

**INVESTIGATION OF STRATEGIES TO BUILD POSITIVE TEACHER-  
STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL  
DISTURBANCE: SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' OPINIONS**

by

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I would like to dedicate this special project to my loving and supportive parents.

Kevin & Debbie Sordelet

There is nothing stronger than the love a parent has for a child. My parents have had continuous dedication, support, guidance, encouragement, and love for me throughout my life. They have been there through the good and the bad, the crazy and the fun, and the moments that I needed them most. Without these two very important people, I know that I would not be the wife, mother, teacher, student, or person that I am today. I would not have been able to achieve my accomplishments without you.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Forming positive teacher-student relationships with students has been identified as a protective factor for students. However, many teachers struggle to form and maintain a positive relationship with students diagnosed with an emotional disturbance. It is essential that teachers have tools to help build and maintain positive teacher-student relationships.

This study focused on investigating licensed special education teachers that have taught seventh through twelve grade students with emotional disturbances. Out of the nine individuals who were sent the survey, all nine participants completed it. The survey was conducted to identify common negative behaviors and to identify what strategies teachers would like more information about to help them form positive teacher-student relationships. The survey consisting of short answer questions, multiple choice questions, yes or no questions, and questions that ask them to explain their answers.

The findings from the literature review and the survey data supported a need for a handbook to be created in order to inform special education teachers of ways to develop and maintain positive teacher-student relationships with students diagnosed with an emotional disturbance. Strategies are included in the handbook for teachers to reduce negative behaviors with students diagnosed with an emotional disturbance.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Problem

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), established in 1975, mandates that children and youth ages 3–21 with disabilities be provided a free and appropriate public-school education. (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2019). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2017* (NCES 2018-070). Although, students with disabilities are mandated to receive a free and appropriate education, teachers may find teaching students with emotional disturbance (ED) more challenging than other students without a disability.

Teachers may find it more challenging to teach students with ED, because of an increased risk of the student externalizing behaviors and causing a disturbance in the teacher-student relationship. However, research has shown that forming a positive relationship with a teacher can be seen as a protective factor in order to reduce poor academic achievement, suspension rates, feelings of incompetence academically, poor sense of self-esteem, and feelings of isolation; causing students to withdrawal and have negative school experiences (Gage, 2013).

Teachers may find it difficult to form positive teacher-student relationships, however many teachers validate the importance of forming positive relationships. According to Cook, et al. (2018), many teachers struggle to develop and maintain positive relationships when conflict occurs between the teacher and student, and teachers would benefit from teacher-student building strategies. Furthermore, findings suggest that teachers reported that changes in student classroom behaviors were linked to teacher-student relationships (Cook, et al., 2018). Therefore, educators need to be aware of relational strategies to implement in order to help develop and

maintain strong positive teacher-student relationships and encourage positive student academic and behavioral success.

### **Significance of Project**

Research has indicated that many classrooms have strained teacher-student relationships resulting in less classroom engagement, poorer academic performance, and increased aggression (Cook, et al., 2018). However, the quality of teacher-student relationships can help reduce aggression and the risk of developing undesired social relationships (Liu, Li, Chen, Qu, 2013). Therefore, forming positive teacher-student relationships can help students academically, emotionally, and socially. Unfortunately, little research was found to help teach strategies to form positive teacher-student relationships with students with emotional disturbances that is easy to understand and utilize with students on an individual basis. Furthermore, many studies indicated that additional research should be conducted to help teachers form relationships with adolescence to decrease problematic behaviors in the classroom.

In order to help educators to improve teacher-student relationships, teachers need to be aware of relational strategies to implement with students labeled with ED in various situations and encourage positive student academic and behavioral success. To help teachers build teacher-student relationships, a Purdue Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved study was conducted to collect data from current special education teachers that are working with students labeled with ED. Data was collected using an anonymous survey. The survey was constructed from a review of peer-reviewed journals. The teachers were asked questions about typical behavioral issues from students labeled with ED that may strain the teacher-student relationship, and what strategies they currently use to help the strained relationships. After data was collected, a

strategy handbook was created in order to help special education teachers improve relationships with their students based on various behavioral situations.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate what special education teachers report about the behaviors that seem to cause the most disruption in the classroom and strain the positive teacher-student relationships. The study helped identify which strategies would be beneficial to special education teachers to reduce negative behaviors and develop and maintain positive teacher-student relationships with students with an emotional disturbance.

### **Research Approach**

This project was created using a qualitative study approach help establish what behavioral issues cause the most conflict and cause strain on the teacher-student relationships. The project helped identify what strategies may be helpful for special education teachers to implement in order to help develop and maintain positive teacher-student relationships with students that have been labeled with ED. In order to assess responses, data was collected using an anonymous assessment survey (Appendix A). The licensed special education teachers from a school in a mid-western state of the United States were asked to complete the one-time survey. The participating teachers were contacted through email (Appendix B). The principal of the Jr./Sr. High School and the director of special education for the district gave permission for this survey (Appendix C). The survey questions were created based on information gathered through peer-reviewed articles.

The survey consisted of two short answer questions, five multiple choice questions with one question asking them to explain their reasoning, and three yes or no questions that ask them

to explain their answers. Three of the questions help identify what behaviors special education teachers report that could strain the positive teacher-student relationships. Three of the questions help identify what strategies special education teachers currently implement to help the strained relationships. Finally, four of the questions help identify what strategies would be beneficial to special education teachers to help gain more knowledge in regard to reducing negative behaviors that reduce the positive teacher-student relationships. These questions helped identify what strategies special education teachers could implement to help reduce negative behaviors while encouraging positive teacher-student relationships. This survey was confidential.

## **Literature Review**

### **Emotional Disturbance Definition**

Emotional Disturbance is a term used as a disability label from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). According to IDEA, “an emotional disturbance is defined as a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance:

- (A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
- (B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- (C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- (D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
- (E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.”

As defined by IDEA, “emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia but does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance,” IDEA under paragraph (C) (4)(i) of section 300.8 (c) (4).

### ***Characteristics of Emotional Disturbance***

IDEA stated that an emotional disturbance can impact an individual beyond emotional distress. ED can affect an individual’s physical, social, or cognitive abilities. Students with ED may exhibit behaviors such as hyperactivity and aggression. Students with Ed can also withdrawal, show immaturity, and learning difficulties. Finally, some students may exhibit distorted thinking, excessive anxiety, bizarre motor acts and abnormal mood swings.

### **Teacher-Student Relationships**

Teacher- Student Relationships are defined as the meaningful interactions students and teachers have with each other. These relationships are based on moment to moment repeated interactions between the teacher and the student (Claessens, et al., 2017).

### ***Why Are Teacher-Student Relationships Important***

According to Mahler, Großschedl, & Harm, (2018), the teacher is one of the most important factors when determining student’s performance. The teacher’s ability to motivate students to learn and have self-efficacy has been linked to characteristics of an effective teacher and his or her ability to form positive teacher-student relationships.

It appears that there are multiple factors that could influence students with emotional disturbances academically, developmentally, and socially. However, many studies have found

that a positive teacher-adolescent relationship is an important protective factor in helping the students reach success (Majorano, Brondino, Morelli, & Maes, 2017).

Students that are able to develop and maintain a positive teacher- student relationship with teachers are more likely to form supports, have better academic achievements, and less emotional distress. The teacher-student relationship has also had strong influences on student development and adjustment. Previous research has shown the importance of interpersonal relationships in relation to positive academic outcomes. It has been found that students that have been able to have positive interactions with a teacher have more knowledge about themselves and can better function in the classroom (Martin and Collie 2019).

According to Liu, et al., (2013), the teacher-student relationship is an important part of the student's school experience and academic-related emotions. Liu, et al., (2013) continued to explain that forming positive relationships with teachers help build resilience. Furthermore, academically at-risk learners' perceptions of teachers as supportive can impact students' academic effort in the classroom and improve their confidence in their abilities; leading to higher achievements (Liu, et al., 2013).

### **Research Questions**

1. What behaviors do special education teachers report that could strain the positive teacher-student relationships?
2. What strategies do special education teachers currently implement to improve the strained relationships?
3. What strategies would be beneficial to special education teachers to help gain more knowledge about reducing negative behaviors that reduce positive teacher-student relationships?

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Population**

#### ***Teachers***

Participants in this study were licensed special education teachers gathered from a school in a mid-western state of the United States. Nine participants were contacted for the study and all nine participants agreed to participate in the survey. There were three male special education teachers and six female special education teachers participating in the study. The teachers interact and teach seventh through twelve grade students labeled with an emotional disturbance.

### **Site of the Study**

#### ***School***

The Jr./Sr. High School serves students grades seven through twelve in the communities in five counties. It is a full-accredited school, which educates around 600 students. The teacher to student ratio is 15.21 to one student. The students body consist of 49.9% male and 50.1% female. The school consists of 1% Native American/Alaskan, 11.1% Black, 9.1 % Asian/Pacific islanders, 4.8 % Hispanic, 69.3% White, and 4.7% Multiracial.

### **Recruitment and Data Collection Procedures/Methods**

Participants were recruited using a recruitment email. The email requested their assistance in completing a survey anonymously. The survey questions were attached to the email. After completing the survey, participants were asked to print off the survey questions and answers, place them in a sealed envelope, and place it in the investigator's mailbox that is located in the school office.



## **Data Analysis Procedures/Methods**

After completed surveys were collected, the investigator reviewed and document the responses. The information was categorized according to the responses and then used to help create a teaching handbook to help special education teachers improve positive relationships with students that have been labeled with an emotional disturbance.

## **Timeline**

Recruitment letters and survey questions were emailed to participants three weeks before they are asked to respond. After collecting the completed surveys, the survey questions were analyzed and used to help develop a teaching handbook. The results of the survey are displayed in Chapter 4-Results. Appendix D consists of a more detailed timeline.

## **Outline for Development of the Special Project**

The special project handbook was developed to help secondary special education teachers utilize strategies to help develop positive relationships with students that have been labeled with an emotional disturbance. The handbook was intended to help secondary special education teachers help students improve academically and socially by forming positive relationships.

## **Definition of Terms**

***Relationships***- A dyadic system in which two individuals engage in reciprocal interactions. Cook, et. al, (2018)

***Teacher-Student Relationship***- generalized interpersonal meaning student and teachers attach to their interactions with each other. Claessens, et al., (2017)

***Belonging***- an individual's sense of connectedness to another person or social setting.

***Social belonging***- Dyadic interactions that make children safe, secure, and protected Cook, et. al, (2018)

***Praise-*** Express warm approval or admiration

***Open ended questions-*** These questions do not lead the person being asked, are objective, and requires an explanation

***Reflective listening-*** is a communication strategy: it helps to understand a speaker's idea. The listener then offers the idea back to the speaker to confirm the idea has been understood correctly

***Validation statements-*** occurs when we confirm, mostly through words, that other people can have their own emotional experiences

***Reprimand-*** a express disapproval, especially a formal one by a person in authority

***Complaint-*** a statement that a situation is unsatisfactory or unacceptable

## **CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

Adolescence can be a very confusing and difficult time for young adults. Students are learning how to become independent and construct a sense of self. It is a time when children are trying to separate themselves from their parental figures and assimilate their peers, because parents are no longer the biggest impact on their child's behavior. Students are beginning to spend more time at school with their peers and teachers than at home with their parents. It is a time that peer and teacher interactions start to become more important than previous years due to developmental changes. However, having an emotional disability can make forming positive relationships very difficult; due to internalizing or externalizing emotions and behaviors. It was reported that teachers understand that students with an emotional disturbance may find it difficult to form positive relationships and they understand the importance of forming positive teacher-student relationships, however many teachers struggle to develop and maintain positive teacher-student relationships over time (Mahler, et. al, 2018).

The purpose of this study was to investigate what special education teachers report about the behaviors that seem to cause the most disruption in the classroom and strain the positive teacher-student relationships. The study helped identify which strategies would be beneficial to special education teachers to reduce negative behaviors and develop and maintain positive teacher-student relationships with students with an emotional disturbance within various situations.

### **Research Questions**

1. What behaviors do special education teachers report that could strain the positive teacher-student relationships?
2. What strategies do special education teachers currently implement to improve the strained relationships?
3. What strategies would be beneficial to special education teachers to help gain more knowledge about reducing negative behaviors that reduce positive teacher-student relationships?

### **Students with an Emotional Disturbance**

Students that struggle with emotional disturbances face many challenges that other students don't typically encounter at school. Due to their disability students labeled with an emotional disturbance experience more relational conflicts, have a higher rate of suspension days, and are more likely to drop-out of school. According to Abrams and Kaslow, (1976), students with disabilities typically experience lower self-esteem, poorer emotional well-being, anxiety, depression, anger, and disruptive behavior; causing emotional disabilities as well. Students labeled with an emotional disturbance often push teachers away and refuse help, because they often have already suffered stigmatizing effects due to encountering ongoing difficulties in their school performance; causing poor self-esteem and a lack of confidence (Ginieri-Coccossis, et al., 2013). Furthermore, students labeled with an emotional disturbance may easily become frustrated or overwhelmed due to their inability to control their emotions. According to Majorano, et al. (2017), students labeled with a disability typically invest more time and energy in schoolwork; however, they still receive fewer positive results than their peers,

causing negative effects on their academic abilities and social and personal perceptions. Therefore, these students would benefit from the encouragement and praise from a trusted adult. However, many students with emotional disturbances face barriers that prevent them from developing positive teacher-student relationships.

### **Barriers to Teacher - Student Relationships**

Many professionals assume that forming a relationship with a student can be difficult due to the time restraints in their schedule. Some professionals have developed a misconception that they have little interactions with a student in the classroom or within the building, so they are incapable of forming positive teacher-student interactions. However, according to Cook, et. al, (2018), relationships are characterized by perceptions and internal feelings towards one another, as well as the quality and quantity of interactions between two parties.

Another misconception that is commonly found is that students that are more aggressive, disruptive, or defiant towards teachers do not have a desire to form a positive relationship with a teacher. However, students that have behavioral concerns or are more aggressive still have a desire to belong and want to be accepted by their teachers and peers. These students may have behavioral problems and have difficulty expressing their emotions to teachers and peers, because the students' sense of belonging has been harmed due to negative interactions with adults (Cook, et al. 2018).

### **Influences on Teacher-Student Relationships**

#### **Social Influences**

Friendships are an important source of support during adolescence. Humans have an innate desire to be social creatures and seek acceptance by their peers. Peers are important,

because peers can provide support, model effective coping skills, and give a sense of belonging. Furthermore, there is a large amount of research that states that a belonging is a fundamental human need and an important factor of healthy development (Cook, et al. 2018). However, students that have ED may not have been taught the essential social skills necessary to help develop peer friendships as a young child. Students labeled with an emotional disturbance often have lower self-esteem and feel different than their peers; they often struggle within peer relationships. It was reported that children with learning disabilities often feel lonely, less popular, and struggle to communicate with others (Majorano, et al., 2017).

Students may struggle with peer interactions, because research has identified that quality child-parent interactions are associated with social competence and adjustment (Lin, 2018). However, studies suggest that students with ED struggle to form parent- child relationships; causing them to lack appropriate social skills needed to form positive peer groups. Therefore, it becomes the educator's responsibility to teach students with emotional disturbances how to interact with peers.

Lin (2018) explained that among other variables academic status is a determinant of friendship. Furthermore, people make friends with people that are most available to them. Therefore, students that have been labeled with an emotional disturbance and often externalize or internalize are more likely to develop friendships with other students that are not socially adjusted and have similar behavioral problems.

### **Environmental Influences**

According to Abrams and Kaslow (1976), a reason why students may have delays and disabilities is because children are often a product of their environment because of the environment's insensitivity, acts before understanding, imposes rather than guides, and punishes

(Abrams & Kaslow, 1976). Therefore, students that have a positive environment and a positive relationship with an adult have an advantage compared to those that do not have positive environment or positive relationships. Students that have not been able to form positive relationships then become accustomed to unsupportive environments and view anyone trying to help them as enemies, causing many teachers and aids to struggle to motivate and educate a child that has grown accustomed to an unsupportive environment at home and at school.

### **Family Influences**

Students labeled with an emotional disturbance often have difficulties that go beyond academics and school. Many students labeled with an emotional disturbance often report family conflicts as well as peer conflicts and academic difficulties. Many children labeled with an emotional disturbance report having poor relationships with their parents as well as their teachers. However, according to attachment theory, teacher-student relationships could be considered extensions of parent-child relations and help the development of critical social, behavioral, and self-regulatory competence needed to form positive relationships long term.

Students labeled with an emotional disturbance experience a higher level of dissatisfaction within their relationships with family and friends (Ginieri-Coccossis, et al., 2013). Due to dissatisfaction within the parent-child relationship, students that may have grown accustomed to an unsupportive environment may struggle to communicate with their parents. Therefore, having a positive parent and teacher relationship is also essential in the potential success of a student. Parents and teachers must work together in order to help create the best outcome for the student. However, every parent is as unique as each student. Teachers and parents have to create an open non-threatening environment with good communication. It is important that teachers take the time to get to know the parents and their views as well as their

students. As professionals, it is important for teachers to have an open mind and engage the parents without imposing their own beliefs, styles, and values (Connor & Cavendish, 2018).

Some students with ED may struggle to form healthy relationships with others, because of adverse experiences at home. It is thought that past negative experiences can affect a child's ability to regulate their emotions, control internal and external behaviors, and form relationships with others. Unfortunately, the effects of traumatic experiences cause children to struggle more academically, behaviorally, and have negative school experiences compared to their peers that do not experience trauma.

### **Economical/ Racial Influences**

There are many contributing factors that may make it difficult for students to form positive teacher-student relationships. However, studies suggest that economically and racially diverse students tend to have a weaker relationship with their teachers than nondiverse students (Cook, et al., 2018). These weaker relationships could also help explain less engagement in the classroom and larger gaps in academic performance; causing them to have low self-esteem and feelings of not belonging.

### **Teacher Influences**

There are several contributing factors that have an impact on the teacher-student relationship, however teacher influences are essential to take into consideration when attempting to improve the teacher-student relationship. There are many possible reasons why teachers choose to work in education. However, positive relationships with students are one of the primary reasons that teachers stay in the profession. It was explained that positive teacher-student relationships are one of the most important sources of enjoyment and motivation for



teaching, and teachers develop intrinsic rewards from forming positive relationships with their students (Claessens, et al., 2017). Further, teachers that appear to develop negative teacher-student relationships have more stress and negative emotions towards teaching; making it more difficult for teachers to work with students that have an emotional disturbance (Claessens, et al., 2017).

In a study conducted by Claessens, et al., (2017), teachers were interviewed to investigate the teachers' perceptions of teacher and student interpersonal behavior in positive and problematic relationships. The study focused on teacher perception of their self-proclaimed positive and problematic relationship with individual students. It was explained that teachers' perceptions are important due to the influence on the development of these relationships and their influence on teacher wellbeing. Findings of the study explained that different teachers can report significantly different levels of stress in a relationship to the same student based on the teacher perceptions. And, the teachers who reported frequent disruptive behaviors reported feeling emotionally drained and had more negative attitudes toward their students (Claessens, et al., 2017).

Although teacher-student relationships are essential to engaging students, there are many variables that may influence the teacher's ability to build rapport and encourage positive academic, emotional, and social growth with students with an emotional disturbance. Teacher bias, beliefs, values, and the teacher's ability to motivate students may contribute to the teacher's ability to form positive teacher-student relationships (Mahler, et al., 2018).

According to Mahler, et al. (2018), the teacher is one of the most important factors when determining student's performance. The teacher's ability to motivate students to learn and have self-efficacy has been linked to characteristics of an effective teacher and his or her ability to

form positive teacher-student relationships. A study conducted by Mahler, et al. (2018), investigated the relationship between student's performance and enthusiasm for the subject being taught based on the teacher's motivational orientations. The study investigated teacher's self-efficacy as a teacher's belief in his or her ability to be a successful teacher by performing specific behaviors. It has been found that self-efficacy is relevant to teachers' professional engagement, effective instructional strategies, and openness to demanding students (Mahler, et al., 2018). Further, teacher enthusiasm is a contributing factor to a teacher's motivation to teach students. Enthusiasm that was found to have an impact on student motivation was subject-specific enthusiasm. Teacher enthusiasm can help increase students' attention and the teacher may become a role model creating enthusiastic behaviors from their students. Therefore, teacher enthusiasm appears to be a contributing factor of the effectiveness a teacher will have when developing and maintaining positive relationships with students.

### **Protective Factors**

It appears that there are multiple factors that could influence students with emotional disturbances academically, developmentally, and socially. However, many studies have found that a positive teacher-adolescent relationship is an important protective factor in helping the students reach success (Majorano, et al., 2017).

Research has proven the importance of developing and maintaining positive relationships for children. Cook, et al. (2018), explained that research in developmental psychology has identified that forming positive relationships with an adult can improve emotional competence, prosocial behavior, and academic performance. Furthermore, Neuroscientific research has revealed that healthy brain development requires positive social relationships and that these positive

relationships can repair areas of the brain affected by trauma. Finally, social psychological research states that relationships are an important factor in motivation.

Based on previous research, students that are able to develop and maintain a positive teacher- student relationship with teachers are more likely to form supports, have better academic achievements, and less emotional distress. The teacher-student relationship has also had strong influences on student development and adjustment. Previous research has shown the importance of interpersonal relationships in relation to positive academic outcomes. It has been found that students that have been able to have positive interactions with a teacher have more knowledge about themselves and can better function in the classroom (Martin & Collie, 2019). Further, students that display externalizing behaviors in the classroom often have weaker relationships with their teachers (Cook, et al. 2018).

Teacher-student relationships can help students be more successful in the classroom, because students with a positive teacher-student relationship are more likely to have similar positive values and beliefs as their teachers. Furthermore, these beliefs and values can help direct cognition and behavior such as increased persistence, self-regulation, and goal striving, and promote positive academic-related emotions (Martin & Collie, 2019).

According to Liu, et al., (2013), the teacher-student relationship is an important part of the student's school experience and academic-related emotions. Liu, et al., (2013), continued to explain that forming positive relationships with teachers help build resilience. Research has demonstrated that when a student with an ED has positive feelings, it is related to student motivation and interest in school. It was explained that similar to secure attachments with parents, positive teacher-student relationships may help students form the safety, security, and

protection that is essential for children to engage in appropriate social activities (Liu, et al., 2013).

If students are not able to form positive relationships, students may form negative feelings about academic achievement (Weber, Wagner, & Ruch, 2016). Teacher-student relationships are valued due to the belief that resilience comes from positive human experiences and students that have experienced negative interactions may develop well if they can form positive teacher-student relationships (Liu, et al., 2013). Furthermore, academically at-risk learners' perceptions of teachers as supportive can impact students' academic effort in the classroom and improve their confidence in their abilities; leading to higher achievements (Liu, et al., 2013).

Studies previously conducted have shown support that children incapable of forming positive relationships with a teacher will be more influenced by school experiences, and students that can form a positive teacher-student relationship may find it easier to seek guidance and support needed for critical development (Liu, et al., 2013). Furthermore, teacher-student relationships are especially important for children considered at risk, because forming positive teacher-student relationships can be seen as a protective factor. It was reported that kindergarten students that displayed internalizing and externalizing behaviors eliminated their risk of developing undesired social relationships after forming a relationship with an emotionally supportive teacher (Liu, et al., 2013).

In a study by Martin and Collie, (2019), results concluded that the more linear association with an increase in the number of positive relationships with teachers, the greater school engagement. It was explained that the classrooms with more emotionally supportive teacher-

student interactions were more likely to have higher levels of autonomy and more supportive peer relationships and improved student engagement (Martin & Collie, 2019).

### **Strategies to Develop Teacher-Student Relationships**

There are many strategies that have been proven to help form positive teacher-student relationships. However, these strategies are rarely utilized due to lack of knowledge, resources, or the ability to understand what strategy to use in various situations. Many strategies suggest communitive strategies. Communitive strategies refer to ways that a teacher can communicate with a student using strategies to help improve the teacher-student relationship. Cook, et al. (2018), identified communitive strategies as taking responsibility and ownership for the problem, validating the student's feelings with empathy, and solving problems collaboratively to identify an agreed upon solution. Furthermore, teachers should be aware of their nonverbal communication that students may perceive as threatening.

Although communicative strategies sound very straight forward and easy to apply, these strategies do not take into account the relationship damage that may have already occurred. Teachers and students may have resentment and struggle to communicate with each other. Teachers may find it difficult to identify what strategy to use during certain behavioral issue, conflicts, or within the damaged relationship. Students may push the teacher away even further and refuse to engage in any kind of relationship with the teacher in order to even begin the relationship building process.

Other strategies have gone into more details regarding effect strategies; however, they also lack the instructional ability to teach teachers how to use them in various situations with students. For example, Establish-Maintain- Restore is a great method used to help improve teacher-student relationships. It identifies strategies to utilize to establish, maintain, and restore a

relationship, however it also does not go into depth about why these strategies are important or how to use these strategies in various situations when students are having behavioral issues or being defiant.

### **Establish-Maintain-Restore**

Establish- maintain- restore (EMR) is a method to help improve teacher-student relationship and students' classroom behavior (Cook, et al. 2018). The study conducted by Cook, et al. (2018), was aimed to evaluate the effects of the EMR method for improving teacher-student relationships while providing elementary teachers development and support. The EMR method was connected to significant improvements academically, behaviorally, and in the teacher- reported teacher-student relationships (Cook, et al. 2018).

### ***Establish Phase***

Developing and maintaining a relationship with a student can be very challenging. Every student has unique needs and perceptions. Teachers have to actively and purposely use strategies to help form a relationship with each individual student. Students may or may not be receptive to these strategies initially. Some students may show resistance and avoid these interactions or perceive them to be threatening. Therefore, it is important that teachers are persistent and find out individual needs of students to continue utilizing these strategies to develop a relationship.

Some common strategies that teachers may use to help form a relationship with a student are praise, open-ended questions, reflective listening, validation statements, and expression of enthusiasm and interest. It is also important to identify a time to meet individually with a student to discuss interests, gather, review, and reference information about a student,

acknowledge and positively greet each student at the door using their name, use secondhand compliments to recognize and acknowledge the students (Cook, et al. 2018).

### ***Maintaining Phase***

Once a relationship is established it is essential that the teacher maintains that relationship using ongoing interactions (Cook, et al. 2018). Maintaining a positive teacher-student relationship is important, because the established relationship can diminish over time. Students may begin to perceive interactions to have more criticism, disapproval, and judgment as the student has undesired behaviors. In a study conducted by Cook, et. al (2018), it was explained that while maintaining a relationship with a student, it is important to pay attention to the number of positive interactions and negative interactions that occur between the teacher and student. Cook, et al. (2018), suggested that the maintain phase ratio of positive to negative interactions is 5 to 1. Further, it was explained that teachers should successfully have positive interactions with a student at least five times for every one negative interaction that occurs such as a reprimand, complaint, disapproving statement, or punitive interaction (Cook, et al. 2018). Some additional strategies that teachers may use to help maintain a relationship with a student are sending positive notes home to parents stating what the student said, did, or achieved in class and checking in on the relationship by having a brief interaction to see how the student is doing or ask about specific things that may be important to the student; e.g., sports, clubs, peers.

### ***Restorative Phase***

The restorative phase is important, because it can help repair any distress on the relationships between the teacher and student after a negative interaction occurs. Cook, et al. (2018), explained that there is evidence that suggests that restorative practices help improve the

relationship between teacher-student relationships. The goal of the restorative phase is to help teachers become aware of possible negative interactions that may diminish the previously established positive relationship. It may be difficult for teachers to identify when a restorative phase is necessary, however students typically give cues that they are losing engagement, such as being defiant and disrespectful towards the teacher.

According to Cook, et al. (2018), some common strategies that teachers may use to help restore a relationship with a student are to deliberately interact with the student to repair any damage to the relationship, take responsibility for your part in the negative interaction, be empathetic, let go of the previous incident and starting fresh, communicate desire to have the student in class, and problem solve together by asking for input from the student.

### **Analysis of Previously Published Resources**

Although it is well known that forming and maintaining a positive teacher-student relationship is important, there are few researches- to- practices examples of how teachers can form positive relationships in teacher professional development (Cook, et al. 2018). Many teacher development programs have discussions about the importance of forming positive teacher-student relationships and give generalized strategies that may help improve these teacher- student relationships. Teachers are often provided with books and manuals about what to expect in the classroom, how to be prepared and organized materials and lessons, and/or how to manage behavioral issues. These resources are helpful; however, they do not teach teachers what they can do when they are being yelled at, cursed at, told no, or even threatened by a student that has an emotional disturbance.

After reviewing resources to help guide teachers, such as, *How To Deal With Students Who Challenge and Defy Authority* and *101 Answers For New Teachers and Their Mentors*, it



was concluded that teachers need to be provided with more resources on how to deal with specific common behavioral issues. Strengths of these resources are that they help teachers know what to expect while teaching in general and they give teachers advice to help them manage the classroom, plan lessons, get students excited about learning, and give tips to help teachers manage behavioral problems for the average student. The resources reviewed gave great advice to help teachers build relationships with students and teach positive behaviors, however their weaknesses are that they do not go into detail about managing ongoing behavioral issues with students that have an emotional disturbance. Further, the resources addressed behavioral problems that are typically minor and common for the average student. The resources do not take into account that students with an emotional disturbance struggle to regulate their emotions and often have much more severe behavioral problems than the average student. Furthermore, students with an emotional disturbance do not typically respond to the average disciplinary techniques provided. The resources do not explain how difficult it can be to maintain a positive teacher- student relationship with a student that easily becomes overwhelmed and starts to cuss, yell, or be verbally and physically aggressive towards peers and staff members. Teachers need advice to help them to understand that students with an emotional disturbance struggle to control their emotions. Teachers need help understanding that behaviors from these students are not personal and they should not avoid or dismiss students that have these behavioral concerns.

It is essential that teachers have resources so that they do not allow themselves to stop trying to build relationships with these students, because often these are the students that would benefit most from teacher-student relationships. Therefore, teachers would benefit most from learning behavior and situation specific strategies to help them build relationships with students

while still managing behavioral concerns at school. Having specific behavioral based resources to help manage behavioral issues from students with an emotional disturbance can help teachers so that they do not create a power struggle with the student or feel at loss on how to help a student that has repetitive behavioral concerns regardless of the relationships that they have already built with a particular student. Therefore, it is important that teachers have more behavior specific resources to help student with an emotional disturbance that focuses on helping teachers understand the reasons for the behavior and gives strategies that teachers can implement to help them form and maintain a positive relationship.

### **Conclusion**

There are many contributing factors that many influence a student's ability to form relationships with others. Studies have demonstrated the importance of forming positive teacher-student relationships. These relationships have been proven to be a protective factor to help students academically, emotionally, and socially. Unfortunately, little research was found to help teachers utilize specific behavior-based strategies to help form positive teacher-student relationships with students that have behavioral concerns. Furthermore, many studies indicated that additional research should be conducted to help teachers utilize the strategies being offered to help form relationships with adolescence and decrease problematic behaviors in the classroom. Therefore, a specific behavior-based manual was created to help teachers develop and maintain relationships with their students before, during, and after a behavioral issue has occurred. The manual is situation and behavior based to help address specific behavioral concerns while still building and maintain positive teacher-student relationships.

## **CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this project is to develop a handbook that informs special education teachers how to utilize identified strategies in specific situations when working with a student that has been labeled with an emotional disturbance. These strategies would be beneficial to develop and maintain positive teacher-student relationships with students with an emotional disturbance while reducing negative behaviors.

In order to achieve this, a survey was conducted to help identify which strategies would be beneficial to special education teachers to reduce negative behaviors and develop and maintain positive teacher-student relationships with students with an emotional disturbance. This study was also based on peer-reviewed literature review of scholarly journals, and books related to students with emotional disturbances and strategies to help improve the teacher-student relationships. Information for this study was collected from special education teachers using a needs assessment survey. The survey helped identify what strategies special education teachers could implement to help reduce negative behaviors while encouraging positive teacher-student relationships. This project offers direction to special education teachers by briefly explaining the importance of forming and maintaining a positive teacher-student relationship and providing effective, evidence-based strategies that could be implemented with specific behavioral issues or situations to help improve a strained teacher- student relationship with a student with an emotional disturbance.

This project was created to be a strategic tool for special education teachers to utilize when trying to improve a strained teacher-student relationship with a student that has an emotional disturbance.

1. What behaviors do special education teachers report that could strain the positive teacher-student relationships?
2. What strategies do special education teachers currently implement to improve the strained relationships?
3. What strategies would be beneficial to special education teachers to help gain more knowledge about reducing negative behaviors that reduce positive teacher-student relationships?

### **Participants**

Participants in this study were licensed special education teachers. The teachers interacted and taught seventh grade through twelve grade students labeled with an emotional disturbance. Nine participants were contacted to participate in the study, and all nine teachers participated in the study. Two of the teachers worked only with students labeled with an emotion disturbance in a small group setting. The other seven teachers worked with students with and without an emotional disturbance in small and large group settings. Some of the teachers had an additional teacher or a paraprofessional in the room during certain periods to help facilitate the needs of students. There were three male special education teachers and six female special education teachers participating in the study.

### **Setting**

The survey that was collected for this study was gathered from a school in a mid-western state of the United States. The School is one of five secondary schools in the county. The Jr./Sr. High School serves students grades 7-12 in the communities in five counties. The city the school

is located in was founded in 1851. The community has around 1,200 residents within town limits and many more county residents calling it home. It is a full-accredited school, which educates around 600 students. The teacher to student ratio is 15.21 to one student. The students body consist of 49.9% male and 50.1% female. The school consists of 1% Native American/Alaskan, 11.1% Black, 9.1 % Asian/Pacific islanders, 4.8 % Hispanic, 69.3% White, and 4.7% Multiracial.

The school contains an Emotional Disturbance Day Treatment Program. Students with a severe emotional disturbance within the district are relocated and educated at the Jr./ Sr. High School to help meet the educational needs of these students. The program currently contains 29 students labeled with an emotional disturbance. Of the 29 students, seven of the students are on a reduced or shortened day schedule and two students were recently placed on homebased serveries due to behavioral issues. Nineteen students were labeled with a Code 52: (Separate Class)- in general education less than 40% of the day. Six students were labeled with a Code 51: (Resource room)- in a general education classroom for 40% to 79% of the day. Two Students were labeled with a Code 50: (General education classroom)- in general education classroom for 80 % or more of the day. Students participating in the program that are taking classes with the general education population are offered paraprofessional help or are co-taught to help assist them academically and behaviorally.

There are also twenty-three other students in the building that are labeled with an emotional disability, however, they do not participate in the program. These students' emotional needs do not justify participating in the Day Treatment Program; however, they do receive services provided staff with a license in special education in the general education population.

These students have accommodation based on their Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) to help them be more successful academically, emotionally, and behaviorally.

### **Recruitment and Data Collection Procedures**

To assess the special education teachers' responses and needs, data was collected using an anonymous assessment survey (Appendix A). The licensed special education teachers were asked to complete the one-time survey. The participating teachers were contacted through email (Appendix B). The survey took no longer than 30 minutes for the special education teachers to complete. Teachers were asked to return the survey within a week after receiving the recruitment email. Once the survey was completed, participants printed off the survey, placed the survey in a sealed envelope, and placed it in the investigator's mailbox, located in the school office. The assessment surveys were then collected by the investigator and kept confidential in a locked filing cabinet for the duration of the study. The teachers were not asked to provide any identifying information on the survey. The principal of the Jr./Sr. High School and the director of special education for the County Schools gave permission for this survey (Appendix C).

After the data was gathered, the results for each question were reviewed, transcribed, and organized into a Microsoft Word document. The data collected from the Teacher- Student Relationship needs assessment surveys were then reviewed and used to create a handbook about strategies that could be utilized to help form and maintain a positive teacher-student relationship with a student with an emotional disturbance.

The Institutional Review Board at Purdue University and the Special Education committee at Purdue University, Fort Wayne granted approval for this study (Appendix H). The required CITI training (Appendix F) has also been successfully passed.

## **Relationship Survey**

The purpose of this study was to investigate what special education teachers report about the behaviors that seem to cause the most disruption in the classroom and strain the positive teacher-student relationships. The study helped identify which strategies are beneficial to special education teachers to reduce negative behaviors and develop and maintain positive teacher-student relationships with students with an emotional disturbance.

The needs assessment survey consisted of four sections. The first section of the survey included detailed instructions for the participants to follow. Participants received instructions that instructed them to complete the survey questions with their best knowledge and ability. It was explained that the survey is completely anonymous and does not collect identifiable data. Participants were not asked to share any personal information. The participants were not required to complete the survey questions, and they could choose not to complete the survey if they desired. When the participants finished the survey, they printed the survey, placed it in a sealed envelope, and put it in Jessica Gettys's mailbox in the school office in order to protect the identity of the participants. All completed surveys were kept confidential.

The second section of the survey had three questions to help identify what behaviors special education teachers report that could strain the positive teacher-student relationships. The questions for the need assessment survey were based on information gathered from peer-reviewed, scholarly literature.

Question one, two, and three of the surveys asked special education teachers what negative behaviors are frequently displayed by a student with an emotional disturbance in class, how does the negative behavior affect your ability to teach, and if these behaviors cause teacher frustration in the classroom. These questions are important to the handbook, because it helps

identify problematic behaviors that may strain the teacher-student relationship as well (Mahler, et al., 2018).

The third section consisted of three questions to help identify what strategies special education teachers currently implement to help the strained relationships. The questions for the need assessment survey were based on information gathered from peer-reviewed, scholarly literature.

Question four, six, and seven of the survey asked special education teachers how often the teacher redirects negative behaviors from students with an emotional disturbance for each behavior, what evidence based strategies are currently implemented to reduce negative behaviors in the classroom, and what discipline strategies are being used most often as a consequence for the negative behavior. These questions are important to the handbook, because they help identify strategies special education teachers may currently implement to help the strained relationships (Martin & Collie, 2019; Cook, et al., 2018).

The fourth section consisted of four questions to help identify what strategies would be beneficial to special education teachers to help gain more knowledge in regard to reducing negative behaviors that reduce the positive teacher-student relationships. The questions for the need assessment survey were based on information gathered from peer-reviewed, scholarly literature.

Question five, eight, nine, and ten of the survey asked special education teachers if they think that the current redirection or discipline strategies helps reduce negative behaviors of students with an emotional disturbance, what strategies would you like more information about to create a positive teacher-student relationship, and what positive behaviors do you believe a teacher should teach students with an emotional disturbance to help them function better in the



classroom. These questions are important to the handbook, because they help identify what strategies would be beneficial to special education teachers to help gain more knowledge in regard to reducing negative behaviors that reduce positive teacher-student relationships, what strategies special education teachers may be using to improve strained relationships (Martin and Collie, 2019) (Weber, et al., 2016). (Martin, et al., 2019).

Table 1. Survey Questions

Survey Questions	Corresponding Research Questions	Response Format	Sources
What negative behaviors are frequently displayed by a student with an emotional disturbance in class? (Mark all that apply)	What behaviors do special education teachers report that could strain the positive teacher-student relationships?	Multiple Choice	Cook, et. al, (2018)
What negative behaviors of students with emotional disturbance affect your ability to teach during class instruction?	What behaviors do special education teachers report that could strain the positive teacher-student relationships?	Multiple Choice	Cook, et. al, (2018)
What negative behaviors of students with an emotional disturbance cause you to be frustrated in class?	What behaviors do special education teachers report that could strain the positive teacher-student relationships?	Multiple Choice	Mahler, D., Großschedl, J., & Harms, U. (2018).
How often do you redirect negative behaviors from students with an emotional disturbance for each behavior? 1-2 times per class period 3-5 times per class period Greater than 5 times per class period	What strategies do special education teachers currently implement to help the strained relationships?	Multiple Choice/ Fill in the blank- Open ended questions	Martin, A.J., & Collie, R.J. (2019).
Do you think that your current redirection strategy (e.g., non-verbal directives, proximity, private conversations, etc.) helps reduce negative behaviors of students with an emotional disturbance?	What strategies would be beneficial to special education teachers to help gain more knowledge in regard to reducing negative behaviors that reduce positive teacher-student relationships?	Yes or No Explain- Open ended question	Martin, A.J., & Collie, R.J. (2019).
Do you implement evidence-based strategies to help reduce negative behaviors in the classroom?	What strategies do special education teachers currently implement to help the strained relationships?	Yes or No Explain- Open ended question	Cook, et. al, (2018)

Table 1 continued

What discipline strategies are being used most often as a consequence for negative behaviors with a student with an emotional disturbance?	What strategies do special education teachers currently implement to help the strained relationships	Multiple Choice	Weber, M., Wagner, L., & Ruch, W. (2016).
Do discipline strategies (listed above) help reduce negative behaviors with students labeled with an emotional disturbance?	What strategies would be beneficial to special education teachers to help gain more knowledge in regard to reducing negative behaviors that reduce positive teacher-student relationships?	Yes or No Explain- Open ended question	Weber, M., Wagner, L., & Ruch, W. (2016).
What strategies would you like more information about to create a positive teacher-student relationship?	What strategies would be beneficial to special education teachers to help gain more knowledge in regard to reducing negative behaviors that reduce positive teacher-student relationships?	Fill in the blank- Open ended question	Martin, A.J., & Collie, R.J. (2019).
What positive behaviors do you believe a teacher should teach students with an emotional disturbance to help them function better in the classroom? Please list at least two positive behaviors that could be taught to a student with an emotional disturbance	What strategies would be beneficial to special education teachers to help gain more knowledge in regard to reducing negative behaviors that reduce positive teacher-student relationships?	Fill in the blank- Open ended question	Martin, A.J., & Collie, R.J. (2019).

### Outline for Special Project

The special project handbook was developed to help secondary special education teachers utilize strategies to help develop positive relationships with students that have been labeled with an emotional disturbance. The handbook was intended to help secondary special education teachers help students improve academically and socially by forming positive relationships and reducing negative undesired behaviors.

## **CHAPTER 4. RESULTS OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

### **Introduction**

In order to add a research component to the special project handbook and design a beneficial tool that teachers may use with their students; a needs assessment survey was conducted with secondary special education teachers. The assessment needs survey was used as a beneficial tool to help communicate with special education teachers in regard to working with students with an emotional disturbance. The special education teachers were asked questions to help identify what strategies special education teachers could implement to help reduce negative behaviors while encouraging positive teacher-student relationships. This project is intended to offer direction to special education teachers by briefly explaining the importance of forming and maintaining a positive teacher-student relationship and providing effective, evidence-based strategies that could be implemented with specific behavioral issues or situations to help improve a strained teacher-student relationship with a student with an emotional disturbance. The information obtained from the survey was used as a basis for the Special Project Handbook. A transcript of the survey responses can be found in appendix B.

### **Needs Assessment**

The needs assessment survey consisted of four sections. The first section of the survey included detailed instructions for the participants to follow. The second section of the survey had three questions to help identify what behaviors special education teachers report that could strain the positive teacher-student relationships. Question one, two, and three of the surveys asked special education teachers what negative behaviors are frequently displayed by a student with an emotional disturbance in class, how does the negative behavior affect your ability to teach, and if

these behaviors cause teacher frustration in the classroom. These questions are important to the handbook, because it helps identify problematic behaviors that may strain the teacher-student relationship as well.

The third section consisted of three questions to help identify what strategies special education teachers currently implement to help the strained relationships.

The questions for the need assessment survey were based on information gathered from peer-reviewed, scholarly literature. Question four, six, and seven of the survey asked special education teachers how often the teacher redirects negative behaviors from students with an emotional disturbance for each behavior, what evidence based strategies are currently implemented to reduce negative behaviors in the classroom, and what discipline strategies are being used most often as a consequence for the negative behavior. These questions are important to the handbook, because they help identify strategies special education teachers may currently implement to help the strained relationships.

The fourth section consisted of four questions to help identify what strategies would be beneficial to special education teachers to help gain more knowledge in regard to reducing negative behaviors that reduce the positive teacher-student relationships. Question five, eight, nine, and ten of the survey asked special education teachers if they think that the current redirection or discipline strategies help reduce negative behaviors of students with an emotional disturbance, what strategies would you like more information about to create a positive teacher-student relationship, and what positive behaviors do you believe a teacher should teach students with an emotional disturbance to help them function better in the classroom. These questions are important to the handbook, because they help identify what strategies would be beneficial to special education teachers to help gain more knowledge in regard to reducing negative behaviors that reduce positive

teacher-student relationships, what strategies special education teachers may be using to improve strained relationships.

### **Demographic Information**

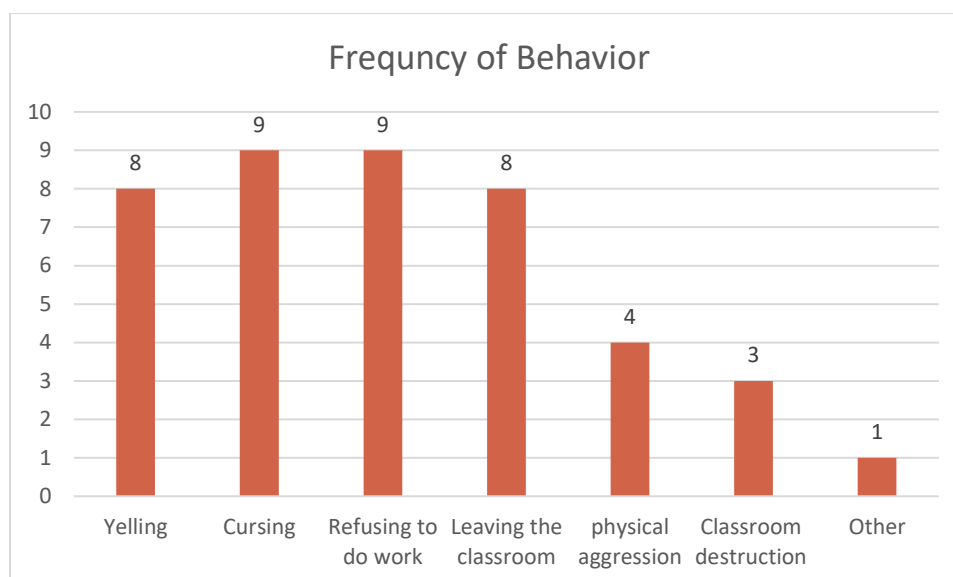
Out of the 9 surveys distributed, all 9 staff members participated, which is a 100% return rate. Participants in this study were licensed special education teachers. The teachers interacted and taught seventh grade through twelve grade students labeled with an emotional disturbance. Two of the teachers work only with students labeled with an emotion disturbance in a small group setting. The other seven teachers work with students with and without an emotional disturbance in small and large group settings. Some of the teachers have an additional teacher or a paraprofessional in the room during certain periods to help facilitate the needs of students. There were three male special education teachers and six female special education teachers participating in the study.

### **Frequently Displayed Negative Behaviors**

Figure 1 indicates how the participants responded on question one: “What negative behaviors are frequently displayed by a student with an emotional disturbance in class?”. The responses to this question variety slightly among participates. However, it appeared that cursing and refusing to do work occurs most frequently, because one hundred percent of the participants agreed that cursing and refusing to do work are frequently displayed by a student with an emotional disturbance. Yelling and leaving the classroom were also identified as common problem behaviors. Eight of the participants reported that yelling and leaving the room were displayed by students with an emotional disturbance. Only four respondents reported that physical aggression seems to be frequently displayed by students with and emotional

disturbance. Classroom destruction and other behaviors appeared to be displayed least often, because only three participants responded that classroom destruction was displayed frequently, and only one participant reported other negative behavior occurring.

Of these negative behaviors reported, participants reported that they redirect negative behaviors from students with an emotional disturbance each period. It was stated by six participants that yelling is often displayed 1-2 times per class period and greater than five times per class period by two participants. It was stated that cursing occurs greater than five times per class period by four participants. Three participants reported that cursing occurs 1-2 times per class period. Finally, two teachers reported that cursing occurred 3-5 times per class period. It was reported that refusing to do work occurred 3-5 times per class period by seven participants. Two participants reported that refusing to do occurred greater than five times per class period. It was reported by five participants that leaving the classroom occurred 1-2 times per class period. Two participants reported that leaving the classroom occurred 3-5 per class period. One participant stated that leaving the classroom occurs greater than five times per class period. Aggression was reported by three participants to occur 1-2 times per class period. One participant stated that aggression is displayed other (less than one per class period). The frequency of classroom destruction was reported by three participants to occur 1-2 times per class period. One participant stated that classroom destruction occurs other (less than one time per class period).



**Figure 1.** Frequency of Negative Behaviors

### **Influence of Behaviors on Teachers**

“What negative behaviors of students with emotional disturbance affect your ability to teach during class instruction?” Eight participants reported that yelling affects the ability for a teacher to teach. Seven participants reported that refusing to do work and physical aggression affect the ability to teach. Six participants reported that when students leave the classroom it affects their ability to teach. Five participants reported that cursing and classroom destruction affect their ability to teach. Finally, only one participant reported other behaviors interfering with their ability to teach.

Of the negative behaviors that affect teacher ability to teach, yelling and cursing cause the most teacher frustration based on seven out of nine respondents’ reports. Classroom destruction and refusing to do work were reported from six respondents that it causes frustration. Leaving the classroom and physical aggression were both reported by five participants as frustrating. Other frustrating behaviors were reported by two respondents.



## **Effectiveness of Strategies**

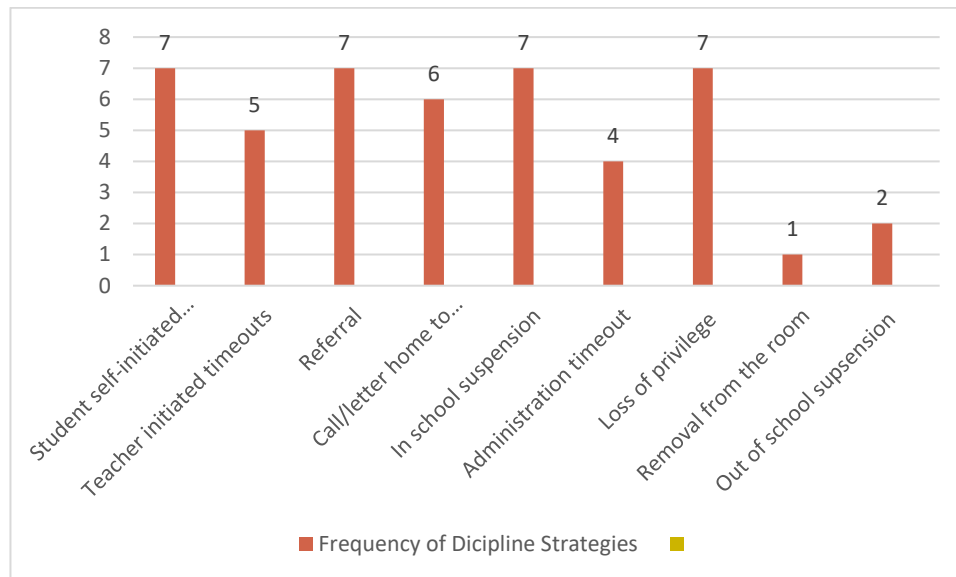
Participants were asked “Do you think that your current redirection strategy (e.g., non-verbal directives, proximity, private conversations, etc.) helps reduce negative behaviors of students with an emotional disturbance? Explain your answer.” Eight respondents stated “yes” that they do think that their current redirection strategy is working. However, one participant stated “no” that they do not think that their current redirection strategy worked. Respondents answers varied but common responses were that strategies help deescalate after getting to know the student, prompting and providing wait time, choice/choice and choice/ consequence must be pre taught and consequences pre-determined.

## **Strategies to Help Form Positive Teacher-Student Relationships**

Participants stated that they implement evidence- based strategies to help reduce negative behaviors in the classroom. Respondents reported various strategies, however there were a few strategies reported being used by multiple participants. Six participants reported rewards, three participants reported praise, six participants reported choices, and five participants reported clear rules/expectations. Other strategies that were reported by participants but did not have any common reports from other participants were humor, limited verbal, proximity, non-verbal, quiet space, timer, consequences, breaks, visual schedules.

Figure 2 indicates how participants responded to question 7: “What discipline strategies are being used most often as a consequence for negative behaviors with a student with an emotional disturbance?” Student self-initiated time out, referrals, in school suspension, and loss of privilege were all reported by seven participants. Call/letter home to parent/guardian was reported six times by participants. Teacher initiated timeouts was reported five times by participants. Four participants reported administrative time outs as a response. Two participants

reported out of school suspensions are used as a discipline strategy. Only one participant reported removal from the room as a consequence.



**Figure 2.** Discipline Strategies for Negative Behaviors

Participants were asked if discipline strategies help reduce negative behaviors with students labeled with an emotional disturbance. Five respondents reported an undecided answer of yes/no. Three respondents reported that discipline strategies do not help reduce negative behaviors. Only one respondent stated that discipline strategies do work to help reduce negative behaviors. Respondents had various explanations to help explain why they reported yes, no, or undecided. Some of the respondents stated that kids do not respond well to these consequences, schools are limited on what can be done, depends on the student, it may just work for a few minutes/times, then become ineffective, these strategies do not alter behaviors, and it is again hit and miss.

## **Strategies**

Participants were asked what strategies they would like more information about to create a positive teacher-student relationship. The participants had various ideas of what information could be beneficial to help create a positive teacher- student relationship. Responses from the participants were, help to not always engage back with student, positive vs. negative punishments as related to positive/ negative reinforcement, one on one instruction, posted schedules/ expectations, reward systems, and project-based learning and token economics.

## **Positive Behaviors of Students**

Finally, participants were asked what positive behaviors could be taught to students with an emotional disturbance to help them function better in the classroom. All nine participants varied in their responses. Some of the responses from the participants were meditation and yoga, teaching them to fix their mistakes, count good or growth instead of focusing on bad, wait time, counting up/down before reacting, how to use a “cool off” pass or “brain break, staying in seat and seeking attention appropriately, emotional regulation, self-regulation and self-awareness, respect for themselves, teachers, and peers, patience, accountability for their actions, “how to express their thoughts/feelings in a healthy way that does not disturb a class/other student and how to self-initiate timeouts, and respect for authority and situational behaviors.

Summary of Handbook Format. The participants in the study reported that they would like to have more knowledge to help them interact, teach, and redirect students with an emotional disturbance. As mentioned, the participants stated that they would like more information about strategies to use with students with an emotional disturbance when they are having behavioral issues; such as yelling, cursing, leaving the room, classroom destruction, refusing to do work, and aggression. They mentioned that they would like more information about how to not engage

in a power struggle with a student, positive and negative punishment and positive and negative reinforcement, token economies, and helping a student using posted schedules, clearly explaining expectations, and applying reward systems.

### **Summary of the Results**

In conclusion, teachers seem to agree that there are behavioral issues that disrupt teaching and cause frustration. Furthermore, there are discipline strategies that have been put into place to help correct negative behaviors. However, the disciplinary techniques established seem to be a case by case strategy that may not correct the problem long term. Therefore, additional information about working with students with an emotional disturbance would be beneficial to special education teachers to help build positive teacher-student relationships and correct behavioral disturbances and frustrations. Having a positive teacher-student relationship will not only help students improve behaviorally, it will also help them improve academically.

Limitations of the results in regard to the methodology of the research is the sample size. The current study had only nine special education teachers qualified to participant in the survey. Ideally, the survey results would be more informative if there were more participants able to participate in the survey. Furthermore, out of the nine participants, some of them decided to not respond to a particular question; making the results not as strong.

## CHAPTER 5. HANDBOOK

# The Whole Truth: The Good and The Bad

A Handbook That Gives Real Advice to Help Special  
Education Teachers with Everyday Behavioral Issues  
in a Fun but Educational Way

# The Whole Truth: The Good and The Bad



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)

A Handbook That Gives Real Advice to Help Special  
Education Teachers with Everyday Behavioral Issues  
in a Fun but Educational Way

*(Excuse my language throughout this handbook but let's be honest if you work with students  
with emotional disturbances, you better get used to hearing profanity)*

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## About the Author

I graduated from Indiana Purdue University Fort Wayne with a Bachelor of Arts with a major in Psychology and a minor in Studio Art in May 2011. I then decided to continue my education and obtained a Master of Science in Education in June 2014. I started my career as a Licensed Family and Marriage Therapist working with adults, children, and couples for various mental health and relational reasons. However, as a therapist, I mostly worked with teenagers and quickly grew a passion for helping teenagers. I then decided to work within the school systems helping students that were placed

in a special education setting due to their emotional disability. After working with these students, I knew that I found my true calling. I wanted to stay in the classroom helping students emotionally, behaviorally, academically, and socially. I enjoyed every day that I was there and did not want it to end. Fortunately, I was then offered a position as a special education teacher at the school that I was working in. I decided to accept the position and continue my education again to concentrate on earning a Master of Science in Education with a major in Special Education graduating in May 2020. I am currently on my third year of teaching in a special education program working with students that have been labeled with an emotional disability, and I am still passionate about helping students with emotional disabilities.

I am married to a loving and supportive husband and we have three wonderful and loving children together; ages one, four, and six. Being a Special Education teacher, mother, and student has been challenging at times, but I wouldn't change anything for the world. I am still happy and excited about my decision to help students with emotional disabilities.

*Jessica N. Gettys*



# Disclaimer

*Before we begin, I want you to know that this handbook is not going to sugar coat anything.* I am going to be real with you and tell you how it is with real life examples of what you may face every day as a special education teacher working with emotionally disturbed students. So, before you begin to read this handbook ask yourself, do you want to know the real truth about being a special education teacher? Are you willing to put forth the sweat, tears, and hair pulling stress it takes to work with emotionally disturbed students, or do you want to pretend that everything will be okay without you having to put forth any effort? If you don't want to put forth the effort it takes to help students with an emotional disturbance, you need to stop what you are doing and put this handbook down right now... this handbook is not for you! Those of you that have decided to keep reading, I congratulate you. You have decided to continue working in one of the hardest, yet most rewarding fields out there. You have no idea the impact you will have on each and every one of your students.

This handbook was created to help you connect with your students and help reduce behavioral issues. The first part of the handbook is divided into sections; defining emotional disturbance disability, brain development, thinking patterns, and discipline. Next, the handbook suggests three steps to follow to better connect with your students while also having better classroom management. The handbook ends with my own personal examples of addressing common negative behaviors.

You can jump ahead to reference steps that may apply more to you in a particular situation. These steps do not have to be followed step by step, because every student and situation is different and there are many factors to consider when contemplating how to appropriately respond to a situation. With that being said,

*let's get to it.*

## Section 1: What is an Emotional Disturbance?



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In order to help students with an emotional disturbance, it is important to have a good understanding of what an emotional disturbance is and how it could affect their behaviors and the teacher-student relationship. So, before we go into depth about how to work with students with an emotional disturbance, let's first define it.

### Emotional Disturbance Definition

Emotional Disturbance is a term used as a disability label from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). According to IDEA, “an **emotional disturbance is defined as a condition** exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

- (A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.

- (B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- (C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- (D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
- (E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.”

As defined by IDEA, “emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia but does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance,” IDEA under paragraph (C) (4)(i) of section 300.8 (c) (4).

## Characteristics of Emotional Disturbance

IDEA stated that an emotional disturbance can impact an individual beyond emotional distress. ED can affect an individual’s physical, social, or cognitive abilities. Students with ED can exhibit hyperactivity, aggression, self-injurious behavior, withdrawal, immaturity, learning difficulties, distorted thinking, excessive anxiety, bizarre motor acts and abnormal mood swings.

As you can see, students that struggle with emotional disturbances face many challenges that other students don’t typically encounter at school. Students labeled with an emotional disturbance may easily become frustrated or overwhelmed due to their inability to control their emotions.

Due to their disability students may experience more relational conflicts, have a higher rate of suspension days, and are more likely to drop-out of school. These students would benefit most from a positive teacher-student relationship and the encouragement and praise from you!

## Section 2: Brain Development and Behavior



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One very important aspect to take into consideration when working with children is their brain development and how it affects their behavior. Children do not have fully developed brains yet, so children typically function from the lower section of the brain; often called the reptilian brain (Siegel & Byson, 2014).

The reptilian brain is more primitive, because its responsible for most fundamental neutral and mental operations such as strong emotions, instincts, and basic functions like breathing and digestion. This is the part of the brain that allows our anger to make blood to flow to our hands, making it easier for us to fight an enemy. It causes our heart rate to speed up and hormones rush to give bursts of energy (Goleman, 1995).

The other area of the brain that is still being developed is responsible for more complex thinking. This area of the brain is still being developed until a person reaches their mid-twenties. So, when we think about this a little more let's consider our students that often get in trouble at school. We ask them why they decided to throw that pencil or why they screamed in class out of nowhere and they respond with "I don't know". As infuriating as that answer may be, it may be the truth. Because they are teenagers and the part of the brain that helps them to rationalize and think of possible consequences are not developed completely, they truly may not have thought about why they did something and just act from their emotional more primitive brain; giving another reason why it's important to try to remember the importance of understanding each student's developmental stage.

## Emotional vs. Rational

An important thing to remember when working with children (or anyone really) is that people don't make the best choices when functioning from the emotional more primitive brain. Remember that the emotional brain is not logical and it reacts in a similar way as a reptile. The emotional brain response is more likely to respond to discipline from a fight, flight, or freeze response if it seems threatening from our words, nonverbals, tone, posture, etc.

I get it, it can be very challenging not to try to correct a behavior right away or not lecture a student for their behaviors in the moment. I do it all the time, I go straight into lecture mode. But I've learned that I have to stop myself from going into lecture mode, because I found myself repeating what I just said later after they calmed down. So, the next time that you have an urge to react to the situation, instead help the student come back to the rational part of the brain. Help the student calm down by demonstrating respect, nurturing with empathy, and communicating a nonthreatening relationship (Siegel & Byson, 2014).

# Hope for Changing Brains

Brains are very complex and there is a lot that we still do not understand about our brains, but what we do know is that there is still hope for change. Consider the student that has been abused, neglected, traumatized, or has just had bad relationships or experiences with adults in the past. These students are naturally more resistant to developing a relationship with you due to their experiences, but that doesn't mean that they can't ever change.



It was explained that everything that a person sees, hears, feels, touches, and smells impacts their brain and influences the way they view and interact with their world (Siegel & Byson, 2014). It was explained that “neurons that fire together wire together”. Therefore, despite the negativity that they have suffered from in the past, a positive experience with a teacher can lead to a neural connection that link together a teacher relationship with accomplishment or feeling good about themselves.

As hard as it may be to continue building a relationship with a student after being called countless names and being disrespected, before you decide that it's time to give up on a student, think about how much that one connection could physically and literally change their brain to help them throughout the rest of their lives. I know it's hard to think about because we typically don't see these big changes, but if you really look you will see small changes that could mean the world to that student throughout their life.

## Section 3: Distorted Thinking Patterns



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When working with students with an emotional disturbance, it is important to not only be aware of brain development, but also possible distorted thinking patterns that can affect the positive teacher-student relationships. Distorted thinking can affect not only your students, but how you think as well. These distorted thinking patterns may be unconsciously causing problems in various relationships. Distorted thinking patterns are usually learned from our experiences and they can be hard to change. So, it's important to be aware of any possible thinking distortions that you and your students may be experiencing.

Do you have any irrational beliefs? I can answer that for you, the answer is Yes, you probably do just like our students. It's hard not to have at least one irrational belief. Maybe you've learned to cope, and you can usually stop yourself from believing in these automatic thoughts, or maybe these thoughts still affect your life and how you handle situations.



Regardless, if you struggle with these irrational thoughts, think about our students and how hard it would be for them to challenge these thoughts. They may not have the skills necessary to challenge these self-defeating thoughts and it could become debilitating without them even realizing it or knowing how to change them. When we consider the possible irrational thoughts that students are facing, it's easy to see why a student may become defensive or irrational themselves. Listed below are some examples of distorted irrational thoughts.

## Common Irrational Thinking:

- Mistakes are never okay
- If someone disagrees with me, it's a personal attack on me
- I must be liked by all people to be happy
- My value depends on what others think of me
- Nothing ever turns out the way I want it to
- Nothing ever works for me
- If what I do is not perfect, I am a failure

## Additional Distorted Thinking to Consider:

**Filtering-** Take the negative details and magnify them while filtering out all positive aspects of the situation.

**Polarized Thinking-** Things are black and white, good or bad. There is no middle ground.

**Overgeneralization-** Having a general conclusion based on a single incident or piece of evidence.



**Mind Reading-** The idea that you know what people are feeling and why they act the way they do without them saying.

**Catastrophizing-** Expecting disaster and focusing on the “what ifs”.

**Personalization-** Thinking that what people do or say is some kind of reaction to you.

**Blaming-** Holding others responsible for your pain or blaming yourself for every problem.

**Shoulds-** Rules about how you and others should act. When these rules are broken you feel anger or guilt if you violate the rules.

**Emotional Reasoning-** The belief that what you feel is true- if you feel stupid, then you must be stupid.

**Fallacy of change-** Expecting others to change for you if you pressure or persuade them enough.

**Being Right-** You are continually trying to prove that your opinions and actions are correct. You will go to any length to demonstrate that you are right.

After reading through these irrational beliefs, was I right? Do any of them hit the nail on the head for you? I have to be honest; I would be lying if I said that I didn't struggle with a few of these myself. I actually can't think of one person that I know that could say, “No, that doesn't sound like me at all”. It's hard to change our automatic thoughts but being aware of them will help us to understand why we are acting in certain ways, or why we are having conflicts.

As hard as it may be for us, consider your students. How can we help them to identify that they are functioning with irrational beliefs? I recommend teaching these irrational thoughts to your students.

## Section 4: Discipline Techniques



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Now that we've talked about brain development and distorted thinking patterns, let's talk about how we address negative behaviors. In a desperate attempt to help students learn and correct inappropriate behaviors, many teachers resort to threats of negative consequences, shame, or guilt. I think we've all been there, right. Because we care, we want our students to succeed so badly that it causes us to be frustrated. But, as you may have already learned, these tactics do not work.

When you think about the word discipline, what comes to mind? Are you thinking about being frustrated and angry; causing you to use punishments to take control over your students' behaviors? If you are, you are not alone. Many people think of discipline as a form of punishment when in fact discipline should be considered as an opportunity to connect and redirect your students.

Actually, the word discipline comes from the Latin word discipline which means teaching, learning, and giving instruction (Siegel & Byson, 2014). Think about it, in order

to change a negative behavior, we must first start with our perception of how we handle the situation.

We need to take away the drama caused by punishment and start teaching our students using discipline so that they can learn skills that can last them a lifetime. But what does it mean to discipline your students? It depends on your students. Every student is different and no one strategy will work for each student. In fact, just because a strategy worked once for a student, does not necessarily mean that it will work again next time for that same student. I know that sometimes it may feel like a guessing game of what may work this time. But no matter how tempting it may be to use the phrases “stop it now” or “because I said so” they are not affective strategies.

Do you think you would respond well to your boss telling you to do something and he/she finishes with “because I said so”? I don’t know about you, but I would probably be a little irritated and resentful while completing the task and I’m a mature adult, most of the time. I can’t even imagine what’s going through the mind of a teenager with an emotional disturbance. Wait, yes, I can; they would be thinking “fuck you, you can’t make me do this shit”.

So, if you don’t want to be cussed at, we need to change the way we think about discipline, it’s important to think about more than just the immediate behavior being corrected. We need to understand that students with ED cannot regulate their emotions and often have not been taught how to express themselves. We are instilling lifelong lessons.

## Microskills Quick Guide:

- **Making Eye Contact**
- **Attending Behavior**
- **Minimal Encouragers**
- **Immediacy**
- **Self-Disclosure**
- **Open Ended Questions vs. Closed Ended Questions**
- **Affirmations**
- **Reflective Statements**
- **Summaries**
- **Reflating Feeling**
- **Communicating Feeling**

## Step 1: Microskills

Microskills are Motivational Interviewing Techniques. Microskills help express empathy, hope, and respect to our students. They are easy and natural to apply, however in many cases they are not used near enough with students that may have behavioral issues. You know who I am talking about, those students that have told you to “fuck off” or say “what is you looking at” one too many times. But these are the students that we need to build a relationship with the most.

Now, if you are one of those teachers that has individual handshakes with each and every one of your students every day, I congratulate you for taking the time to connect with your students in a way that they will always remember. But, for the rest of us mere mortals, individual handshakes with emotionally disturbed students would be nothing short of a miracle. I can see it now as I tell the students enthusiastically “come on guys let’s make up a handshake and do it every morning” as they stare at me blankly and say, “That’s dumb Mrs. G.” or “Are you high?”

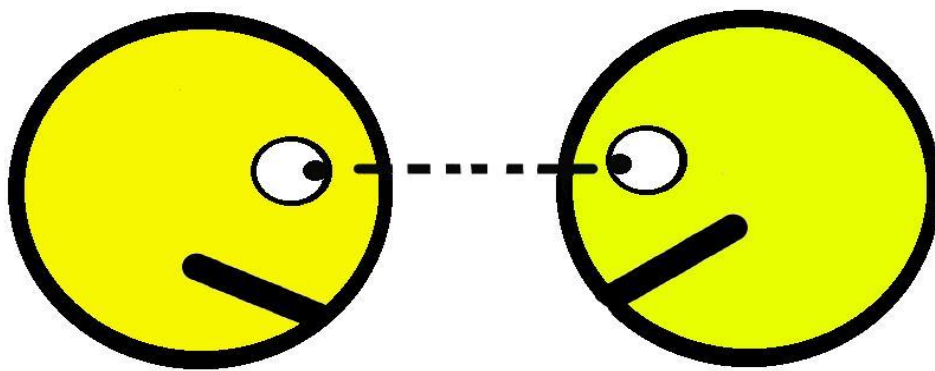
Now, I am not saying that it would be impossible to get my students to do these handshakes with me every day, but it would take a lot of coercing and time to convince them to go through this long drawn out routine with me every day. There are ways that we connect with our students in an easier and more realistic way called microskills.

**Making Eye Contact** - When you look at someone at the same time as they look at you directly in the eyes.

Make eye contact and say good morning to your students as they walk by you or come into your class every day. This sounds easy enough right? But what happens when that student ignores you and avoids eye contact with you? The best thing you can do is be persistent. After about 100 times of looking them in the eyes and saying good morning, they have to start at least anticipating the interaction, and secretly I am sure they like the attention. Plus, you never know, you may be the only positive interaction that student has with an adult all day.

But I also want to be realist here, so what about those day that you are in a deep conversation with another teacher, or you haven't had your cup of coffee and just can't muster up a smile or get a pep to your step that morning. These days do occur, and we are only human right, but we have to try to suck it up and make a conscious effort to interact with your students.

# Eye-Contact



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## Attending Behavior - Attending to someone in a way that shows you are listening.

Again, eye contact is important, but it's not the only important factor that shows others you are listening and care about what they have to say. It is well known that less than 10% of communication is actually communicated verbally. Therefore, most of our communication is done through nonverbals. Non-verbal communication refers to gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, eye contact, body language, posture, and other ways people communicate without using language.

What is your body language saying to your students? Are you standing in a non-threatening way, are you making an annoyed face? Watch your expressions when a student is driving you crazy by asking you the same question over and over again. These are the little things that unfortunately can damage a relationship without us even knowing why.

Also, pay attention to the non-verbal communication that your student may be telling you with his/her own non-verbal communication. Students may not even be aware of what they are saying with their nonverbals. You might learn something new or notice a pattern in their behavior. Remember focus on what is not being said as much as what is being said!

### Examples:

- **Smiling**
- **Eyebrow raising**
- **Frowning**

**Minimal Encouragers** - minimal encouragers are little cues that allow students to know that you are paying attention to what they are saying.

Minimal encouragers are great, but please do not stare at your computer half listening and nod your head and give out a couple uhmm when a student is talking to you. We've all been there. You have an IEP due, an ACR coming up, endless emails, missed calls, students arguing, a class to teach, and now a student that just really wants to tell you all about their video game in the middle of all that chaos. It's hard to give your full attention 100 % of the time, I get it. But what you are really saying to that student as you stare at the computer screen, is that they are not as important as all your work. Talk about one way to kill a relationship.

So, you have two choices, you can either stop what you are doing and have a "real" conversation with your students in the middle of chaos, or instead just be honest with the student. Let the student know that what they have to say is important to you, but you can't give them your undivided attention right now. Schedule a time to talk when things slow down and you can really give them your attention.

### Examples:

- Yes
- Sounds good
- Head nods
- Okay
- I understand what you mean

**Tip:** Try a "Talking Tuesday". I've found this to be a great way to really sit down with students and talk with them and check in on how they are doing. Let them know that this is their individual time one on one time with you. They can tell you about what's going on at home, with friends, or the conversation could be strictly school related if the student felt more comfortable that way. Use the time to look up grades, discuss missing assignments, ask them what's working, what isn't working, and how you can help. If you are going to try this, the students may be a little resistant to this at first, but I've found that once you get started the students will actually start reminding you it's Talking Tuesday.

Wait a minute: where do I find the time to sit down with each student on a Tuesday and just talk? I give an assignment that I know the students can work on independently and I pull students one at a time. Sometimes the meetings will last five minutes, others may need to talk for about twenty minutes or longer if they have something going on at home or at school that is really bothering them. If you run out of time don't sweat it, make a point to let that student know that you are going to start with them next week, or do an extra check in with that students that you missed when you have some free time.

There is nothing wrong with a "talking Wednesday or Friday" either. The point is to show your students that you are going to take the time to really hear them and do everything you can do to help them when they need it most. Remember listening equals learning.

**Immediacy** - Involves attending to issues that, if ignored, could interfere with the relationship.

It's important to focus on the here and now and what is not being said. Point out positive behaviors right away. Make a point to let students know that you see them and that you are happy with their choices. This will go a long way and help encourage positive behaviors.

On the flip side, pointing out bad choices can be very important too. But rather than saying don't do something, try telling them what they should be doing. For instance, if a student is kicking the wall or pounding on their desk to get your attention, you could say "I see you, but a better way to get my attention is by raising your hand and asking me nicely for help. I am way better at helping you when my ears aren't hurting from all that pounding." Yes, it's okay to joke! I also like to tell my students "every behavior has a reason, so what's your behavior saying"?

Usually students will stop what they are doing and at least think about why they are being disruptive, and most of the time they will actually tell me why they are being disruptive so that I can help them. Remember there is no such thing as a good or bad student, just good and bad choices.

**Examples:**

- **Thank you for asking to leave the room**
- **Thank you for being so respectful when you are asking a question**
- **Thank you for raising your hand**



## **Self-Disclosure - Disclosing personal information about yourself to the students.**

Self-disclosure is a tricky subject. I've heard people say self-disclosure is bad. You don't want your students to know about your personal information. However, I disagree with this statement; well to a point. I'm not saying you should tell your student that you went out drinking with your friends last Saturday night or that you just got into the biggest fight with your significant other. No, No, that is not what I am saying. But people need to understand that it is okay to let your students know that you are human too and that you are more than just a teacher.

The key here is to connect with your students, but how can you ever connect with your students if you never allow them to know about some of your likes and dislikes? If a student is having trouble getting along with peers, try remembering a time you got into a fight with a peer when you were their age. Explain what the fight was about (if appropriate) and explain what you did to improve that relationship. This not only allows you to connect with your student, it also helps them have a sense of normalcy, and gives them advice to potentially improve social interactions.

### **Examples:**

- **I struggled to read when I was your age**
- **Learning did not come easy**
- **Math was not my favorite subject**

**Open Ended Questions** - When asking an open-ended question, it is important to avoid one-word responses or answers that can be answered with a "yes" or "no" response. The question should help the student go into depth about the question and generate longer in depth thinking.

**Examples:**

- **What is your favorite thing about high school?**
- **Why is it that you seem irritated?**
- **Explain what else you need to be more successful in each class?**
- **How exactly did the fight start between the two of you?**

**Close Ended Questions** - These questions can be answered with a one-word response and/or a "yes" or "no" response. These are not ideal questions to initiate in depth thinking and/or conversations.

**Examples:**

- **Are you feeling better today?**
- **Do you need help?**
- **Do you like your math class?**
- **Are you mad?**

Have you ever really paid attention to what you're asking your students and how they respond? Are you getting short, one answer responses to your questions making you feel like you are hamster running in a wheel? I think we've all been there, frustrated because a student seems so closed off and resistant to opening up to you.

It can be so exhausting to try and try, but the student just won't open up. But if you really think about it, do you think it is possible that you are just asking the questions incorrectly? Don't get me wrong, there are definitely students out there that no matter how hard you try they are very resistant to sharing information with you, but I think a majority of students like being heard and want to talk about what's going on in their lives. So, one

way to help build a relationship with your students is to try making a conscious effort to prompt in depth conversations.

**Affirmations** - Positive statements that help challenge self-sabotaging and negativity.

Affirmations are very important when establishing a positive teacher- student relationship. Affirmations help students build self-esteem. If affirmations are repeated enough, students will begin to believe them and make positive changes.

But what about the students that have a tendency to not follow rules or complete work? It can be very frustrating when a student is noncompliant over and over again. We expect them to do what we tell them to do rather than focusing on what they were actually able to accomplish. It is so easy to overlook that one time out of 100 that he/she actually followed your instructions or stayed in their seat for a full ten minutes. But, that one time that they actually did what they were supposed to do is the most crucial to point out and praise to encourage more of the same positive behaviors. So, bottom line, stop yelling and start praising!

**Examples:**

- **You did an excellent job on that test**
- **I am so proud of how hard you worked**
- **I am happy to have you in my class**
- **You are such a good listener**

**Reflective Statements** - A communication strategy that seeks to understand a student's idea, then offering the idea back to the student, to confirm the idea has been understood correctly.

It is so easy to get caught up in the craziness and chaos of the day. When the to do lists seem to be a mile long, teachers may feel like they need to keep their conversations short and forget that students want to feel heard and understood. And yes, I am talking about those students that go on and on about Minecraft or Pokémon that you have no clue or interest in what they are actually trying to say. But, it is important to show interest in the things that are important to them by using reflective listening even if in your head your telling yourself "Okay kid, I have no clue what the Heck you are talking about and I have so much work to do."

Reflective listening is all about making sure students know that you care about them and what they are saying to you by expressing empathy. Remember that five minutes of your time will mean the difference in your relationship with that student.



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**Phrases to use to help you confirm that you are hearing the student clearly.**

*Examples:*

- What I hear you saying is...
- So, if I understand this correctly you feel...
- From your point of view...
- I'm picking up that you...

**Phrases to use if you are having a hard time perceiving clearly.**

*Examples:*

- Could it be...
- I wonder if...
- Correct me if I'm wrong, but...
- Is there a chance that you...

*Summaries* - Summarizing what the student is telling you is another important strategy to help them feel heard and understood. Summaries can communicate interest and understanding of the student's perspective. It can also help point out important parts of the conversation.

Summaries are very similar to reflective listening. They help the student know that you are listening to what they have to say. We all like to feel heard and frankly talk about ourselves. So, let the student vent to you or tell you what they think and/or feel about situations and interests, and then summarize what they say to make sure you understand them correctly.

Summaries are a great way to clarify what the student is actually saying. All you have to do is restate what the student just told you to ensure that you actually understood them. You may not realize it, but just because a student seems to be saying one thing, they may actually be saying something completely different. This has happened to me so many times. I think a student is telling me something and then when I summarize, they look at me and say no that's not what I meant at all. I smile and say okay can you explain it to me again?

It's okay if you missed something and got it all wrong, trust me they will correct you. We have different experiences and perspectives than most of our students, but how would you ever know if you misunderstood unless you take the time to make sure you understand what they are saying?

## Reflecting Feeling - Reflecting on how a student feels about something.

When reflecting feelings, it is important to point out a feeling that you think that they are having in that moment. Most student don't understand the difference between surface emotions and underlining emotions. According to Gottman, when we're angry, there can be other emotions hidden beneath the surface. It's easy to see a person's anger, but it can be difficult to see the underlying feelings the anger is protecting. Therefore, anger is considered a surface emotion used to hide and protect true feelings.

Underlying emotions are hidden under the surface and are more difficult to admit and talk about to others. Most children struggle to identify and express their emotions in an appropriate way. That's why anger is often the first emotions displayed by children.

Think about your students... have you ever had a student that seemed to be perfectly fine, but then out of nowhere started to scream at you or another student? As you stand there confused as to why they are so angry, remember underlying emotions. Maybe the student felt overwhelmed and helpless when trying to do their work, or maybe they started to think about a situation that happened at home or with a friend; causing them to feel disappointed, sad, rejected, or anxious. Whatever the reason, the student is now screaming and acting very angrily.

It's so easy to assume the worst and kick the student out of class or yell back at them. But, how would you respond to this angry student if you knew the true reasons why they are screaming? If your student's mom just went to jail or the student hasn't eaten in two days because there isn't any food in the house? So, before assuming the student is just a little jerk, stop and think about what else may be going on and how to help them express their underlining emotion.

### Examples:

- **It seems like you may be feeling...**
- **I wonder if your anger is a result of..**
- **Your emotions seem to be causing you to..**

*Communicating Feeling* - is an important aspect of immediacy. Emphasis is on the teacher's feelings not the students.

Now that we've talked about your students' feelings, let talk about yours. We are all humans and we all have feelings. We have lives, families, hobbies, and stress of our own that we also have to deal with. Remember not to project, or take out, your emotions onto your students even if you just had the worst day of your life.

Be aware of your underlying emotions and how you are responding to the people around you. I know, I know it can be difficult to not just let loose on a student for being late to class for the umpteenth time, but before you go all Bruce Banner on your student think about whether it's really worth damaging your relationship with that student because of things you have going on in your life; most of our students have been through enough and don't need one more adult yelling at them.



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So, what should you do with this repeatedly late student you ask? Take a deep breath and simply tell them to take a seat. After class ask to speak with the student and remind the student of your expectations and the consequences of being late. This may not



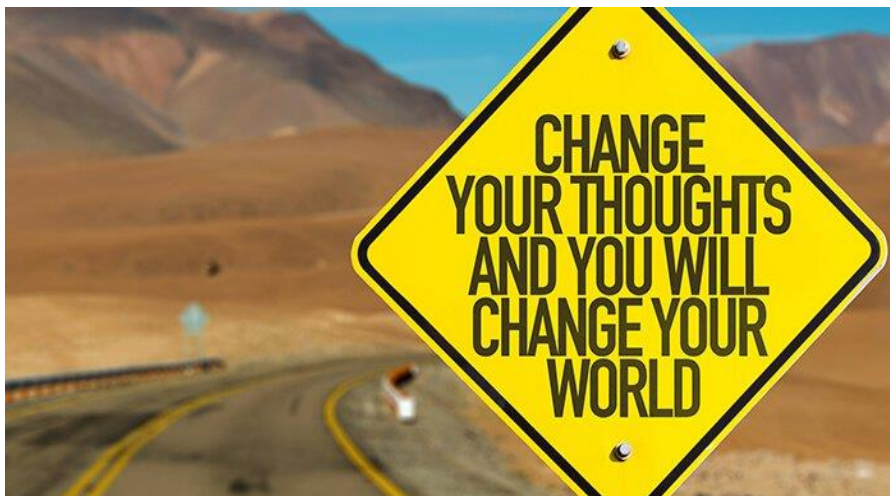
completely prevent them from being late next time, but on the bright side you kept your cool and they were able to participate in at least some of the class rather than getting upset and walking out. Remember the angrier you get, the more defensive and angrier the student get. So, instead of de-escalating the situation you are actually entering a never-ending game of who can get madder. If you can stay calm even if they are beyond rational, they can only come down from their angry state, but if you feed into their anger, you will both continue to get angrier and angrier.

## Changing Irrational Beliefs Quick Guide:

- Self-Reevaluation
- Counterconditioning
- Stimulus Control
- Reinforcing Management
- Environmental Reevaluation
- Highlight Discrepancies
- Decision Balancing
- Strengths Identification
- Emotional Arousal

## Step 2: Changing Irrational Beliefs

Listed below are just some ways to help change irrational beliefs and possibly help our students use coping skills when escalated. In order for our students to take these steps seriously we have to have buy in from our students



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as well. I don't think you will get very far if you just say, "your irrational beliefs are causing you to have conflict with others". In this case, the student would just look at you and tell you to shut up, because it's hard for people to admit that what they've know their entire life is wrong. Change is hard for everyone and even if a student is constantly getting into trouble, at least it's a consistency for them. So, it may take some time and patience when teaching these skills to your students.

**Self-Reevaluation-** Help students Assess their own feelings and thoughts about themselves with respect to problems. An important step includes clarifying values and challenging beliefs or expectations.

**Counterconditioning-** Substituting coping alternatives for distress caused by maladaptive behaviors. Strategies include deep breathing, relaxation techniques, positive self-statements.

**Stimulus Control-** means avoiding or countering stimuli that creates problem behaviors. This strategy involving avoiding or removing high risk triggers from the student's environment.

**Reinforcing Management-** Rewarding a student for making appropriate change. Contingency contracts are examples of reinforcement.

**Environmental Reevaluation-** helping the student to understand how their problems affect their personal and physical environment.

**Highlight Discrepancies-** helping the student identify a discrepancy of gap between their future goals and their current behavior.

**Reinforcing Self-Efficacy-** Fostering hope and optimism by reinforcing beliefs in their own abilities by identifying strengths and building on past successes.

**Decision Balancing-** Exploring pros and cons of continuing maladaptive behaviors.

**Strengths Identification-** Helping the student identify what has worked in the past for themselves or others that they know.

**Emotional Arousal-** Experiencing and expressing feelings about one's problems and finding solutions to them. Role playing is an example of emotional arousal.



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## Applying Strategies Quick Guide:

- Respond vs. React
- Obtain a Non-Threatening Position
- Give Insight into the Brain
- The Power of Being Proactive
- Avoiding Arguments
- Roll with Resistance
- Won't vs. Can't
- Emphasizing Personal Choice and Control
- Do Overs
- A Conditional Yes
- Point Out Positives
- Humor
- Behavior Contracts
- Token Economies
- Model
- Social Stories

## Step 3: Strategies to Consider

Does this sound familiar?

**Student:** I'm not doing my work today and you can't make me.

**Teacher:** It's an important lesson and everyone has to do their work today.

**Student:** No, I don't feel like it.

**Teacher:** You will do your work today, or you will get written up.

**Student:** I don't care, write me up you bitch.

**Teacher:** Go to the office.

**Student:** Fuck you, I didn't want to be in here anyways.

## Responding vs. Reacting - Consider how you approach a situation. Do you think about the problem or just act?

One way to connect with our students and model appropriate behavior is responding to a situation rather than reacting. In this example the teacher is not responding to the situation, the teacher is reacting. The problem is that many teachers instantly get upset when a student is being defiant, and they take it personally. I know we are only human, and we don't want to be disrespected. But we have to remember that probably nine out of ten times it's not about you, so we have to stop taking it personal! We are the adults and we have to connect, model, and redirect how to respond to a situation in order to teach the students these lifelong skills.

And, if that's not enough to motivate you to slow down to respond, consider what happens to student that feel threatened or attacked. Their brains are naturally triggering the adaptive survival mode fight, flight, or freeze mode. And, if the student is in survival mode we might as well be talking to the wall.

When we respond, we are taking the time to think about what we should say to help deescalate the situation and really connect with our students. We need to show our students that regardless of the behaviors being displayed, they are important, and we still want to continue having a relationship with them. We have to have clear and consistent boundaries, create predictable structure, and have expectations for them. I know this is easier said than done. It's human nature to go into the fight, flight, or freeze mode ourselves, but we have to go into these situations prepared with an idea of how we would respond to certain situations.

When we consider how we respond to the situation, it's important to consider the student's state of mind. Are they emotional and having behavioral issues? If so, consequences and lessons will be ineffective until they are no longer in their emotional state of mind. It's like trying to teach a dog to sit while he's fighting another dog. Obviously, you wouldn't waste your time saying "sit boy, sit" when all you care about it pulling him away from the other dog (Siegel & Byson, 2014). So, why waste your time trying to explain to a student why his behaviors are not appropriate when he is clearly not

being rational? The most important thing you can do at this moment is to help the student “stop fighting the other dog” so that they can use their rational brain to understand your expectations and the consequences for how they acted when they were emotional. So, how do we respond to be intentional and make conscious decision? To help use better respond misbehaviors we should ask ourselves three questions; why, what, and how (Siegel & Byson, 2014).

### *1. Why is the student acting this way?*

I know the immediate response may be that they are trying to test me, they never listen to me, or unfortunately we have the thought that they are just little jerks. But we have to look deeper into the behavior to really understand why the student may be acting this way.

### *2. What lesson do I want to teach the student in the moment?*

Do you want the student to learn self-control, taking responsibility, being polite, etc.? It's easy to tell the student that they should not act a certain way, but we need to be able to explain the why. Students will respond much better if you can tell them what they should do instead of what they should not do and why.

### *3. How can this lesson be taught?*

Remember not every student is the same and not every strategy will work for certain students and certain situations. So, after taking into consider your student, their developmental level, and their disabilities, ask yourself how can you teach the lesson you identified in step two?

After considering these questions, you will be much more equipped to stop the negative behavior and teach lifelong lesson and skills. Also, when teaching these lessons, try to involve the student in the process as much as possible. Communication is key! It's better to ask than assume, because you know what they say, “it makes an ASS out of U and Me”.

## Obtain A Non-Threatening Position – To not present any danger or discomfort.

Earlier we talked about making eye contact to help establish a positive relationship with a student. However, instead of making direct eye contact with a student, this time I want you to try to get below their eye contact level, if possible, to look them in the eyes. Don't worry I'm not trying to set you to be in a good position to get punched in the face or spit on... but, be aware of the possibility of that happening.

The reason I am suggesting that you crouch down to get below eye level of the student is because it will help you to seem less threatening and convey a message that says I am here for you. Think about it, animals in the wild do it all the time to assert a non-threatening position when facing the dominate animal.

No, I am not saying the student is dominant over you or that you should let the student control the situation. But we do want to help a student make a connection with us and what easier way to help them feel safe than conveying that there is no threat and therefore no need to fight.



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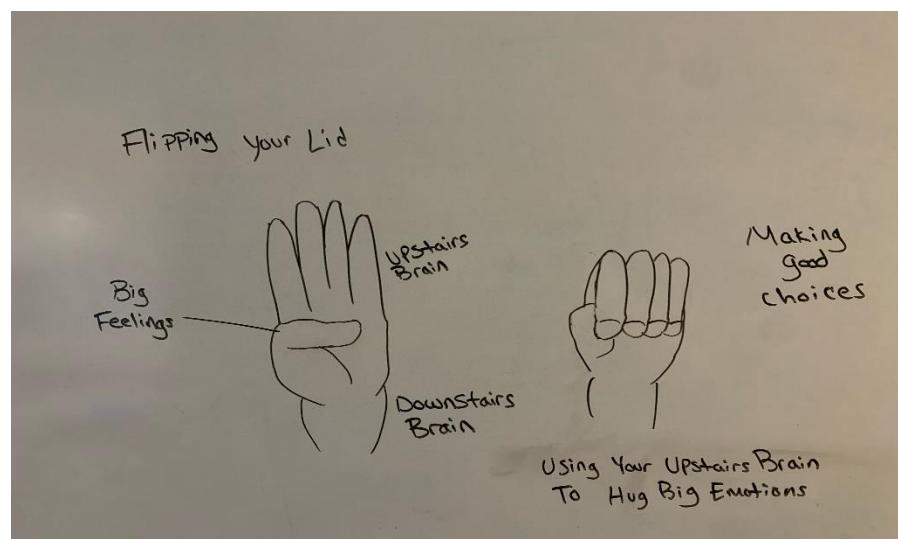
## Give Insight into The Brain - Teaching students important aspects of their brain.

One of the most powerful tools we can give our students is giving them insight. Insight into why they may act the way they act and why they say the things they say. Giving insight does not mean to try and educate the student when they are already escalated.

Instead, try teaching insight when the student is calm and using the rational part of their brain. Help them to understand how the brain works and how to manage emotions when they are upset and help them to identify coping skills to use when they are escalating.

Try using a cartoon to help teach kids about their brains and its function. One cartoon that I like using is a picture of a fist with your thumb next to your palm created by Siegel & Byson. IT was explained that the fingers wrapped around your thumb represents your logical brain where good decisions are made, and your thumb represents your emotional part of the brain. As long as your fingers are covering your thumb, you can control your emotions and express them appropriately. But the minute your finger starts to uncover your thumb “flipping your lid”, your emotional brain takes control. When your emotional brain takes control, the rational brain does not have the ability to say “stop, you are making bad choices and you are going to get into trouble” (Siegel & Byson, 2014).

This is a great tool to help students identify when they are “flipping their lid” and why. It can also help students to deescalate faster. I showed this to my five-year-old son and my three-year-old daughter as well as my





adolescent students with great success. It's an easy concept to understand, it externalizes the behaviors and names it, and it allows us a way to give students a nonverbal cue to help them understand that they are starting to flip or have flipped their lid. The picture that I drew below represents the drawing created by Siegel & Byson.

### *The Power of Being Proactive - Try to think ahead to help avoid possible triggers.*

One way to respond to students is by being proactive. Try to pay attention to your student's cues. If you are able to notice triggers and cues to typical behavioral issues, you can avoid drama by staying ahead of the behaviors. As you think about your students, try to point out any cues that normally occur before a behavioral outburst. This may be tricky if you don't know your students well, or if they react differently to different situations. But I think most students have a go to cue that tell everyone to "back off" or "leave me alone" whether they are aware of it or not.

Can you think of any students' cues? The easiest cue I can think of from one of my students is what I call his "grumpy face". I have a good relationship with this student and often joke that he put on his Mr. Potato Head mad face today. It usually makes him smile and we talk about what's going on, but there are times that he's looked at me with eyes that could kill and I know "not today Jessica" and I give him a little space to help him cool off before we talk about what's going on.

But for other students it may not be so obvious, they may tense up, seem agitated, or just act in different ways that we wouldn't usually notice until they are flinging desks or cussing you out for asking them to have a seat. So, it may take some time to really notice triggers to be proactive.

## Avoid Arguments - Don't argue with students.

As hard as this may be, instead of arguing with a student or trying to reemphasize reasons why the student should do what you are asking them to do (lecturing), it may help to realize that you are not the student and you are not on the same page as them. Ask yourself the why, what, and how questions.

Instead of arguing you can say...

- I think I am getting way ahead of myself here
- I apologize. I think I haven't been fully listening to what you have been saying.

I know this takes some maturity. No one likes admitting they are wrong or taking the blame for something they didn't do. But in the long run, I would much rather swallow my pride than spend the rest of the afternoon chasing the student through the building or preventing them from slamming their foot through my wall because the student escalated so much from our argument. Sometimes we just have to pick our battles and I personally don't want to spend my day on the battlefield.



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## Roll with Resistance - Not allowing resistance to control the situation.

Don't engage in a power struggle, as hard as it may be. Instead of responding in a way that increases resistance, it is better to listen and try to understand the student's perspective by responding. This will help you gain more information about thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are maintaining the behavior.

I like to use humor to help me roll with resistance. I don't necessarily consider myself the funniest person, but if I can get the student to at least crack a smile I've noticed that their demeanor starts to change. They seem to be in less of an attack mode and more in a relaxed state.

Another way to roll with resistance is to change the subject. Start talking about something completely off subject that the student enjoys and make sure they know (or think) you are really interested. I do this a lot.

The student could be telling me how mad they are about a situation. I take the time to listen, ask questions to make sure they feel heard, then I act like I just thought of something that I completely forgot about. "Oh yea, I completely forgot to tell you that you I tried that game you were telling me about. It looked a little hard for me, do you think you could show me some of your secrets later?" This usually helps the student to put their walls down and we can get back on task.

**Won't vs. Can't** - Sometimes students do not have the ability to achieve a goal compared to other that choice not to complete the goal.

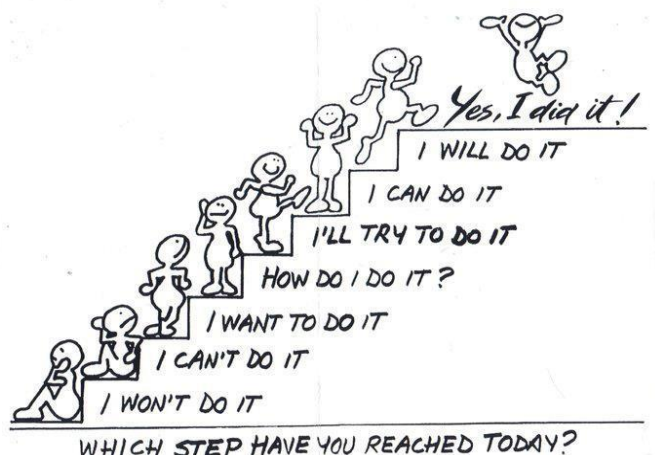
Consider if the student won't or just can't. As an educated adult we find things to come easier to us than our students would. We assume that students should be able to do the things that we ask them to do and say, "it's so easy". We easily forget that students may not have been taught or simply don't have the skills needed to do the, what we think is easy, work.

When a student refuses, it's important to look at the why again. Try not to just assume that the student is challenging you, or that he/she is being defiant. Maybe they just can't complete the homework assignment, stay in their seat, control impulses, or use appropriate language. As frustrating as these behaviors can be, if no one has ever taught them or they can't control themselves, how can we expect them to just know?

I think we all have at least one student like this, right? The student that is constantly out of their seat, yelling, cussing, screaming, or can't keep their hands to themselves. As I describe these behaviors, I know you can think of at least one student, right? I have had several and as irritating as these behaviors are to us, we have to think about why they may be acting this way.

Consider the student that has ADHD, impulse control disorders, or is being abused or neglected at home. Can we really hold them to the same expectations of other students when they truly do not have the capabilities? Try reducing some of the work, make a deal with them, or

give them a reward for completing the work. This may allow your student to have some buy in and at least try. This will help you to better determine if the student won't or can't.



WHICH STEP HAVE YOU REACHED TODAY?  
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## Emphasizing Personal Choice - Allowing the student to have control over their outcome.

People don't typically like being told what to do. Most dislike being told what to do so much that they maintain their behaviors to prove that no one can tell them what to do even if change is the best option.

It is hard to refrain from telling students what to do when you can clearly see that they are making poor choices. However, when we tell our students what to do, it may risk further student push back. Help the students to understand the reasons behind our expectations. If students can clearly see that we care about them and their future and we want them to be successful for their own good, students are more likely to make a choice to try harder.



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**Do Overs** - Allowing the student to change their behavior by starting over.

Try using a “do over” before applying any kind of disciplinary strategy (Siegel & Byson, 2014). A do over is a very easy concept. The next time a student comes in and slams his stuff down on the desk, you can say, in a nice and calm manner, that was a little loud, I think I am going to let you try that one again and this time maybe not so loud. Do you want to give it a try?

This helps them practice doing the right thing. Depending on the student’s mood and the relationship that you have with the student, this may or may not work. Some of my students would normally respond well and would smile and try again, but others may look at me angrily and tell me to “fuck off” or “no, I’m good”. So, what do you do in that situation? Best thing you can do, is smile and try a different strategy even if in your head you’re secretly screaming at the top of your lungs!

If at first you don't  
succeed  
try,  
try again.

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## *A Conditional Yes - Avoiding saying no by adding a condition.*

Another strategy to try is instead of saying no, try a conditional yes. I don't know about you, but I hate being told no. Our students are no different. It doesn't matter if the request is the dumbest thing you ever heard, if they are told no and don't have emotion regulation skills get ready for a battle. So, to avoid battles it may be better to give a conditional yes instead of a no answer.

You can still say no, but it's how you say no that counts (Siegel & Byson, 2014). A harsh no can automatically trigger reactive response. So rather than just saying no, try adding a condition to your answer.

### *Example:*

**Student:** Can I just talk with my friends a little longer before we start the assignment?

**Teacher:** Of course, you can talk with your friends during passing period. Or, if we get through the lesson, I will give you time for you to speak with them.

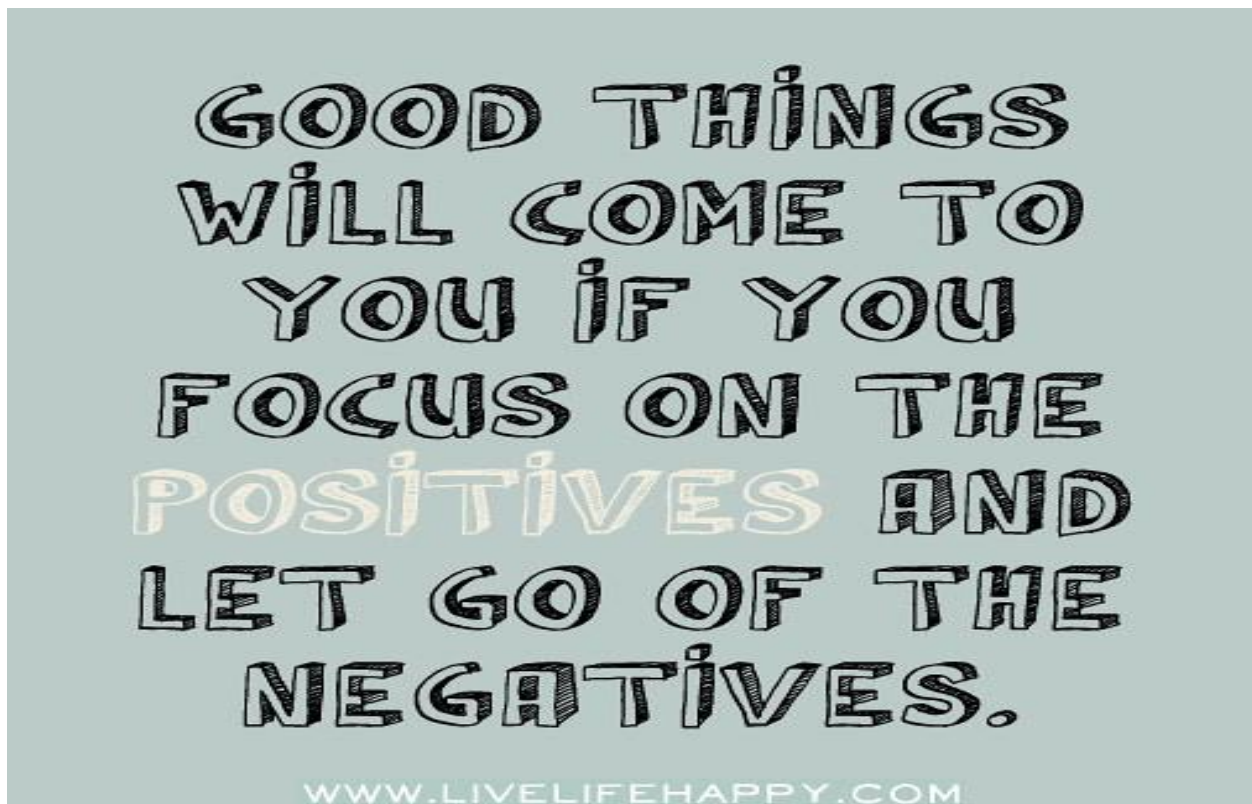
Again, this may or may not work depending on what they are asking, the student's mood, and the relationship you have with them. Instead of accepting the conditional yes, they could laugh at your response, tell you to shut up, and continue talking with their friends. But in my experience if they are taking the time to ask you to talk with their friends, they will most likely accept the conditional yes.



**Point Out Positives** - Make the student aware of the good things that they accomplished.

Too often we get caught up in what the student should be doing better rather than focusing on what they are doing right. We reward students that often don't go to class for going to class, but we never say anything to the students that go to class day after day without any persuasion. We forget that the best way we can continue to encourage positive behaviors is by pointing them out and letting students know that we see them and appreciate everything they are doing correctly.

It's important to be specific. Take the time to say, I am proud of you for going to class and following along rather than just saying I am proud of you; be specific. Yes, praise is good and saying I am proud of you is a good thing, but we want to point out the specific behaviors that we want to continue or the student may be confused and think that you are talking about something else that they did.



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## **Humor - Making students laugh as a distraction from the situation.**

As discussed early I like using humor to help deescalate a situation. After having a good relationship with students, humor can be a great tool to help regulate emotions and redirect a situation. It doesn't matter if I am making a joke about myself, the situation, or the student. If the student can buy in and laugh at a situation, you may have just avoided further escalating the student. I would much rather the student get a little laugh about how I was out of breath climbing up and down the stairs chasing them than watching them lose control on my classroom décor or hurting themselves by slamming their fists into the wall.

## **Behavior Contracts - Spells out the expectations of the student and teacher when carrying out a plan.**

Behavior contracts are awesome and usually help correct negative behaviors at least a little. They help bring some awareness to the student's behaviors and students can see the possible rewards and consequences associated with their behaviors. Plus, it's a great way to hold students accountable and prove you did what you said you were going to do. Make sure you keep your end of the bargain or you may lose trust with students.

I also suggestion using contracts with students that you have already established a good relationship with. If you don't have a good relationship with a student and attempt to do a contract, the student may not have much buy in and not try as hard as they could to correct their behaviors.

There are many different contracts available, however I like pointing out what the student should do to correct behaviors and things that the teacher should do to help the student. This helps the student understand that they are not alone and that you are willing to help them reach success. In the examples, I created a contract that works best for me that is similar to others that I have found from other resources.

## Behavior Contract

**I \_\_\_\_\_, agree to improve my behaviors by doing the following:**

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**My teacher \_\_\_\_\_, agrees to help me make these changes by:**

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**After successfully achieving my goal, I will be rewarded by:**

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## Behavior Contract

**I Johnny Doe, agree to improve my behaviors by doing the following:**

Bringing my Ipad, notebooks, and pencil to class, sitting in my seat when the bell rings, and reduce my cursing to no more than three times per period for three weeks in a row with only one mess up day.

**My teacher Mrs. Gettys, agrees to help me make these changes by:**

Creating a visual list of materials needed for each class to put in my locker, reminding me to have a seat as soon as I walk in the room, and giving warnings and reminders to me when I say a cuss word.

**After successfully achieving my goal, I will be rewarded by:**

Allowing a free period to play basketball in the gym with a friend of my choice after achieving my goal for three weeks in a row with no more than one mess up day.

## **Token Economies - A system used to reward desirable behaviors.**

A token economy is a contingency system that helps reinforce target behavior. Students are given reinforcers that can be exchanged for other reinforcers. Token economies can be set up many different ways. Teachers can use stickers, tokens, marbles, fake money, etc. to represent proof of positive behaviors. Students can then trade in the reinforcers for other more appealing items.

I think token economies are great but be cautious using them. Students may become dependent on them to complete simple tasks that they were already doing before introducing the token economies. And, many of my students attempted to negotiate how many reinforcers they can receive per expected behavior and the trade in value of the other items. If you stay firm, this should stop, but it's hard to say no when they are doing so good and you just want to reward them because you are so proud.

Another thing to be aware of is forgetting to give the reinforcer to the student. I don't know how many times the end of the period comes, and I get distracted by something and before you know it both the students and I forget about giving them their tokens. It is so hard to remember what student earned for what behavior the next day or from the day before that. So, make it a routine or make sure you document behaviors to refer back to later.

## **Model Behavior - Teaching a new behavior so that others can imitate that behavior.**

Modeling is an important part in teaching behaviors. It's important to show the students the desired behaviors that you expect. We can show students how we cope with feelings. Talking about your feelings can help students learn how to express themselves and cope with emotions rather than externalizing or internalizing their feelings. It is a perfect time to show students that we are human too and that we make mistakes. It's okay to not always have all the answers or do everything the proper way every time. Your goal is building a relationship and allowing the students to feel like you can connect.

After you have a relationship with the student you should try to meet them where they are by copying their behavior. I am not saying do everything they are doing. Please don't yell, cuss at students, and throw chairs to get your point across. But you can make little adjustments to your own behavior to help them deescalate.

Try matching their posture, tone of voice, or volume. It is crazy, but once you match them you can start to change them. Imagine a student that comes in all hype and anxious about a situation. You respond with the same hyped up energy and as you continue talking you start to slow things down and return to normal volume and speed. Watch as the student follows your lead and naturally slows down too. I'm not joking when I say it's like magic.

## ***Social Stories* - Model appropriate social interactions by describing a situation using a short story.**

Social stories help students learn socially acceptable behaviors. Social stories can be used for various reasons. They can help students understand routines and expected behaviors of students. I find them very useful to help prevent negative situations by teaching students how to express their emotions appropriately.

We identify a specific trigger and potential coping skills that may help them reduce frustration or anger from the trigger. So, let's say there is a student that often doesn't like it when another student stares at them. The social story may start with, when someone stares at me... followed by agreed upon procedures to help prevent the student from further escalation. Once the social story is created, it should be reviewed often with the student.

### **Social Story**

**When I walk into the classroom.....**

**I will use a quiet voice**

**I will sit in my assigned seat**

**I will follow instructions**

**I will complete my assignments for the day**

## My Personal Experiences:

- **Yelling**
- **Aggression**
- **Cursing**
- **Name calling**
- **Leaving the classroom**
- **Refusing to do work**

Based on teacher responses, yelling, aggression, cursing, name calling, leaving the room, and refusing to do work are the most common negative and problematic behaviors displayed by students with emotional disturbances. These behaviors make it difficult for teachers to teach and often cause frustration. Too often teachers focus on these behaviors and we forget that students with emotional disturbances struggle to control their emotions and often do not have the skills necessary to manage their emotions. It's important to remember not to take these behaviors personally. These students often respond from a fight, flight, or freeze mode and do not consider the consequences of their actions.

With that being said... these behaviors are extremely frustrating and can really test any teacher's patience and make us second guess our ability to teach students with emotional disturbances. The problem is that there is no one answer that will prevent these behaviors or stop them from escalating. I don't have a magical cure or solution that will stop students from these behaviors; I'm sorry to say! If I did have a magical solution, I am pretty sure I would be a millionaire by now giving lectures and writing books after books. But sadly, I am not magical, and I have no one answer.

What makes managing these behaviors the most frustrating is that it's a huge guessing game, guessing and guessing, until something seems to work. Every situation and every student are different. What works one time with a student may not work next time with the same student.

There are so many factors to consider when addressing a problematic behavior that it is almost impossible to really know exactly what's going on and how you can help. So, this section of the handbook is going to be included to help you understand that you are not alone.

I am going to give you real examples of situations that I have dealt with and how I handled them. I am not saying that I handled these situations perfectly or that you have to do it the way that I handled the situation. The point is to help you feel that you are not alone in the struggle.

## Yelling - Yelling out in class to be disruptive.

In the past, I had a student that had a love-hate relationship with me. He would come talk to me, ask me for advice, and joke around with me. But the minute he had to be in my classroom for academic purposes, it was as if I was his biggest enemy. I couldn't get him to sit down for five minutes or stop yelling and disrupting the class the entire period.

His favorite things to do was to walk around the room and start screaming "big hoes, big hoes". He thought he was so funny. He continued to be disruptive the entire period and refused to do any work. It really didn't matter what I said to him in that moment, avoiding the work out trumped any fear of consequences or the possibility of damaging our relationship. This behavior lasted for several weeks before he was ready to explain why he was acting the way he was in my classroom. (Remember every behavior has a reason).

After discussing his feelings about his low self-esteem and beliefs that he could not complete the work, he stated that he would rather be loud and disruptive than look dumb. We have since discussed alternative assignments he could pick from and ways to help him express himself appropriately.



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## Aggression - Physical or verbal threats used to intimidate others.

Aggression is a hard-behavioral issue to address. You do not want to go head to head with a student, but you do not want to cower in fear either. Students are trying to prove that they are in control of the situation. This will happen. Aggression comes with the territory, so remember those fun CPI techniques and know who your crisis team is around you.

Before and when this happens be prepared. It helps to have a plan of how to handle situations like these and not just wing it. Pay attention to triggers and sign of distress. Think if this kid comes at me or uses aggression as intimidation how can I respond in the best way to deescalate the situation and not contribute to the situation.

Thankfully I haven't had a student come at me in an attempt to fight, but I have had my fair share of breaking up fights between students and broken items in my room. I've had things thrown at me and my desk completely cleared, but in this example, I am going to describe a situation that caused one of my students to become aggressive while causing a lot of classroom destruction.

During this situation, the student with an emotional disturbance was having trouble regulating his emotions. He was having a growth spurt and his medications were being changed to help adjust to his developmental changes. This student and I have had a good teacher-student relationship for a while and he was usually respectful and easily redirected when I worked with him.

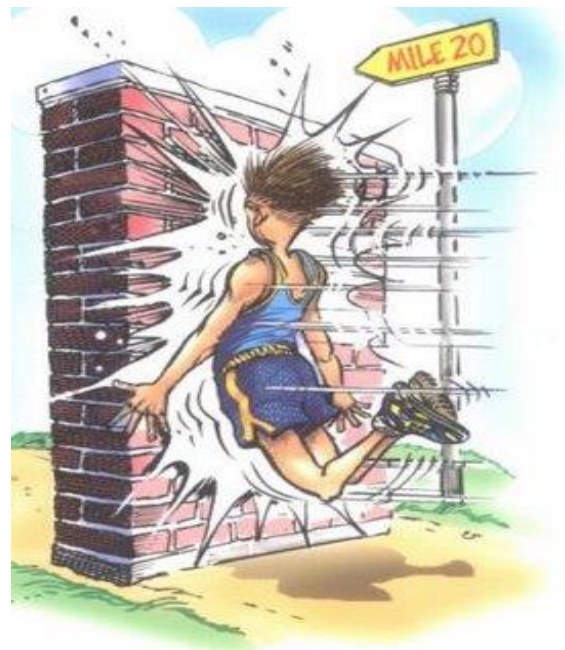
On this specific day, the student left my room to go to a general education class. He was gone for about ten minutes and returned to my classroom upset about something that happened in class. He refused to go back to his general education class and started passing the room. He refused to talk to me about what was going on, so I decided to allow him time to pace. However, after about ten minutes of pacing he then started to tear posters off the wall.

I asked him what was going on and why he was tearing my posters off the wall. He remained silent, looked at me, and continued to pull posters down and break small

items in my room. As I continued to try to calmly reason with him and offer coping skills, breaks, and every other strategy that I could think of, he just continued to take it out on my classroom. He then began to kick and punch the walls. Due to concern for his safety, I decided to call for backup.

Calling for back up only increased his rage and the amount of damage he did to my classroom. In this case, it did not end well. Multiple staff members, the resource officer, his parent, and I all tried to give him other options and reason with him, but he was unable to deescalate in the moment. It was a very sad moment in my teaching career as he stared at me in fear as he was being arrested and taken from the building in handcuffs. In this example, there was no strategy that I could have used to help him deescalate. This will happen! I spent the next few days racking my brain trying to figure out why he did what he did, why he destroyed my room when I had nothing to do with why he was mad in the first place. I beat myself up asking how I could have done something differently to help him. But when he came back, I found out that he said that he came to my classroom, because it was his room and the only place, he felt safe in that moment. I think he knew that I would not hold a grudge and that I would try to help him rather than judge him. He and I then talked about what happened to help ensure our relationship was in tack and discuss what we both could have done differently. He was very apologetic, expressed deep regret for how he acted, and paid for the damages of my personal items that he broke. I explained that I knew he was not himself and that we can start fresh.

This particular student and I continued to have a great teacher- student relationship, he wasn't aggressive in any way since that day, and he is continued to do well academically. So, this just proves you could have all the strategies in the world, but sometimes there is nothing you can do.



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## Cursing - To use offensive words.

Cursing can be very disrespectful and disruptive in the classroom. It's hard to teach when students are constantly dropping the F bomb. But honestly, I think we need to choose our battles. If a student gets frustrated with an assignment and mumbles fuck, or is telling a story to a friend during free time and describe their story with a few cuss words, is it really worth getting upset and possibly turning something into nothing? Situations like these, I usually try my best to ignore and pretend like I didn't even hear it. If it's too loud or the student is cursing too often, I say "come on guys, please use school appropriate language". And they usually stop.

We have to remember that our expectations may not be our students' expectations or their parents' expectations. I think one of the hardest things to change is cussing at school when it's okay to cuss at home and everyone at home cusses as they please. Students do need to learn that there is a time and place for everything and that different environments have different expectations. I try to help my students understand these expectations and I often say, "please use school appropriate language", but again I am going to pick my battles.

Now, if a student comes in my classroom cussing at another student or just being disruptive to start a fight with another student, I will try other strategies. I often use do overs with my students when they are cursing. I say, "excuse me, do you want to try again?" Most students will smile, because they know they are in the wrong, and rephrase what they said without using cuss words. Like I said,



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many times cursing is just habitual, and they cuss out of habit or don't even realize they are being inappropriate.

## Name Calling - Insulting others using abusive language.

*Fuck off, you fucking bitch!*

I know what you are thinking, “did that kid just tell me to fuck off and call me a bitch? Oh, hell no, no one can talk to me like that!” But, before you go gladiator on that kid, STOP take a deep breath and remember you are the adult. The student is looking for a reaction to avoid or show they are in control. Relax your face or your fist; whatever tenses up when you are ready to rumble.

This actually happens a lot to me working with students with an emotional disturbance. I’ve learned I cannot take this personally, because there is not one student that has called me a name and I think back at and wonder why they hated me or wonder how they could have treated me so badly and disrespectfully. Honestly, on most occasions the student that just called me every name in the book is deescalated and perfectly happy within ten minutes of the situation joking and laughing with me.

Students with emotional disturbance often call people names because they don’t know how else to regulate their emotions. I’ve learned that if I get defensive or yell at the student, the situation will only escalate and now I just fueled their fire. I’ve learned if I tell a student that it hurt my feelings or I don’t appreciate being called that, the student just learned how to get under my skin, and they use it as their first weapon of defense.

The best thing that I can recommend in this situation is to stay as calm as you can; even if you are screaming and cussing in your head. Here is just one of my many examples that come to mind about a student calling me a name.

**Me:** “Today we are going to finish our read aloud. After the read aloud, we will complete an English assignment together.”

**Student:** “I am not doing that shit today. You are such a bitch” as the student slammed down his notebook.

**Me:** Calmly ask- “Why what’s going on?”

**Student:** Yelling- “I just don’t feel like doing that gay ass reading shit today you fucking bastard.” “God why are you so fucking dumb you bitch? Just shut the hell up.”

**Me:** “Oh, I’m sorry to hear that you feel that way. You must really not like the book we are reading, huh? You know sometimes I can really ask a lot from you guys and I have a tendency of picking some boring books. Maybe we can talk a little more about how I can help to make the assignment a little more interesting for you next time? What do you think?”

**Student:** “You suck at picking books. It’s so stupid” as he sat down in his seat.

**Me:** I crouched down beside his desk and said, “take a break for a little while and maybe we can talk later.”

**Student:** Put his head down during the read aloud, but he was listening. He then participated during the English assignment without prompting.

In this example the student actually did deescalate and complete the assignment. We talked later about why he got so upset, how to express himself appropriately next time, and coping skills that he could have used in the moment. Although this example turned out well, it does not always go that way. I’ve had students call me name after name without any end in sight. I’ve overreacted and could have handled situations differently, but in this case, I really just got lucky here.

Other strategies that I have used when students were calling me names, “thank you for expressing your opinion, but you know that is not appropriate school language. My favorite... Yeah, sometimes I can be, thank you for noticing. Then change the subject.

The key is to show them that you are NOT offended by whatever they call you. Again, the minute they see you react instead of responding to the situation... they are going to eat you alive! Trust me on this... give it a try, just let it fly.

## *Leaving the classroom - Walking out of the room without permission.*

I don't even want to talk about how many students have got up and left my classroom. But let's be honest, when it comes to fight or flight, I would rather the flight option than fighting me or another student. In many cases, students become overwhelmed and frustrated with the academic or social needs required to be a student. When students feel as if they have no other option, their first instinct is to escape. When the student is not upset, you should try to help the student learn coping skills and have an alternative designated spot in the room for the student to escape to when they are upset. But if a student is trying to leave in the moment, I would not suggest standing in front of the door to block them; unless you like being punched. In many cases, the student is so angry or overwhelmed they will do anything to escape the situation.

In my example, a student that I once worked with left the room every time he was told no. It didn't matter what it was, if he wasn't getting his way he was out. The student made a mad dash to the door and then walked around the halls until he made it to one of his designated hiding spots in the building. These spots actually were kind of nice, because I always knew where to look for him.

I had to find coverage for my room and then go after him time and time again. He usually needed about ten minutes to deescalate and return to class. After deescalating, we always spent time discussing the situations and better options than leaving the room. I created a designated calm area for him to sit and a pacing path in my classroom to allow him to pace. We discussed deep breathing techniques and distractions using coloring and drawing.

These techniques seemed to help, but what really worked for this student was the conditional yes and a reward system. This particular student and I created a contract that stated that he would be able to earn a certain number of tallies per period if he stays in the room and uses alternative coping skills when upset. We worked on this very hard for about a month and then it seemed to just come natural to the student. The designated area became his first instinct.

## Refusing to do Work - Student refuses to complete assigned tasks.

Refusing to do is one of the most frequent behavior issues that I deal with on a regular basis. It can be so irritating, especially when I already modify the assignment or reduce it to help the student feel less overwhelmed. But really, there are so many possible reasons that a student could refuse to complete their work. The assignment could be too easy or too hard, they could be tired, sick, agitated, or worried about a situation at home or with their friends. They could be trying to be defiant, or just have control over the situation. There are so many things that our students cannot control in their lives, so I'm not surprised that a student would refuse to do his work to feel as if they have some choice in his life.

Because there are so many possible reasons that students refuse to do their work, it becomes our job to play detective. It can be exhausting and time consuming to understand the real meaning behind the refusal, especially since each refusal can have a completely different reason each time. We have to educate our students to talk to us and let us know what we could do to help. But this takes time a lot of trust from the student to share these reasons. Try pulling them aside to talk to them about the situation. They may not tell you anything, but if you are consistent, they may eventually open up to you.

In one of my examples of a student refusing to do work, I will admit that I could have handled the situation a little better. In this situation I recall being so frustrated, because I helped him so much that if I did any more for him, I would have been just writing the assignment for him. I asked myself, I put in the effort, why couldn't he? But I guess it's true what they say, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink!

### Example:

**Me:** We are going to be reading a short story together as a class and then writing a one 5-7 sentence paragraph answering the question about the reading.

**Students:** Groaning they complain as a class that I am making the write five sentences. (As if I was asking them to write a book or something.)

**Me:** I will help answer the question and give ideas of what to write. I just want you to write the answer we discuss in your journals focusing on grammar, punctuation, and the correct use of capital and lower-case letters as we have been discussing.

(I then do the reading and have the kids get out their journals.)

**Student:** Okay, I'm finished with my paragraph as he pulls out his phone.

**Me:** Okay, let me take a look so we can review it together. (noticing he only wrote one sentence.)

**Student:** I did the assignment, so I'm done.

**Me:** No, you only wrote one sentence. The assignment was to write a five to seven sentence paragraph. I need you to finish your journal. Come on, I will even tell you what to write.

**Student:** No, I did the assignment, so I don't have to write anything else. As he threw the journal in the trashcan.

**Me:** No, the assignment is not done. You have two choices; you can get it out of the trash and finish it and then enjoy a break for the last five minutes of class. Or, you can sit there and do nothing without your phone until the period is over.

**Student:** (Still playing on his phone) I already did it. I'm done. If I was in any other class, they would just give me the F and leave me alone.

**Me:** Well, I am not any other teacher and you are not in any other class right now. If you want free time you have to finish your work, or you can go to the office.

**Student:** Fine, I will go to the office.

In this example, the student went to the office and then refused to come back to my class for two days. I saw him in the halls throughout the day during these two days he refused to come to my room. I continued as usual with a smile on my face saying hi and asking him how he was doing. He just looked at me every time with a blank look on his face. But I knew if I was persistent, he would come talk to me at some point. I was right.

He did finally give in and come to my class. He acted as if nothing happened and was laughing and joking around with me and the other students. At the end of the period,



I pulled him aside and asked him what happened that day. He said he was sorry for throwing the journal away and that he was just really frustrated. He explained a situation that was going on at home and an inability to focus that day. I allowed him to make up the assignment and we moved on.

# Thank you

I hope this handbook has guided you in the right direction and given you a sense of hope when working with students with an emotional disturbance. I also hope that it has given you a sense of relief that you are not alone. Always remember that you are making a difference in the lives of your students whether it feels like it or not. So....

Thank you!

# THANKS

for **ALL** that you did today in your classroom...

For making a million little split second

**DECISIONS** for the benefit of your students.



For putting your own needs on hold and

keeping them the **FOCUS** of your day.

For **PLANNING** for them long before today  
ever got rolling.



For **CHANGING** those plans because they didn't  
fit someone who needed a little extra.

For smiling, **LAUGHING WITH THEM** and reassuring  
their efforts, trials and mistakes.



For placing your hand on a shoulder that  
was **EXACTLY** what someone needed.

For getting down on the physical level of  
your students because **IT MATTERS**.

For thinking of a new way to reach  
someone who wasn't getting it.

You matter.

Yes — **YOU MATTER.**

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## **CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION**

The purpose of the Special Education Project was to investigate what special education teachers report about the behaviors that seemed to cause the most disruption in the classroom and strained the positive teacher-student relationships. From the study, a handbook was developed to help special education teachers learn to form and maintain positive teacher-student relationships while still addressing negative and undesired behaviors. The study helped identify strategies that are beneficial to special education teachers to reduce negative behaviors and develop and maintain positive teacher-student relationships with students with an emotional disturbance.

In order to create a handbook a needs assessment survey was conducted with special education teachers. The purpose of the survey was to find out the answer to three questions; what behaviors do special education teachers report that could strain the positive teacher-student relationships? What strategies do special education teachers currently implement to help the strained relationships? What strategies would be beneficial to special education teachers to help gain more knowledge in regard to reducing negative behaviors that reduce positive teacher-student relationships? The needs assessment survey also solicited information on additional information or strategies special education teachers would like to use to help them address negative behaviors in positive ways. The handbook is designed to help teachers build and maintain positive teacher-student relationships while still addressing negative behaviors.

The results of the needs assessment were consistent with previous findings that negative behaviors can have a negative impact of the teacher-student relationship. The needs assessment suggested that there were behavioral issues that disrupted teaching and caused frustration. Participating teachers reported that they would like to have more knowledge to help them interact, teach, and redirect students with an emotional disturbance. The teachers stated that they

would like more strategies to use with students with an emotional disturbance when they are having behavioral issues such as yelling, cursing, leaving the room, classroom destruction, refusing to do work, and aggression. In addition, teachers would like more information about how to not engage in a power struggle with a student, positive and negative punishment and positive and negative reinforcement, token economies, and helping a student using posted schedules, clearly explaining expectations, and applying reward systems.

Therefore, additional training working with students with an emotional disturbance are beneficial to special education teachers to build positive teacher-student relationships and correct behavioral disturbances and frustrations. Having a positive teacher-student relationship is not only helpful for students to improve behaviorally, it will also help them improve academically. By using this handbook, teachers will have access to strategies and support when working with students with an emotional disturbance.

### **Strengths of the Handbook**

The handbook describes different strategies that can benefit special education teachers to reduce negative behaviors and develop and maintain positive teacher-student relationships with students with an emotional disturbance. The handbook is intended to be used as a resource to implement when working with students with an emotional disturbance. Teachers can use the information and strategies from the handbook to help build and maintain a positive teacher-student relationship. It is a tool for teachers that may be lacking skills necessary to build and maintain positive teacher-student relationships and identify strategy to help reduce behavioral issues.

### **Limitations of the Survey Study and Handbook**

Limitations of the results in regard to the methodology of the research is the sample size. The current study had only nine special education teachers qualified to participant in the survey. It should be noted that one hundred percent of the eligible teachers participated the survey study. Ideally, the survey results would be more informative if there were more participates able to participate in the survey. Furthermore, out of the nine participants, some of them decided to not respond to particular questions; making the results not as strong. A limitation to the handbook was that there is no one size fits all strategy that can be utilized with students with an emotional disturbance. Every student and every situation are unique. Strategies that have worked in the past may not necessary work again. Teachers are not able to easily flip to a page, grab, and use with a student having behavioral or emotional distress. The handbook only offers suggestions and gives examples of possible way to handle the situation.

### **Recommended use of the Handbook**

The use of this handbook is intended for special education teachers working with emotional disturbed students. Many teachers can benefit from the information and strategies provided in this handbook to help them understand emotional disturbed students and possible strategies that may help them to reduce negative behaviors. The handbook is intended to give special education teachers real life strategies and advice while also helping them to gain confidence and reassurance that they are not alone.

### **Implications for future Studies and Practices**

As mental health is becoming less stigmatized and the demands on our youth are growing, more and more students are being diagnosed with anxiety, depression, attention

hyperactive disorder, etc. The number of students being labeled with an emotional disturbance is also on the rise. Due to the increased percentages of students struggling with emotional disturbances, special education teachers need to be aware of strategies to help these students manage and express their emotions to help students academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. The handbook created is a great resource to help teachers build positive teacher-student relationships that could have lifelong impact on the students.

### **Personal Reflection**

It is important for teachers to have a fun and truthful guide to refer to when feeling discouraged so that they can continue to be the best teacher they can be. My hope was to create a handbook that ignites teacher's willingness to seek problem solving skills and a desire to continue working with students with an emotional disturbance. I want special education teachers to always remember that they are working with students that everyone else said was too challenging and they are changing lives every day. I hope that my handbook will help provide special education teachers with the resources needed to work with students with an emotional disturbance.

This handbook has been very rewarding to create. However, there are some things that I would do differently. I would focus not only on special education teachers working with student with an emotional disability, I would also include general education teachers that work with student with an emotional disturbance in their class. Future studies should include positive teacher-student relationships of general education teachers to help gain more insight.

The biggest hurdle of completing this special project was the time. The time away from my husband, time away from my children, my friends, my life. This project was very time consuming and for someone that works a full-time job, a part time job, completing a Master

program, and has three children, time is very precious. There was a lot of stress and desire to give up, but I continued to push myself. I never gave up and I am proud of the handbook that I have created for my colleagues and for the benefit of the students I am passionate about working with every day. Without the support of my classmates, professor, and my family, I am not sure this project would have been created. Thank you for all the encouragement and motivation to help me achieve my goal.



## APPENDIX A: ASSESSMENT SURVEY

### Instructions:

Please complete the following questions to the best of your knowledge and ability. The survey questions are completely anonymous. You will **not** be asked to share any personal information. You are not required to complete the survey questions, and you can choose not to complete the survey if you desire. When you have finished the survey, please print the survey, place it in a sealed envelope, and put it in Jessica Gettys's mailbox in the school office in order to protect your identity. All completed surveys will be kept confidential. Thank you for your participation and time completing the survey.

### Teacher- Student Relationship Survey Questions

1. What negative behaviors are frequently displayed by a student with an emotional disturbance in class? (Mark all that apply)
  - a. Yelling
  - b. Cursing
  - c. Refusing to do work
  - d. Leaving the classroom
  - e. Physical aggression (hitting, punching, kicking)
  - f. Classroom destruction
  - g. Other\_\_\_\_\_
  
2. What negative behaviors of students with emotional disturbance affect your ability to teach during class instruction. (Mark all that apply)
  - a. Yelling
  - b. Cursing
  - c. Refusing to do work

- d. Leaving the classroom
- e. Physical aggression (hitting, punching, kicking)
- f. Classroom destruction
- g. Other\_\_\_\_\_

3. What negative behaviors of students with an emotional disturbance cause you to be frustrated in class? (Mark all that apply)

- a. Yelling
- b. Cursing
- c. Refusing to do work
- d. Leaving the classroom
- e. Physical aggression (hitting, punching, kicking)
- f. Classroom destruction
- g. Other\_\_\_\_\_

4. How often do you redirect negative behaviors from students with an emotional disturbance for each behavior?

1-2 times per class period

3-5 times per class period

Greater than 5 times per class period

- a. Yelling \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Cursing \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Refusing to do work\_\_\_\_\_
- d. Leaving the classroom\_\_\_\_\_
- e. Physical aggression (hitting, punching, kicking) \_\_\_\_\_

- f. Classroom destruction\_\_\_\_\_
- g. Other\_\_\_\_\_

Please describe the strategies (e.g., clear rules/expectations, praise, reward systems, choice, etc.) that you are implementing to redirect behaviors listed previously.

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5. Do you think that your current redirection strategy (e.g., non-verbal directives, proximity, private conversations, etc.) helps reduce negative behaviors of students with an emotional disturbance?

Yes

NO

Please explain your answer

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6. What evidence- based strategies do you implement to help reduce negative behaviors in the classroom? (e.g., clear rules/expectations, praise, reward systems, choice, etc.) (please list the evidence-based strategies)

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7. What discipline strategies are being used most often as a consequence for negative behaviors with a student with an emotional disturbance?

- a. Removal from room
  - b. Student self-initiated timeouts
  - c. Teacher initiated timeouts
  - d. Referral
  - e. Call/letter home to parent/guardian
  - f. Out of School Suspension (OSS)
  - g. In School Suspension (ISS)
  - h. Administrative timeout
  - i. Loss of privilege
  - j. Other
- 

8. Do discipline strategies (listed previously in question #7) help reduce negative behaviors with students labeled with an emotional disturbance?

Yes

No

Please explain your answer

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9. What strategies would you like more information about to create a positive teacher-student relationship? (Your response can be related to the strategies mentioned in the survey or from other strategies)

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10. What positive behaviors do you believe a teacher should teach students with an emotional disturbance to help them function better in the classroom? Please list at least two positive behaviors that could be taught to a student with an emotional disturbance.

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Thank you for completing this survey. Your responses are very valuable, and I appreciate you taking the time to complete the survey. This information will remain confidential.

Thank you very much for your assistance!

Jessica N. Gettys

## APPENDIX B: SURVEY RESPONSES

### Teacher- Student Relationship Survey Responses

1. What negative behaviors are frequently displayed by a student with an emotional disturbance in class? (Mark all that apply)

RESPONDENT #	RESPONSES
1	Yelling, cursing, refusing to do work, leaving the classroom, physical aggression
2	Yelling, cursing, refusing to do work, leaving the classroom, physical aggression, classroom destruction
3	Yelling, cursing, refusing to do work, (other- not following procedures)
4	Yelling, cursing, refusing to do work, leaving the classroom, physical aggression, classroom destruction
5	Yelling, cursing, refusing to do

	work, leaving the room
6	Yelling, cursing, refusing to do work, leaving the classroom
7	Yelling, cursing, refusing to do work, leaving the classroom, physical aggression, classroom destruction
8	Yelling, cursing, refusing to do work, leaving the classroom
9	Cursing, refusing to do work, leaving the classroom

2. What negative behaviors of students with emotional disturbance affect your ability to teach during class instruction? (Mark all that apply)

RESPONDENT #	RESPONSES
1	Yelling, cursing, refusing to do work leaving the room, physical aggression
2	Yelling, cursing, refusing to do work leaving the room, physical aggression,

	classroom destruction
3	Yelling, refusing to do work, (other- not following procedures)
4	Yelling, cursing, refusing to do work leaving the room, physical aggression, classroom destruction
5	Yelling, cursing, refusing to do work leaving the room, physical aggression, classroom destruction
6	Yelling, cursing, leaving the classroom
7	Yelling, refusing to do work, leaving the classroom, physical aggression, classroom destruction
8	Yelling, physical aggression, classroom destruction
9	Refusing to do work, leaving the classroom,



physical  
aggression

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3. What negative behaviors of students with an emotional disturbance cause you to be frustrated in class? (Mark all that apply)

RESPONDENT #	RESPONSES
1	Yelling, cursing, refusing to do work, physical aggression, classroom destruction
2	Yelling, cursing, refusing to work, leaving the classroom, physical aggression, classroom destruction
3	Yelling, cursing, (Other- not following procedures and ignoring directives)
4	Yelling, cursing, refusing to do work, leaving the classroom, physical aggression, classroom destruction
5	Yelling, cursing, refusing to do work, leaving the classroom,

	physical aggression, classroom destruction
6	Yelling, cursing, refusing to do work, leaving the classroom
7	Leaving the classroom, classroom destruction
8	Yelling, physical aggression, classroom destruction
9	Cursing, refusing to work, leaving the classroom

4. How often do you redirect negative behaviors from students with an emotional disturbance for each behavior?

1-2 times per class period

3-5 times per class period

Greater than 5 times per class period

RESPONDENT #	RESPONSES
1	Yelling: 1-2 Cursing: 3-5 Leaving the classroom: 1-2
2	Yelling: 1-2 Cursing: 1-2 Refusing to do work: 3-5 or Greater than 5

	Leaving the classroom: 1-2
3	Curing: 3-5 Refusing to do work: 3-5
4	Yelling: 1-2 Cursing: 1-2 Refusing to do work: 3-5 Leaving the classroom: 1-2 Physical aggression: 1-2 Classroom destruction 1-2
5	Yelling: Greater than 5 Cursing: Greater than 5 Refusing to do work: Greater than 5 Leaving the classroom: Greater than 5 Physical aggression: 1-2 Classroom destruction: 1-2
6	Yelling: Greater than 5 Curing: Greater than 5 Refusing to do work: 3-5 Leaving the Classroom: 1-2
7	Yelling 1-2 Cursing: Greater than 5

	Refusing to do work: 3-5 Leaving the classroom: 3-5 Physical aggression: Less than 1 Classroom destruction: Less than 1
8	Yelling: 1-2 Cursing: 1-2 Refusing to do work: 3-5 Leaving the classroom 1-2
9	Yelling 1-2 Cursing: Greater than 5 Refusing to do work: 3-5 Leaving the classroom: 3-5 Physical aggression: 1-2 Classroom destruction: 1-2

Please describe the strategies (e.g., clear rules/expectations, praise, reward systems, choice, etc.) that you are implementing to redirect behaviors listed previously.

RESPONDENT #	RESPONSES
1	Humor, limited verbal, proximity, non-verbal directives, quiet space, tangible rewards, praise, and choice

2	Choice/choice, reward systems, visual schedule, timers
3	Choice/choice, choice/ consequences, prompting with wait time, positive reinforcement, planned to ignore, natural consequences, col off passes
4	
5	Martin bucks, break, candy, verbal praise
6	Nonverbal prompts, rewards, praise, love, proximity, and private conversations
7	Clear expectations, rewards, creating a trusting environment, model expected behavior planned to ignore
8	Posted schedule, clear and consistent expectations, positive reinforcement, give 2-3 choices/options

when students are  
in crisis, allow  
students a cool  
down/ break to  
self-regulate,  
chunk  
assignments/  
modify and lessen  
work expectations

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9	Classroom token economy, praise, positives, parent contacts, rewarding positive behaviors
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5. Do you think that your current redirection strategy (e.g., non-verbal directives, proximity, private conversations, etc.) helps reduce negative behaviors of students with an emotional disturbance? Explain your answer.

RESPONDENT #	RESPONSES
1	Yes, these strategies deescalate
2	Yes, knowing each child and when they start showing signs of frustrations, these strategies can (but not always) deescalate
3	Yes, by prompting and providing wait time, the student has time to make a choice. Choice/choice and choice/

	consequence must be pre taught and consequences pre-determined, so the student knows what to expect
4	
5	Yes, depends on the student
6	Yes, I believe that if the behaviors are not full-blown melt down
7	Yes, depends on the day the student has had prior to seeing me. A strategy that works one week, may not work the next
8	Yes, some days is a resounding yes, others are more hit or miss. My biggest reminder I have to give myself is to meet them where they are, so they may not produce that much work on that particular day. However, if they are in their seat meeting behavior expectations that is more of the goal.

No, Most students  
do not care about  
their education  
and do not find  
fault with  
negative  
behaviors

6. What evidence- based strategies do you implement to help reduce negative behaviors in the classroom? (e.g., clear rules/expectations, praise, reward systems, choice, etc.)

(please list the evidence-based strategies)

RESPONDENT #	RESPONSES
1	Humor, limited verbal, proximity, non-verbal directives, quiet space, tangible rewards, praise, and choice
2	Clear rules/ expectations, reward systems, timer- work X amount then break X amount
3	Positive reinforcement, choice/choice, choice/ consequence, natural consequences, prompting with wait time
4	



5	Money system, breaks, instant rewards, clear rules, verbal praise, choices
6	Clear rules, praise, verbal choice, humor
7	
8	Clear rules/ expectations posted, positive reinforcement, providing choices where students still feel they have control
9	Reward systems, clear expectations, visual schedules/ checklist, choice- choice

7. What discipline strategies are being used most often as a consequence for negative behaviors with a student with an emotional disturbance?

RESPONDENT #	RESPONSES
1	Student self- initiated timeouts, Teacher initiated timeouts, Referral, Call/letter home to parent/guardian, in school suspension, administration

	timeout, loss of privilege
2	Student self-initiated timeouts, Teacher initiated timeouts, Loss of privilege
3	Removal from the room, referral, in school suspension
4	Student self-initiated timeouts, Teacher initiated timeouts, Referral, Call/letter home to parent/guardian, in school suspension, administration timeout, loss of privilege
5	Student self-initiated timeouts, Teacher initiated timeouts, Referral, Call/letter home to parent/guardian, in school suspension, administration timeout, loss of privilege
6	Student self-initiated timeouts, Teacher initiated timeouts, Referral,

	Call/letter home to parent/guardian, in school suspension, administration timeout, loss of privilege
7	Referral, Call/letter home to parent/guardian, out of school suspension, in school suspension, loss of privilege
8	Student self-initiated timeouts, loss of privilege
9	Student self-initiated timeouts, referral, call/letter home to parent/guardian, out of school suspension, loss of privilege

8. Do discipline strategies (listed previously in question #7) help reduce negative behaviors with students labeled with an emotional disturbance?

Yes

No

Please explain your answer

RESPONDENT #	RESPONSES
1	No, Kids do not respond well to these

	consequences; however, schools are limited on what can be done.
2	Yes/No, depends on the student- most effective is giving them the choice of a timeout
3	No, because you want to extinguish the negative behavior and replace it with a positive behavior, and traditional discipline strategies are not effective in doing this. These strategies are negative, not positive punishments.
4	Yes/No, they may work initially and depending on what the function of behavior is, they may continue to work. For some kids, it may just work for a few minutes/times, then become ineffective.
5	Yes/No, Depends on the student
6	No, these strategies do not

alter behaviors.  
Most students  
with emotional  
disabilities are not  
impressed with  
these strategies.  
They have been  
down these  
avenues before.

7

---

I believe the  
larger behaviors  
would occur less  
frequently if some  
of the  
consequences  
were given  
immediately after  
the negative  
behavior  
occurred; or as  
soon as possible.

8

---

Yes, it is again hit  
and miss. When  
students get into a  
fight or flight  
situation, they  
may not be as  
likely to remove  
themselves from a  
room or process  
that they're to lose  
a privilege.  
However, when a  
student is not in  
crisis and  
understands they  
can take a self-  
initiated timeout,  
it has been  
successful.

9

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Yes/No, for some  
students the  
consequences

make an impact.  
For others there  
seems to be no  
impact on  
negative  
behaviors.

---

9. What strategies would you like more information about to create a positive teacher-student relationship? (Your response can be related to the strategies mentioned in the survey or from other strategies)

RESPONDENT #	RESPONSES
1	No response
2	How to not always engage back with student (especially when they are attention seeking)
3	Positive vs. Negative punishments as related to Positive/ Negative Reinforcement.
4	No response
5	No response
6	One on one instruction
7	Any that I found primarily on E.D. and not other areas of Special Ed. or Gen. Ed.

8	Posted schedules/ expectations, reward system
9	Project based learning and token economics

10. What positive behaviors do you believe a teacher should teach students with an emotional disturbance to help them function better in the classroom? Please list at least two positive behaviors that could be taught to a student with an emotional disturbance.

RESPONDENT #	RESPONSES
1	Meditation and yoga
2	They are not “bad” or “troublemakers”- those are just actions, not who they are. Teaching them to fix their mistakes (we all make them) is powerful. Also teaching them to count good or growth instead of focusing on bad. We all tend to do that!
3	A few positive behaviors are wait time (or counting up/down before reacting- the student) how to use a “cool off” pass or “brain break”

4	Staying in seat and seeing attention appropriately
5	Emotional regulation
6	1. Self- regulation 2. Self- awareness
7	Respect for themselves, teachers, and peers, patience, accountability for their actions
8	A. How to express their thoughts/feelings in a healthy way that does not disturb a class/other student B. How to self- initiate timeouts
9	Respect for authority and situational behaviors



## APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Primary Faculty Member of Heritage Jr./Sr. High School,

My name is Jessica Gettys. I am graduate student at Purdue University Fort Wayne. I am requesting your assistance with my research, a required component of my master's program in Special Education.

You are invited to complete a needs assessment survey (Teacher- Student Relationship Survey) about your knowledge of the benefits of forming positive relationships with students that have been labeled with an emotional disturbance, and the strategies used to help form relationships with your students. This survey is optional and will remain confidential. You will not be asked to provide any identifiers or personal information. This one-time survey will take you no longer than thirty minutes to complete and your answers will be helpful in my study. After collecting the surveys, they will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my classroom. The surveys will be disposed of once the study is complete. The principal of the Jr./Sr. High School and the director of special education gave permission for this survey.

I appreciate your participation and your time completing this survey. Please feel free to contact me with any questions at [jgettys@eacs.k12.in.us](mailto:jgettys@eacs.k12.in.us). You may also contact my professor, Dr. Jeong-il Cho, Ph.D. at 260-481-6454 or [choj@pfw.edu](mailto:choj@pfw.edu). Thank you for your time and consideration in thesis matter.

-----

Special Education Teacher

## APPENDIX D: SUPPORT LETTERS

October 10, 2019

To Whom It May Concern,

Jessica Gettys has asked me to allow our special education staff members to participate in her needs assessment study regarding positive teacher-student relationships with students that have been labeled with an emotional disability and the strategies that they use while working with the students.

Jessica Gettys is a teacher in our district, and I welcome the opportunity to have her conduct all the required research at Heritage Jr./Sr. High School.

Respectfully,  
Connie Brown  
Director of Special Education



CC: Personnel File

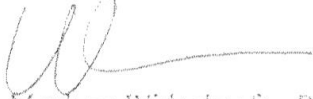
October 11, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

Jessica Gettys has asked me to allow our special education staff members to participate in her need's assessment study regarding positive teacher-student relationships with students that have been labeled with an emotional disturbance and the strategies that they use while working with the students.

Jessica Gettys is a teacher at our school, and I welcome the opportunity to have her conduct all the required research at

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Widenhoefer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matthew Widenhoefer, Ph.D.

Principal

## **APPENDIX E: NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY TIMELINE**

September 16, 2019- Ask permission from the Principal the Jr./Sr. High School and the Director of Special Education to send a survey to their staff

School to survey his staff

September 19, 2019- Finalize survey questions and recruitment letter

October 14, 2019 - Submit IRB Application




November 11, 2019- Email recruitment letter and survey to all participates

December 9, 2019- Collect all completed surveys and begin to analyze data

2020- Organize data

2020- Use result of data to complete Chapter

## APPENDIX F: CITI TRAINING COMPLETION REPORT

		Completion Date 09-May-2019 Expiration Date 09-May-2023 Record ID 31532852
This is to certify that		
<b>Jessica Gettys</b>		
Has completed the following CITI program course:		
<b>Human Research</b>	(Institution Group)	
<b>Group 2.Social Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel</b>	(Course/Team/Group)	
<b>1 - Basic Course</b>	(Stage)	
Under requirements set by:		
<b>Purdue University</b>		
Verify at <a href="https://citi-program.org/verify/20200909/record/31532852">https://citi-program.org/verify/20200909/record/31532852</a>		

## APPENDIX G: IRB APPROVAL



**This Memo is Generated From the Purdue University Human Research Protection Program System, Cayuse. Date:** October 31, 2019

**PI:** JEONG-IL CHO

**Department:** PFW EDUC STUDIES

**Re:** Initial - IRB-2019-573

*INVESTIGATION OF STRATEGIES TO BUILD POSITIVE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE: SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' OPINIONS*

The Purdue University Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) has determined that the research project identified above qualifies as exempt from IRB review, under federal human subjects research regulations 45 CFR 46.104. The Category for this Exemption is listed below. Protocols exempted by the Purdue HRPP do not require regular renewal. However, The administrative check-in date is **October 30, 2022**. The IRB must be notified when this study is closed. If a study closure request has not been initiated by this date, the HRPP will request study status update for the record.

Specific notes related to your study are found below.

**Decision:** Exempt

**Category:** Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording). The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

**Findings: Research Notes:**

Any modifications to the approved study must be submitted for review through Cayuse IRB. All approval letters and study documents are located within the Study Details in Cayuse IRB.

**What are your responsibilities now, as you move forward with your research?**

**Document Retention:** The PI is responsible for keeping all regulated documents, including IRB correspondence such as this letter, approved study documents, and signed consent forms for at least three (3) years following protocol closure for audit purposes. Documents regulated by HIPAA, such as Release Authorizations, must be maintained for six (6) years.

**Site Permission:** If your research is conducted at locations outside of Purdue University (such as schools, hospitals, or businesses), you must obtain written permission from all sites to recruit, consent, study, or observe participants. Generally, such

permission comes in the form of a letter from the school superintendent, director, or manager. You must maintain a copy of this permission with study records.

**Training:** All researchers collecting or analyzing data from this study must renew training in human subjects research via the CITI Program ( [www.citiprogram.org](http://www.citiprogram.org)) every 4 years. New personnel must complete training and be added to the protocol before beginning research with human participants or their data.

**Modifications:** Change to any aspect of this protocol or research personnel must be approved by the IRB before implementation, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects or others. In such situations, the IRB should still be notified immediately.

**Unanticipated Problems/Adverse Events:** Unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others, serious adverse events, and noncompliance with the approved protocol must be reported to the IRB immediately through an incident report. When in doubt, consult with the HRPP/IRB.

**Monitoring:** The HRPP reminds researchers that this study is subject to monitoring at any time by Purdue's HRPP staff, Institutional Review Board, Research Quality Assurance unit, or authorized external entities. Timely cooperation with monitoring procedures is an expectation of IRB approval.

**Change of Institutions:** If the PI leaves Purdue, the study must be closed, or the PI must be replaced on the study or transferred to a new IRB. Studies without a Purdue University PI will be closed.

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**Other Approvals:** This Purdue IRB approval covers only regulations related to human subjects research protections (e.g. 45 CFR 46). This determination does not constitute approval from any other Purdue campus departments, research sites, or outside agencies. The Principal Investigator and all researchers are required to affirm that the research meets all applicable local, state, and federal laws that may apply.

If you have questions about this determination or your responsibilities when conducting human subjects research on this project or any other, please do not hesitate to contact Purdue's HRPP at [irb@purdue.edu](mailto:irb@purdue.edu) or 765-494-5942. We are here to help!

Sincerely,

Purdue University Human Research Protection Program/ Institutional Review Board

## **APPENDIX H: TIMELINE OF THE PROJECT DEVELOPMENT**

### Timeline

9/9/19- 9/15/19- Start IRB Application

9/9/19- 9/15/19- Refine topic and rational

9/9/19- 9/15/19- Start Introduction

General problem area (state problem; start general)

Specific problem (The focus should be special education related.)

Importance of topic (prevalence)

Methodology/Research approach (qualitative or quantitative or mixed methods)

Definitions of terms (student definition in your words of what you are researching)

9/9/19- 9/15/19- Start Literature Review

Description of research that has been done in the past (peer-reviewed research articles)

Thematic review and study-by-study review

Research questions for the special project

9/16/19-9/22/19 - Start Methodology

Description of the research methodology, how your research will be conducted

Research design

Subjects/participants

Setting

Data sources such as surveys, interviews, school records, etc

Data collection procedures (i.e., pre-survey, intervention, post-survey)

How you plan to analyze data (what you plan to do with the data)

9/16/19-9/22/19 - Acknowledgement page

9/23/19-9/29/19 - Complete Resume

9/23/19-9/29/19- Work on Methodology and Literature Review



9/23/19-9/29/19- Narrative of description of the Special Project

9/23/19-9/29/19- Examples of format of the Special Project (i.e., teacher handbook, DVD of role plays)

9/23/19-9/29/19- Timeline of expected components of the project development

9/30/19-10/6/19- Finish and submit IRB Application to sped department

10/14/19-10/20/19- submit IRB Application to IRB

10/21/19-11/17/19- Finalize Methodology and Literature Review

11/18/19-11/24/19- Submit Final project (Chapters 1-3)

### **Introduction, literature review, and methodology completed**

11/18/19-11/24/19- Send out survey for data collection

11/18/19-11/24/19 Finish and submit power point slides Ch.1-3

12/2/19-12/8/19- Present Slides

12/9/19-12/15/19- Edit chapters & plan for Spring class

12/9/19-12/18/19- Collect Data and review

1/13/2020-1/19/2020

Work on Analysis of the results/Research results/findings

Complete Timeline

Table of contents

Abstract

Design of Special Project and Final Product

1. Importance/Rationale
2. Synopsis of Relevant Research

Description of Final Product

Design format of content/ handbook

Narrative, charts, graphs, or pictures (whatever format matches your special project

(Make sure to follow all regulations and policies of the school corporation in producing the special project)

1/20/2020-1/26/2020

Work on Results

Start first 3 pages of each chapter in project

1/27/2020-2/2/2020

Continue working on project

2/3/2020-2/9/2020

Finish Special Project

2/10/2020-3/1/2020

Start and complete Ch. 6 Discussion and Reflection

Discussion/ Summaries of what you found

(Discussion/reflection/conclusion)

Summary and conclusions

3/2/2020-3/8/2020

Start draft poster and slides

3/9/2020-3/18/2020

Complete PDF Poster

Finalize chapters, handbook, and references

Complete appendices and one-page resume

3/19/2020-3/29/2020

Work on Symposium Presentation

**Finish Project/Submit**

3/30/2020-4/15/2020

Complete power point presentation/slides

4/16/2020- 4/19/2020

Submit Final revised version for approval

4/20/20-4/29/2020

Submit Final copy with faculty signature in a designated repository

## APPENDIX I: RESUME

# JESSICA N. GETTYS

5233 Harmony Lane, Fort Wayne, IN 46835 · 260-705-1061

**Jngettys@gmail.com · [www.linkedin.com/in/jessica-gettys-b95aa873](http://www.linkedin.com/in/jessica-gettys-b95aa873)**

To obtain a position in special education teaching that encourages and inspires the passion of students while building character in a positive constructive environment.

## EXPERIENCE

### AUGUST 2016- PRESENT

#### **SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER, EAST ALLEN COUNTY SCHOOLS**

- Develop Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for each student
- Teach and mentor students as a class, in small groups, and one-on-one
- Co-teach to help support students in the general education classroom
- Implement IEPs, assess students' performance, and track their progress
- Update IEPs throughout the school year to reflect students' progress and goals
- Prepare and help students transition from grade to grade while earning credits

### MAY 2014 – AUGUST 2016

#### **MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPIST, BOWEN CENTER**

- Provide therapeutic services to individuals, families, couples, and groups
- Provide high quality assessments
- Offer effective education and consultations to the organization and the community
- Complete all detailed documentation within billing requirements
- Communicate and travel to East Allen County Schools to provide therapeutic school services

## EDUCATION

Master of Science in Education  
Major: Special Education  
Purdue University, Fort Wayne  
Graduated: May 2020

Master of Science in Education  
Indiana University, Fort Wayne  
Major: Counseling: LMFT  
Graduated: June 30, 2014

Bachelor of Arts  
Purdue University, Fort Wayne  
Major: Psychology  
Minor: Studio Art  
Graduated: May 11, 2011

## SKILLS

- Management experience
- Professional presentation experience
- Excellent organizational skills
- Detail oriented
- Self-motivated
- Skills in building relationships
- Ability to work in a fast-paced environment
- Adult CPR/ First Aid/ AED training and Child/Infant CPR/First Aid/AED training
- Computer software proficient, competent in smartboard, Canvas, and Egenuity

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