

ADDITUDE *Inside the ADHD mind*

ADHD Parenting > School & Learning

SCHOOL BEHAVIOR

Could a Behavior Intervention Plan Help Your Student with ADHD?

If your child acts out, interrupts, yells, or loses academic focus, it may be time for a behavior intervention plan (BIP). A BIP aims to teach new skills and replace interfering behaviors with appropriate alternative actions – and improves the overall academic experience. Learn what constitutes a behavior plan, and how to make sure your child’s is effective.

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When a student’s behavior impacts their classmates’ and their own learning, a behavior intervention plan can help resolve challenges while supporting (not chastising) the student.

Behavior intervention plans are unique to a student’s needs, but they all aim to teach new skills and replace interfering behaviors with appropriate alternatives. Still, behavior plans – which can define a student’s academic experience – are not all created and implemented equally.

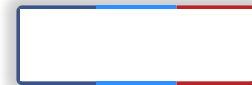
It’s important for families to understand how a behavior intervention plan is formulated, what a comprehensive one should look like, and common (but correctable) issues that arise.

What Is a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)?

A behavior intervention plan is a formal document that outlines the following:

- a student’s problem behaviors in the classroom – physical or virtual
- reasons why the behaviors may be occurring
- interventions to replace and reduce the interfering behaviors
- measurable behavioral goals, as well as strategies for teaching and reinforcing new behaviors

A behavior intervention plan is built on the findings of a [Functional Behavior Assessment \(FBA\)](#), an important process that aims to understand why the student is engaging in interfering behaviors. Parents can and should be involved during the process and creation of the plan.



While behavior intervention plans can be part of a child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP), a student does not need to have an IEP (or a 504 Plan) to receive a behavior plan. The point at which a child becomes a good candidate for a behavior plan depends on how the individual school district defines impeding behavior. It is best, however, for behavior plans to be in place as soon as disruptive behaviors are detected, rather than in later grades, when they may be more difficult to curb.

Behavior Intervention Plan: Components

A comprehensive behavior support plan comprises three main parts.

1. Definition of the Problem Behavior

The behavior intervention plan first breaks down the interfering behavior, using the following points gathered from the FBA:

- **Antecedent:** What predictable events precede the problem behavior (e.g. transitioning between classes, at the start of class, when switching from a preferred to a non-preferred activity, etc.)
- **Behavior:** An objective description of the behavior in question. A good definition describes an observable action, and does not attempt to “explain.” For example, a good definition of behavior is “throws worksheet off the table” instead of “non-compliant.”
- **Consequence:** What commonly happens to or with the student immediately after the problem behavior. This section should list observations, not analysis (e.g. “the teacher says ‘no’ or provides verbal redirection; student screams and runs around the classroom).
- **Function:** What the hypothesized purpose for the problem behavior is. Typical functions include trying to escape something/someone; getting access to something/someone; delaying an activity; and self-stimulatory reasons.

2. Behavior Goal

Replacement behavior refers to the new skills and behaviors that will be taught to the student so that they learn appropriate ways to get what they want. The skills in this section must align with the listed function – it’s a common mistake for the two not to line up.

For example, if the function of an interfering behavior like yelling is to gain the teacher’s attention, a potential replacement behavior would be for the student to raise their hand to request the teacher’s attention (the functions align). If a student with ADHD squirms and fidgets excessively for self-stimulatory purposes, movement breaks or different seating options may serve to “match” the function of self-stimulation. If the replacement behavior does not match the function, the student will continue to engage in the interfering behaviors.

When thinking of the replacement behavior, it is also helpful to think of the student’s capabilities. What skills do they currently have that they can leverage toward the behavioral goal? What are their current needs? What do they like?

Along with the behavior goal is the measurement associated with it, typically in rate or duration (e.g. “The student will raise their hand to get the teacher’s attention for four out of five consecutive opportunities for five consecutive school days.”). A common mistake with this section is attaching unrealistic, infeasible measurements to the goal, which is why it’s important to take the student’s baseline into account and have a simple means to record activity (a data sheet often does the trick).

No matter the method, the plan should collect data on both the replacement and interfering behaviors so that families and educators can determine if the plan is working. A behavior intervention plan that only collects data on the problem behavior is a red flag – both pieces are needed to ensure that the student is learning new skills, and that those skills are decreasing the problem behavior.

3. Teaching

The behavior intervention plan should explain how the student is going to be systematically taught and prompted to engage in the new skills to replace the undesirable behaviors, including when, where, and by

whom.

Take a student who engages in an interfering behavior to avoid difficult classwork. Antecedent strategies may include a new seating arrangement with the student closer to the teacher, and a cue card system to allow the student a more appropriate way to signal that they need a break. The teacher may describe and teach the cue system to the student, and provide prompts and reinforcement for the student to use it in the classroom. The teacher may also provide additional supports and strategies to the student to help them become more confident with the difficult material. This may include an assessment of prerequisite skills, or direct one-on-one instruction with the student.

A clear and explicit explanation for instruction, however, is usually left out of plans; that makes it important for parents to ask for specificity. In all, it doesn't matter how great the replacement behavior seems if there is no plan to teach it. If it is not taught, it will not be used.

This section will also list **consequences** – what the educator will do after the student uses the replacement skills, or engages in the interfering behavior. For using appropriate replacement skills, the student should be reinforced, or rewarded, in a way that relates to the function.

The goal here should be to make it so that the interfering behavior no longer “works” for the child. For example, if the purpose of an interfering behavior is to escape challenging classwork, the student should no longer be allowed to escape the work (if possible), and should instead be prompted to use the replacement skill (asking for a break). This process can feel counterintuitive, but the important factor is to teach the student appropriate ways to get what they need.

Behavior Intervention Plan: Issues and Solutions

Narrow Focus

- A problem can occur when the behavior plan focuses solely on the student's interfering behaviors without context.
- **Solution:** Consider their current repertoire of skills, their motivation, what's going on in their immediate environment, in their lives, and other quality-of-life issues.

Overall Fit

- The behavior intervention plan should complement, not contradict, the goals outlined in the student's IEP or 504 plan.
- **Solution:** Any skill taught within the BIP should be part of the overall education plan. A disconnect between these should be brought up with the IEP team.

“Just a Formality”

- This typically occurs when the goals of the behavior plan are generic and broad, which makes it easy to ignore the BIP.
- **Solution:** Insist on specificity and explicit instruction. Raise concerns with the educator and others that are part of your child's education. Make sure that a comprehensive FBA has been completed (or ask for a redo), and ask for what has worked in the past for your child (review data to back this up).

Catch-All

- The behavior intervention plan becomes the one-stop-shop for every disruptive behavior the child exhibits. This makes for a convoluted plan.
- **Solution:** Prioritize. What is the most concerning problem behavior? Pick one or a couple of behaviors, and wait until they are sufficiently addressed before moving on.

Stagnation

- The plan was initially effective at decreasing problem behavior. Now, the disruptive behavior has stagnated – replacement behaviors are not being consistently used.
- **Solution:** There could be many reasons for this, but narrowing the culprit comes to ensuring that data is collected and reviewed consistently. Data can reveal if the problem behavior is being reinforced somewhere, or the plan doesn't have enough replacement behaviors, or there is little reinforcement and encouragement for the child.

Behavior Intervention Plans and Remote Learning

The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) specifically outlines behavior plans in relation to the physical schooling and education environment. With [remote learning](#), behavior plans are somewhat up in the air. While an FBA can be done remotely, it is really up to the parent or caretaker to determine whether they're comfortable carrying out the resulting behavior plan at home. Teachers and other members of the child's education team can provide suggestions and accommodations. Overall, in a remote learning environment, behavior plans may not be as effectively carried out – a possibility parents and teachers must address.

Behavior intervention plans are ultimately set up to help a child become more independent – not reliant or submissive to the will of adults. Working toward appropriate and socially acceptable behaviors is no easy feat, but with time, analysis, questioning, and effort, a behavior plan is sure to result in positive change in a child's life.

Behavior Intervention Plan: Next Steps

- **Learn:** [Could Your Child Benefit from a Functional Behavior Assessment? What to Know](#)
- **Read:** [12 Teacher Strategies to Inspire Listening, Learning and Self-Control](#)
- **Q&A:** [My Son's IEP Does Nothing for His Behavioral Issues](#)

The content for this article was derived from the ADDitude Expert Webinar “Better School Behavior: How to Design and Implement a Positive and Effective Behavior Plan” (ADDitude ADHD Experts Podcast episode #330) with Rachel Schwarz, Ph.D., BCBA-D, which was broadcast live on October 29, 2020.
