

Autism Classroom Resources Podcast  
Episode 18 Transcript  
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Welcome back to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast and thanks for joining me. I'm Chris Reeve and we are in the midst of a series on 10 Steps to Meaningful Behavioral Support. Our next step in building a behavioral support plan is determining how we are going to respond to behavior. We've talked about strategies for preventing the behavior, ways to replace the behaviors and skills that we need to teach to supplement our replacement behaviors skills. Even if we have the most kick ass plan on the planet for this student with tons of preventive strategies and replacement skills being taught, the behavior is still going to occur at some point. And so it's critically important this part of the plan is written out for everyone to follow consistently.

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Before we get started talking about strategies, on [AutismClassroomResources.com](http://AutismClassroomResources.com) I have a [free resource library](#). In addition to printable, the library includes a set of 30 videos on behavior support. Each one is less than 5 minutes long and they cover preventive, replacement and responsive strategies. Some of the strategies I'll touch on here today are described and demonstrated more in the videos on the site. And did I mention they are free to all my newsletter subscribers? So I'll put the link in the show notes to sign up and check them out for yourself.

### What Are Responsive Strategies?

Responsive strategies include everything that is going to happen after the behavior occurs. They may involve redirecting, separating him from peers for safety, or even just ignoring the behavior and continuing to present a demand.

Responsive simply means how we respond to challenging behavior. Keep in mind that we can "respond" to challenging behavior without acknowledging or saying anything about it. Not every behavior has to have an overt response. However, we need to make sure that we have clear written the strategies of what to do for the team so that we all respond consistently.

So think back to your ABC data. What consequences seemed to be maintaining the

behavior or keeping it going? Those are the responses that we will probably need to change.

So, if the student typically was removed from a situation when the behavior occurred (i.e., it seemed to occur to gain escape from the situation), then we need our responsive strategies to involve avoiding that outcome. We need to have strategies that allow us to keep him in that situation. Or at least keep him there until we can reinforce a replacement behavior.

### **What Might Be Included in Responsive Strategies?**

There are several considerations in what to include in responsive strategies. But it's important that they be as complete as possible to help staff know what to do. Otherwise you could end up sabotaging your whole behavior plan because the behavior problem may still be reinforcing.

The first thing you want to make sure to include (or specifically eliminate) in your responsive strategies are the responses that have happened in the past when the student misbehaved. The responses from the environment that are maintaining the behavior. Let's say you remove a student from morning meeting following disruptive behavior. And that behavior functions to escape from group situations. We need to try to avoid removing the student in this situation because it serves to reinforce the behavior.

Now I realize that is easier said than done. Certainly keeping the student in the activity while he is disrupting the whole class is part of the problem. So, then we need to think about how to arrange our responses to minimize the reinforcement for the student while controlling the disruption to the whole class. There are a few ways that we use to do this.

### **Redirecting to Replacement Behaviors**

Assuming you have identified replacement behaviors, and that you are teaching them when the challenging behavior is NOT happening, you can redirect the student to use that strategy at the first sign of challenging behavior. In your FBA, did you identify behaviors that lead up to bigger behaviors (e.g., he starts whining before

he starts screaming)? Then that's a good cue for when to introduce the redirection at the less intense problem.

I prompt him with a visual to ask for a break. If he doesn't ask immediately, I might gesture or point. And eventually I may physically prompt him to hand me the break card and then remove him from the situation. Having to do that isn't ideal, but it is giving him a chance to ask independently AND it's reinforcing the break request. Yes, it may simultaneously reinforce the behavior, since that's what started the reminder. But it is making the challenging behavior much LESS efficient at getting reinforcement than the break request.

(As an aside, I don't ask him if he needs a break. I don't want him to wait for me to ask...I want him to imitate the request. So even if he's verbal, I use a visual cue to remind him to ask. Make sure you are teaching him and practicing asking for a break when there are no problems as well. And make sure that he has access to the break card at all times. You don't want it to just appear when there is a problem.)

**The great thing about this approach is that**

1. You are using the problem as a teaching opportunity for him to experience the escape from the undesired activity.
2. Once he gets a break, you can remove him. So that short circuits having to have to "work through" the behavior and wait him out. Which keeps it from disrupting the whole rest of the classroom.

In a I-I situation, it might be possible to just keep presenting the activity that the student doesn't want to do. However, that won't work effectively when you have the rest of the classroom to think about. And it doesn't really teach him what to do instead. It really just teaches him that you won't reinforce the behavior. He probably will still demonstrate the behavior in other situations.

### **Consequence-based Strategies**

Another element that might go into your responsive strategies are consequence-based behavior management strategies. These might include things like going to time out, going to the principal's office, losing points or token on a behavior

system, or losing privileges. All of these are strategies that are designed and typically used to make the behavior decrease.

#### **Advantages:**

1. Often they remove the student and the problem from the classroom situation
2. These consequences may stop the behavior from escalating at times

#### **Cautions in Consequence-based Strategies:**

1. Make sure they match the function of behavior. If you use time out for escape related behavior, you are going to be increasing it rather than decreasing it.
2. Make sure that the consequence is something that is punishing or the student. If the student doesn't care about the reinforcer he is earning with the token system, losing tokens won't work.
3. Make sure you aren't taking away everything.

#### **Identify Responsive Strategies to Respond To Avoid Reinforcing the Problem**

One of the main goals of responsive strategies, assuming that you have strong preventive and replacement strategies in place, is to assure the team is not reinforcing the problem behavior. Just telling them not to reinforce it won't be sufficient though. You need to design specific actions they are to do (and avoid) to assure that the behaviors aren't reinforcing. And you want to use these strategies as consistently across the school as possible. Remember that reinforcement is a like a slot machine. If you hit the jackpot just once, you keep on playing! So, that consistency becomes particularly important or we run the risk of making the behavior more durable through intermittent reinforcement. Or we run the risk of having the student engage in the behavior in specific environments or with specific staff because they "payoff" much like my lucky slot machine in Vegas.

#### **Redirection**

So, typically these strategies include redirecting the student to appropriate behavior. Typically I like using visuals like first-then, contingency maps, or just

showing them the visual we want them to follow.

### Tips on Redirection

1. Redirect TO the behavior you want to see not away from the problem. So instead of “stop running,” it’s “walk in class, please.” Similarly redirect to an action not the absence of an action. Stop X means that typically the student will hear X and that’s likely to be his next behavior. So always redirect to what you want him to do instead.
2. Use visuals. I use visuals for all students—not just students with autism. When someone is upset, their language comprehension is typically compromised to some degree. Consequently, your students aren’t processing language effectively or quickly because their mind is on other things. People process pictures faster than speech. In addition, using visuals takes the power struggle out of the situation many times. You can argue with someone telling you what to do. It’s hard to argue with picture directions.

In addition, visuals reduce the amount of attention we are paying to the behavior. Visuals can give the student information without attention. So if the behavior is maintained by any type of attention, it reduces the reinforcement of the negative behavior.

1. Wait a student out. First, give him or her time to process the direction or redirection you are giving. Second, if you are using visuals, you know you have given a clear direction; now you need to wait for him to follow through. Avoid repeating your direction or trying to argue or bargain with the student.
2. Individualize your redirection depending on the student. These are general guidelines that work for many, many students. but your student may have unique characteristics and you need to outline how to redirect within the responsive strategies so that everyone knows how to do it effectively.

### Assuring Safety

Finally, I need to say a few words about assuring that everyone remains safe. Sometimes you can include the strategies just as responsive strategies. But sometimes you need a written crisis plan. hopefully the strategies you have used

thus far will prevent it. but at some point the behavior may escalate to a level of a crisis.

I define a crisis as a situation in which the student is not responding to redirection and is attempting to hurt himself or others. If the student has ever demonstrated behavior like this, you want to have a crisis plan. It's a plan that tells everyone who may have to intervene with this student specifically what to do. It may or may not include removal or protection strategies depending on your situation and the nature of the behavior.

You have to make sure that the student is safe and those around him are safe. In a crisis, that should be your focus. not whether he understands what he is doing wrong. Also, if you have strategies in place to physically intervene with the student in some way, make sure you have had that conversation with the family BEFORE you implement the plan. And make sure that you and they are clear about when this might happen.

### **Crisis Strategies to Respond to Challenging Behavior**

When I write a crisis plan, there are specific strategies that (regardless of the training strategy used in the district) I insist on.

1. Avoid touching the student if at all possible. Only physically intervene when the student is in danger or placing someone else in danger and you don't have another alternative. If you can block the behavior and keep everyone safe, do that. If you can remove the other students and keep everyone safe, do that. Block and avoid as much as possible before you touch the student. Putting your hands on someone when they are upset is the quickest way to escalate the behavior, not make it better. It's true for all of us...when you are in a state of high emotion, someone touching you results in your becoming more upset not less. Especially if you aren't feeling safe at the time.
2. When intervening with a student in crisis, use visuals more than verbal interactions as much as possible. When a person is in a heightened state of emotion, it is harder to process language than pictures. If you are using any type of verbal redirection, use soft, quiet tones of voice. Getting louder to

match the loudness of the student will escalate the situation rather than de-escalate it.

3. Recognize that the crisis time is not the time that the student is going to learn how to behave better. It's not a learning opportunity. It's not a time to think you are giving consequences or meaningful responses to change the behavior for the future. Instead, it's a time to make sure everyone is safe.
4. Have a procedure in place for debriefing when the crisis is over. If you want to and it makes sense to include the student in the debriefing you can do that. However, don't make it a judgement session for him or her. Make it a productive, proactive session of brainstorming ways to avoid this happening in the future. I have a crisis incident form that I use with teams to have them review how the situation arose, what happened and to plan out what they are going to change to avoid it happening again. If I've included the student, I might use a social autopsy form to have them think through what the problem was and how to avoid it in the future. Whether you include the student or not, this debriefing should take place when everyone is calm. Don't do it right after the event. Give everyone, staff and student, time to get calm.

Where the student goes and what he or she does after the crisis is over depends on the function of the behavior and the plan that is developed. Sometimes it might make sense to go to a quiet area with easy tasks to slowly integrate back into the day. However, other students may need to go back to the situation they were in when the crisis occurred to complete the task they avoided with the behavior. Again, that depends on your FBA and your data and your team's decisions.

Thanks for joining me for this episode of the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. Make sure to check out the [free behavior videos](#). And I'd love to hear your thoughts about the podcast episode in our [free Facebook Group](#). And don't forget to [leave a review of the podcast on Apple iTunes](#).