

Behaviors That Interfere With Learning

BEHAVIOR

A. ABSTRACTING-SYMBOLIZATION

Inability to understand relationships, especially to relate a symbol to its object

- Inadequate language development
- Below-average reading skills
- Unable to associate sound with symbols

B. CATASTROPHIC REACTION

Sudden loss of control for no apparent reason (usually passes quickly)

- Bursts into tears
- Throws things
- Temper tantrums
- Uncontrolled or hysterical laughing
- Low frustration tolerance
- Trembling

C. CLASSIFICATION AND SORTING DIFFERENCES

Groups objects or ideas differently by using unusual sorting criteria

- May classify instruments according to color (i.e., silver, gold, black); size (i.e., small/large, skinny/fat); those with keys, bell-shaped ends, holes at top, and so forth

D. CONCRETE BEHAVIOR

Inability to generalize or perceive different aspects of objects, symbols, or ideas

- Interprets directions, stories literally
- Tends to be rigid due to highly unreliable feedback from perceptual processing
- Difficult transferring learning from one situation to a new one

SUGGESTED TEACHING TECHNIQUES

1. Use concrete and manipulative materials.
2. Give response choices.
 - a. Explain verbally.
 - b. Show through movement or dramatization.
 - c. Draw picture.
1. *Prevention*: reduce the possibility of panic and anxiety in new situations by structuring the activity so that it is less threatening.
 - a. Incorporate a familiar element (e.g., a partner the target child works well with, an instrument that has been successfully handled before, a familiar song).
 - b. Use multisensory approaches to new musical concepts (visual, tactile, motor).
 - c. use concrete and manipulative materials.
2. *First aid*: remain calm.
 - a. Comfort and reassure the child.
 - b. Change the activity.
 - c. If necessary, direct the child to an individual activity for a brief period to provide time for composure before rejoining the group (e.g., learning center activity, doing a special job for you).
1. Before deciding a response is incorrect (rather than different), consider all possible sorting criteria, or ask child to point out similar features.
1. Build confidence by using target child's strongest sensory learning mode to support weaker ones (i.e., if child is a visual learner, present concept visually first, then relate the auditory aspect).
2. Plan activities that involve classification and sorting to enable child to perceive similarities.
3. Introduce variations to routine procedures carefully and gradually, pointing out those aspects that will remain the same.
4. Avoid idiomatic and slang expressions that assign new meanings to common words (e.g., "bring out your part," "punch that note," "from the top").
5. Carefully plan step-by-step transfer of concepts and skills to new activities.

E. DISORGANIZATION

Inability to carry out a task or pay attention to the material at hand

- Responses appear random and meaningless
- Personal untidiness; messy desk, locker
- Disarray of work materials
- Inflexible to new situations

F. DISTRACTIBILITY

Constantly distracted by extraneous stimuli

- External distractions: room, hall, or outside noises; room temperature; open windows; fly buzzing; jewelry or printed clothing worn by teacher, etc.
- Internal distraction: uncomfortable clothing, hunger pains, headache, etc.
- All stimulus is given equal importance so attention jumps from one thing to another
- Inability to focus on the main activity
- Wants to touch everything

G. FIGURE-GROUND CONFUSION

Inability to separate background from foreground material; pays too much attention to insignificant details

Visual

- Frequently loses place in music
- Skips notes, measures, lines
- Unable to focus on important things on a crowded page

Auditory

- Unable to identify familiar instruments when disassembled (e.g., clarinet)
- Unable to block out background noise
- Unable to distinguish melody from accompaniment
- Unable to hear separate parts in vocal music, or instruments in ensemble
- May pay too much attention to an accompanying element, such as a rhythmic pattern, while being unaware of melodic theme in listening experiences

H. HYPERACTIVITY

Excessive or uncontrollable movement or activity without purpose

- Reacts to all stimuli
- Something constantly in motion (e.g., hands, feet, etc.)
- Leaves seat continually

1. Establish consistent procedures for routine events (i.e., open and close of class lesson, passing out music, use of instruments).

1. Structure activities tightly.

2. Give step-by-step directions.

3. Limit choices to two or three (i.e., "Shall we accompany this song with a drum or a tambourine?").

4. Reduce distractions (e.g., put away instruments, music as soon as activity is completed).

1. Simplify the environment by putting *everything* out of sight except the materials to be attended to.

2. Avoid "sensory overload: by limiting the number and dimension of sensory materials used in one activity (i.e., visuals, instruments, body movements, etc.).

3. Structure activities tightly and keep them short.

4. Use simple, attractive visual aids.

5. Frame blackboard, charts, or flannelboard work with bright colored border.

6. Position target child where you will have proximity control (i.e., arm's length away) without losing eye contact with entire class. A gentle touch is often effective in refocusing lost attention.

1. Use large, simple visual aids with few details (e.g., black-and-white line drawings, photographs)

2. Simplify music notation (e.g., two or three line staff; Kodaly system, etc.)

3. Frame parts of visuals or music page to aid in focusing.

4. Mask out extraneous visual material when possible (i.e., irrelevant exercises, pictures).

5. Use two-track stereo recording to highlight melody or accompaniment, specific instruments.

6. Have target child use earphones for recorded listening.

7. Demonstrate how instruments are assembled and taken apart.

8. Help child interpret visual and auditory materials through discussion of the main features.

9. Point out categories (e.g., instrument families, vocal classification, instrumental ensembles, etc.) and their similarities.

10. Add instruments to ensemble activities one at a time.

1. Simplify environment by reducing the number of things to look at, touch, or hear.

2. Plan many and varied activities of short duration with obvious goals.

3. Alternate quiet activities with physically active ones

- Unable to control motor responses, especially in slow tempo

4. Alternate fun, easy activities with difficult ones that require more concentration
5. Plan most activities with motor involvement that will keep hands busy (e.g., use two mallets, pantomime words to songs, draw melody in air, keep beat, trace or point to pictures or score).
6. Plan generous amounts of gross motor activities.
7. Gradually increase endurance for remaining in one position by developing and extending familiar activities that hold interest for the target child.

I. IMPULSIVITY

Acts on impulse due to inability to anticipate or evaluate consequences

- Runs to window
- Shouts out comments, answers
- Impelled to touch and handle things, especially in unfamiliar surroundings
- Overreacts

1. Exploit motor reactions by planning generous amounts of movement activities to help dispel excess energy.
2. Provide outlet for compulsive actions (e.g., action songs, creative movements).
3. Structure other activities so that those likely to trigger impulsive behavior are tightly controlled.
4. Keep materials (e.g., instruments, record player, etc.) well out of reach of target child and, if possible, out of sight when not in use.

J. PERSEVERATION

Unnecessary repetition of movement or speech

- Continues to sing after class has finished the song
- Continues to play after the activity has ended
- Continues movement after a "stop" signal
- Repeats some words two or three times when expressing ideas, relating stories, etc.

1. Signal the end of one activity and the beginning of another by collecting and putting away materials after each activity before bringing out those for the next.
2. Arrange activities within the lesson in a contrasting order (e.g., singing followed by movement, followed by listening).
3. Physically change positions with a new activity (e.g., stand up to sing a song; move closer to record player, etc.).

K. REACTION TIME

Delayed response to sensory stimulus

- Unable to perform on the beat
- May not react to an activity for several minutes, hours, or days

1. Give the child longer than usual to make a response. Never prompt or pressure a response.
2. Provide extra time in call-and-response or echo-type activities to enable target child to respond (i.e., measure rest between call and response; sing action songs in free rhythm).

L. RIGIDITIES

Inability to adapt to changes in the environment

- Resists doing things differently (i.e., new instrumentation, new words, etc.)
- Changes in room arrangement or schedule may be disturbing
- Changes in tempo, key, accompaniment style may be disturbing

1. Establish predictable routines for beginning and ending lesson (i.e., greeting, choice of song, etc.)
2. Use consistent management and control techniques.
3. Modify familiar activities only slightly, pointing out the features that will remain the same.

M. SHORT ATTENTION SPAN

Inability to concentrate more than a few minutes on one activity, even without distractions

- Suggests new activity before present one is completed
- Wanders off in the middle of an activity
- Complains of boredom or fatigue
- Watches clock
- Becomes irritable

1. Structure plans, space, and materials so that lesson flows smoothly from one activity to another.
2. Begin with very short, high interest activities, such as action or name songs, that focus on individuals.
3. Keep activities short and varied.
4. Repeat "good" performances frequently, thereby increasing their length.
5. When attention span begins to increase, select some ongoing activities suitable to expansion and development in subsequent lessons (e.g., compose new verses or accompaniments, create dances, musically adapt favorite poem or story).
6. Insist that each activity be completed before moving on to another.

N. VARIABLE PERFORMANCE LEVEL

Erratic achievement or behavior

- Steady improvement may suddenly be followed by stagnation or even regression to a lower level
- Understanding of a difficult concept may be demonstrated even though previous performances have failed to demonstrate understanding of more basic concepts

1. Plateaus are common. Child apparently needs time to assimilate, digest, and transfer new learning.
2. Do not leave an activity too soon because it doesn't seem to be accomplishing the desired goal. It sometimes takes a long time to get the *initial* response. Introducing new material will only confuse the objective.