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## Avoiding Traumatization

Behavior intervention ideas are not easy to come by. We have our token economies that are our bread and butter (and for good reason). As we explore ideas for each student, it is important that we consider the psychological impact the plan may have on the student.

I once worked with a student who vividly remembered 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Everyone had to learn their multiplication tables. The more you learned, the more ice cream toppings you got during the party. This student did not remember that they got ice cream. Rather, they remembered that they got far fewer toppings than the rest of the students.

Whatever we plan to implement, remember that students make comparisons. They look for this in word and deed. And, over time, they begin to see patterns.

## Behavior: Key to Transition Readiness

Transition is often viewed as getting a kid ready for college or finding them a job/career. These are the long-term outcomes we want to see. In order to achieve these goals, we need to make sure students have foundational skills that are applicable across multiple settings. Being able to follow the social and behavioral expectations of a given environment is one of those foundational skills.

Behavior issues will look differently for each student. A common thread is often a lack of persistence through difficult or unwanted tasks. Students need to know how to complete and turn in work on time, how to pay attention and resist distractions in class or meetings, how to work in a team, how to handle frustrations without “meltdowns,” how to communicate effectively, and how to deal with the answer of “no.” And they need to preform these skills even when it goes against their preferences. Without these skills, students will have short lived success in employment and postsecondary education (PSE).

Employers are already hesitant to hire individuals with disabilities. Behavior issues give them reason to bypass them and hire someone else. The same can be said in PSE. Why modify curriculum for a student who is going to be disruptive or show little effort? IDEA does not exist outside of K-12 education, meaning our students will not have the same protections if behavior is an issue. Low rates of employment and education highlight the importance of having our students ready to handle social and behavioral challenges.

Let’s take a moment to focus on some of these foundational skills this year. One question to ask is: Does this student have the behavioral/social skills they need to reach their long-term goals? If no, then what do they need? For some, the answer may be a BIP (new, continued, or amended). For others, some social skills lessons. And there may be others that need to see greater academic success or who are where we expect for their age. Answering these questions may require you to consult more with your teacher leaders or psychologists, equaling more time and energy; and possibly much better results.

## Avoiding Trauma (cont.)

When we post consequences to the whole class (or academic progress/success) or have our verbal praise/correction ratios skewed then we risk the student inferring that they are bad, dumb, etc. (What we are and the product of our actions are not always the same, but that is a topic for another time) Taking away things that were already earned or inherent to school can have the same effect. So what can be done instead?

Consider group contingencies that do not single out individual students. We might also reframe our corrections. Instead of "Jimmy, I told you to stop. Move over here by me," we can say "Jimmy, this environment does not seem to be helping you right now. Come over here so you aren't so distracted."

Building rapport is critical in the first few weeks of school. When students know that you like them from the start they are less likely to get severely hurt by something later. Joking with students can be a good way to build rapport; however, sarcasm should be avoided. Remember, many of our students have a difficult time differentiating literal from figurative in ELA. The same often applies with jokes.

More can always be said. Please reach out to your school psych for more info on this topic.



## Opposing Views: Rage Against ABA

A growing number in the neurodivergent community are apposed to ABA therapy and practices. Here is why.

Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) has been around for decades. It is often considered the "gold standard" for modifying undesired behavior in individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). In recent years, however, there has been a growing resistance toward ABA therapy from those with IDD and their advocates. It is not our intention to persuade you one way or the other regarding this practice. Rather, we feel knowing the view point may come in handy as you work with parents and advocates.

The argument against ABA therapy is two fold. Many argue that the practice that does not adequately include the preferences and values of those with IDD, which then leads to those with IDD being treated like rats in a cage. Let's look at both of these arguments individually and see if we can better understand the movement.

"Nothing about us without us" has become a battle cry of the neurodivergent community. Historically, the voices of this community have come from advocates because society has been slow to hear the cries of those living with IDD. (If you would like to learn/discuss disability history or disability studies, please reach out to Alex, he loves that stuff). This became a habit of many ABA practitioners. It became easier to assess, set up a plan, and carry out therapy based on the dictates of research rather than have a collaborative relationship with caregivers and clients. Many universities train prospective practitioners to include a client and caregiver interview and incorporate values in assessment and practice. However, we are hearing from the trenches that that has become a lost art, leading to a distrust of the practice as a whole.

The lack of collaboration has led many to feel as if they have been dehumanized by ABA therapy. They feel as though practitioners are trying to change their very nature. This has been felt particularly hard when practitioners have worked to extinguish stimming behaviors in individuals with autism. Some argue that ABA is traumatizing in its methods that have largely remained the same over the years. Others even accuse practitioners of being ableist, saying that their refusal to be collaborative and look for alternative practices highlights their views that those with IDD are less than others.

If you have to deal with this opposition, remember that people want to be heard. Listen and seek understanding. We do not do ABA therapy in schools, but we do follow some core principles. Work with them to meet their concerns and include the school psychologist when needed.