what I was teaching this learner because she had apparently made no progress. Thankfully, I remembered the data I collected, and I immediately shared it with the principal. This student went from swearing 115 times in fifteen minutes to 37 times in an entire week. We demonstrated that although the behavior of concern was not completely eradicated, progress had been made. Considering this student had used swear words for four to five years to communicate her need to avoid uncomfortable situations, drastically reducing the frequency of her swear words in only a matter of months seemed like considerable progress to me and to her parents.

This scenario also illustrates the importance of sharing the plan with all those who will be working and interacting with the learner. If the principal had understood the function of this learner's swearing behavior, she might have refrained from approaching her during a stressful time in the first place. In addition, if the principal had been aware of the plan to teach this learner a script for escaping uncomfortable situations, she might have been able to reinforce the use of the script by redirecting the learner to the script instead of responding emotionally and with embarrassment.

**Part IV****Strategies For Proactively Managing****Your Home Or Your Classroom**

As previously noted, having an individual plan to handle specific behaviors of concern is helpful for responding positively to specific learners, providing a focus and consistency for the learners as well as for the implementers of the plan. For the same reasons, it is also important to establish an overall environmental plan that focuses on structure, teaching, redirection and reinforcement, and consistency for managing the overall learning environment, whether that be at home, at school, or at work. Doing so supports all of the learners in the learning environment, not just those with behavior issues.

**Creating Structure**

Structure is an essential component for preventing behavior problems. In school, teachers should develop specific rules and procedures before the school year begins, creating routines for entering the classroom, using the restroom, asking for assistance, turning in homework, or returning from absences. Posting daily schedules, pairing pictures with written words, is often an excellent way to create structure for learners. Structure can also be created through the statement of clear expectations for learner participation. At home, daily routines can be developed surrounding homework, which would mean establishing a specific time and location for completing homework. Clearly schools have an advantage over home environments because routines are a natural part of the school setting, but routines can also be established at home for such things as getting ready for school in the morning, clearing the dishes from the table after dinner, and getting ready for bed in the evening. Frequently, parents and group home direct workers have told me that many learners have their greatest

difficulties during these daily events. Facilitators of learning need to recognize that through unconventional and disruptive behaviors, a learner may actually be requesting procedures and routines for these highly stimulation situations (control). As with Gentle Teaching (McGee et al., 1987), these routines should be used as the activity to which a learner is redirected when unconventional behaviors occur. For example, if a learner is anxious each day before going home from school and tries to run out of the room, the teacher can remind the learner that there is a procedure to follow before he can go home, and *redirect* him to that procedure.

Once structure has been created through procedures and routines, parents and teachers need to spend a good deal of time introducing and teaching learners about the rules and procedures, rehearsing daily as necessary. The initial extra time spent teaching these routines should be considered an investment. The time used to teach the procedures is made up by decreasing time spent putting out fires in the classroom or at home. The "down time" that typically occur during transitions should also decrease as a result of teaching procedures and routines, thereby increasing time for instruction. At the beginning of the teaching process, parents and teachers may need to schedule time to go over and review procedures or rules frequently with their students and children. The learner can not be expected to absorb and understand the entire routine upon the initial instruction. Further explanation as to why the routines were established and periodic role playing or practice may prove helpful. Both parents and teachers should support learners while the routines are being taught and reward approximations of the desired behavior. No matter what strategies are used to create structure, the facilitator of learning needs to remember to reinforce learners throughout the year for following the routines and for meeting individual expectations. Often

ers wonder "What's happened to my classroom!" because by

February the learners in the room have slipped back to creating chaos. This occurs when the routines and procedures are no longer reinforced by the teacher.

### **Redirection and Reinforcement**

When desired behaviors are observed, the facilitator of learning should provide immediate reinforcement through positive interactions with learners. When undesired behaviors occur, parents and teachers should redirect by asking the learner what the routine is and/or reminding the learner about the routine or procedure (redirection through manding). Try to redirect using gestures, such as pointing to picture schedules or tapping on the table where homework is to be completed, and avoid the use of verbal redirection when possible. Save verbal responses for reinforcement of the desired behavior once it has been demonstrated, or an approximation has been observed.

### **Providing Consistency**

Being prepared with routines and procedures will only be effective if those rules and procedures are followed without failure. Consistency is key to the success of any behavior prevention or intervention plan, whether it be for a specific individual or for an entire family or class. That is why it is important to establish rules that can be realistically reinforced on a consistent basis. I recently worked with a teacher who was having difficulty with the management of her classroom. She identified one learner who she felt was causing her a significant amount of trouble because he often interrupted the instruction the teacher was attempting. On the wall the teacher had a rule that stated "Raise your hand before speaking," yet throughout the day, most learners were allowed to shout out their answers. When I conferenced with her about the situation, she said that she does not reinforce that rule consistently because there are frequently times she likes to encourage open discussion. What she had to decide then was whether or not she felt

strongly enough about the rule for hand raising to begin reinforcing it on a consistent basis. Otherwise she would continue to send mixed messages to all of the learners in her classroom, including the learner she considered disruptive. We determined that during those open class discussion times, she would tell the learners in that for the next forty-five minutes everyone could join the discussion and that the rule for hand raising would be temporarily suspended. At the conclusion of the forty-five minute period, she announced to the class that discussion time was over, and that they were returning to the "raise your hand" rule. By doing so, the teacher created structure around an unstructured activity, setting time limits and parameters for participation. Once the unstructured activity was complete, the class was clear about the expectations for the rest of the day. This also helped the learner who spoke out off topic to structure his behavior as well. If a facilitator of learning is not willing to reinforce a rule on a consistent basis, then it is better to not make it a rule in the first place.

We all know, however, that times will occur when change in an established routine is necessary. Fire drills, assemblies, visits from relatives, and shopping trips all may require a change in a schedule or a routine. Whenever possible, prepare learners for the impending change in routine, and create a structure for the chaotic times. In school, learners can practice how to respond during fire drills or assemblies prior to the actual event. At home, if a parent is unable to make it home in time to fix dinner, establish an "emergency routine," outlining who is responsible for getting out the microwave meals and how to use the microwave. Inform learners of what they can expect, and when or if the previous routine will be reestablished. Once again, social stories (Gray, 1994) are excellent sources of structure for learners that provides them opportunities to rehearse and be prepared for the change. Both parents

Teachers need to realize that once a routine has been disrupted,

relative order may be temporarily lost. Remain calm and reestablish routines as soon as possible. Do not forget to provide reinforcement for following the routine once it has been reestablished.

### **Working With Groups**

Groups of learners can communicate wants and needs as well as individuals. This may require the use of a problem solving process in order to create an effective intervention. However, when working with an entire class, the process for designing the interventions works much more informally. The following is an example of how problem solving for a group might occur within a matter of a few minutes.

**Define the problem situation.**

The group is too loud and is off task.

**Analyze the situation.**

The group is demonstrating a need for control and would benefit from an increase in structure.

**Set goals.**

To get the group back on task for the remainder of the class period.

**Design and implement action plans.**

Refrain from commenting to the class about their loud and off task behavior (ignore). Focus the learner's attention on the teacher by flicking the lights, point to or read the rule for on-task behavior, gesture towards the class goal chart or to individual point sheets, then wait for learners to refocus on their work with

- Evaluate progress.** the teacher tapping individual desks for redirection when needed (redirect). After one minute, walk over to the class goal chart or individual point sheets and begin recording points based on the current behavior observed.
- Provide rewards as appropriate.** Walk around to each desk and individually praise each learner who has responded as desired.
- Revise the plan as needed.** For each individual who remains off task, redirect by readjusting their seat, straightening it to the desk, discussing individual expectations and goals, maintaining proximity, working with the learner individually, and then providing reinforcement for eventual on task behavior.

The importance of each of the environmental and instructional aspects of an intervention depends on the needs of the individual or the group for which the interventions were designed (Shea, & Bauer, 1991). Whether there are several behavioral issues to address or just one, whether the concern is around an individual or an entire group, whether the facilitator of learning is a family member, peer, or teacher or whether the learner has mental retardation or not, one then remains constant. Facilitators of learning need to focus their attention on deciphering the communicative intent of the behavior prior to designing prevention and intervention activities. By skipping the facet of problem solving, team members may design interventions that inadequately support the learner and waste precious time and energy. Remember that learning

takes time, and in order for something to change, it is often necessary for us to change something we do (Tobin, 1991).

## Epilogue

There is no one practice or theory that can be used to teach all learners. Yet, a combination of strategies, used flexibly and individually, can lead to greater learner independence. In this book an attempt to was made to bring together strategies proven through research and practice that support learners with mental retardation and autism. Based on the premise that learners should be taught alternatives to unconventional behaviors, the works of many researchers and practitioners can be synthesized to create a comprehensive, pro-active learning environment. Using a collaborative problem solving approach, a team of individuals knowledgeable about the learner can define and analyze a problem situation, hypothesize the communicative intent of the learner's behavior, set goals, and create, implement, evaluate and revise prevention and intervention activities.

Although a description of a comprehensive approach was attempted, I realize that there exist numerous other effective strategies for working with learners who have behavioral difficulties. Knowing these strategies is not enough. The facilitator of learning needs to understand when it is the best situation to use specific strategies and with whom. I hope I have given the readers of this book the strong foundation needed to make such a determination, enabling you to design and integrate more creative interventions that meet the needs of those with whom we work. If you should have any questions regarding the information shared in this text, please do not hesitate to contact me.

## Glossary

**attention:** A need or a want to interact with others.

**avoidance:** A need or a want to escape participation in certain situations.

**behavior:** Actions demonstrated by living things.

**behavior episode:** A series of events that begins with a learner demonstrating an unconventional behavior and end with the learner participating in learning activities.

**behavior planning:** An agreed upon sequence of instructional activities and supports that are created to teach a learner alternative, conventional behaviors.

**collaborative:** A style of working together as equal participants.

**communicative intent:** The function of a behavior; what need or want the action communicates to another.

**consequence:** What results from an action. Can be either positive or negative.

**control:** A need or a want to take charge of a given situation in order to affect the outcome of that situation.

**conventional behavior:** An action that is common and perceived as socially acceptable. What is determined to be conventional depends on the culture of the learner.

**cue:** A prompt that guides a learner to a desired response.

**discipline:** A method for teaching alternatives to unconventional behaviors; characterized by positive interactions, the use of instruction, is long term, and uses logical consequences.

**facilitator of learning:** A person who is responsible for helping an individual learn. The responsibility can be either self-imposed or part of a job description.

**fade support:** To gradually reduce the frequency and intrusiveness of demonstration of an undesired behavior.

**independent:** To do something without support from others.

**interrupt:** To stop an act of aggression by shadowing or blocking, or by the use of environmental strategies.

**intervention:** The use of instructional strategies and procedures to redirect a learner to a desired behavior after an undesired behavior has been demonstrated.

**learner:** A person whose primary role in a particular situation is to gain information and skills. This includes those who are commonly referred to as students, clients, residents, and/or family members.

**model:** To show by example.

**mand:** To provide a cue while requesting a response.

**prevention:** The proactive use of instructional strategies and procedures to keep a behavior of concern from occurring.

**problem solving:** A sequence of steps used to address issues of concern. The steps include defining a problem, analyzing the problem, setting goals, designing and implementing action plans, and evaluating the effectiveness of those plans.

**punishment:** A method for stopping a behavior that is occurring; characterized as short term, often emotion laden, causes physical or emotional discomfort, uses consequences that may not directly relate to the behavior.

**redirect:** To use gestures, cues, or minimal verbal responses to guide a learner to an alternate behavior or action.

**reinforcement:** Something that increases the likelihood that a behavior will reoccur.

**reward:** To demonstrate respect through positive interactions with the purpose of reinforcing a particular behavior.

**shaping:** To guide learners to the demonstration of a desired behavior through reinforcement of successive approximations of the behavior.

**team:** A group of people who are working together. Should include the learner, family members, and facilitators of learning.

**unconventional behavior:** An action that is uncommon and is generally not considered socially acceptable, as determined by the learner's culture.

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### **About the Author**

**Melissa M. Jones, M.ed.** has worked as a special education teacher in public schools, as a program manager in a residential facility, and as a supervisor of programs for learners with emotional and behavior disorders. Through those experiences, she has had the opportunity to facilitate the learning of both children and adults with various abilities, including mental retardation. She is currently an Educational Consultant at the Southwest Ohio Special Education Regional Resource Center in Cincinnati, Ohio where she works with families and educators through inservices and consultation to enhance the lives of all learners.

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