



## How to address BIPs of students learning remotely

A student with a disability who was making progress at school thanks to a behavioral intervention plan may regress or exhibit different behaviors while starting to learn remotely and to cope with the reality of the pandemic. The existing BIP may not make a difference.

"Behaviors are context-specific, so a behavior plan developed at school isn't going to do much for us in the new environment," said Scott Singleton, a doctoral-level board certified behavior analyst, nationally certified school psychologist, and Oklahoma Behavior Consultation Project director at the University of Central Oklahoma. "The only function the BIP could serve may be to orientate us to what might be an issue, but we shouldn't expect behaviors to be exactly the same."

Instead, have general strategies ready for teachers and parents to use as challenging behavior emerges, then use what you observe to help develop a new behavior management system tailored to the student's new behavioral needs.

"I hate to say the word 'triage,' but that is the state we are in right now," said Kathryn Phillips, an educational and behavioral consultant and president of Total Behavior Management in Bend, Ore. "You can't deal with everything that was on the BIP, but you can address what is going on now."

Implement the following strategies to address challenging behavior during remote learning:

**☐ Set up a token economy.** Help parents set up a system of rewards for appropriate behavior, Singleton said. You may want to share a short video with tips, as Singleton's program has developed, or conduct a videoconference. Encourage the provision of activity-based rewards, such as time playing with Legos, after the student exhibits the appropriate behavior, such as following directions. "The key is the timing of the reinforcement," he said. "You want to make sure the reward is right after the behavior. The more the reward is delayed, the less likely there will be maintenance of the [appropriate] behavior next time."

Ultimately, the reinforcer is associating the completion of something with getting something and down the line that something will just be a good feeling, Singleton said. Let parents know "the reinforcement's job is to make that association," he said.

**☐ Institute planned ignoring.** If the student is making little noises during a videoconference or is playing with her mouse rather than attending to her assignment, teachers or parents can engage in planned ignoring, Singleton said. These are small behaviors and it may be better to tolerate the slight distraction than to give the student attention and reinforce the inappropriate behavior. Just be sure that the teacher or the student's parents have been clear beforehand about what they want the student to do. Rather than say, "Be a good student," teachers or parents have to be specific, saying, for example: "I want you to be in your seat with your body and head facing the screen, your eyes on the teacher (or assignment), and your hands near the keyboard."

Teachers or parents can associate a phrase, such as, "Get ready," with the expectations in case they can't ignore the behavior and must redirect the student, Singleton said. If the student starts to become disruptive, for example, the student's teacher or parents can say, "Get ready," and the student will know

what to do. "They want to redirect as quickly as possible and reinforce the right behavior as quickly as possible," he said. "Stopping to explain what the student should be doing ends up inadvertently rewarding the problem behavior."

☐ **Offer office hours and check-ins.** Set up times during the week when parents can call or meet virtually with their student's teacher or a school expert on behavior for consultation, Phillips said. "You can say from 3 to 4 p.m. on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, we can set up a time to talk," she said. Have colleagues use an app, such as Google Voice or Remind, if they don't want to share their personal phone numbers with parents.

Teachers should regularly check in with students and their families via videoconferences or calls to help them work on the students' social-emotional or behavioral IEP goals they had before school closures, Phillips said. For example, if the student is learning how not to use profanity when he becomes angry, teachers can offer parents de-escalation strategies and students self-regulation strategies.

☐ **Share a common language.** Let parents know the wording teachers and staff use in school to address their child's behavior so they can use the same language at home, Phillips said. For example, if the student's teacher says, "Remember that when you start to feel angry, you need to take a walk" when she sees the student may need a short break from learning, let the parents know they can use the same cue. This is better than trying to teach a student new language when she is experiencing so much other change, she said.

See also:

- [How to propel social-emotional learning in online education](#)
- [QUICK TIP: Give behavior-specific praise](#)
- [SEL SKILL BUILDER: Teaching students to manage stress](#)

*For more stories and guidance on this topic, access the [COVID-19 Roundup](#).*

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