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CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR / EDUCATOR GUIDE

Understanding What Student Behavior Communicates

For adults supporting students ages 10–14

Behavior is a starting point for inquiry, not proof of a student's motivation. Observe what happens, ask with curiosity, and respond to the student's needs while maintaining clear expectations.

From observation to supportive response

Observed behavior	Possible explanations	Supportive response
Declines to participate	Uncertainty, embarrassment, unclear directions	Offer a private check-in and a choice of ways to participate.
Frequently asks to leave	Physical discomfort, stress, need for a break	Ask privately about needs; follow health and safety procedures.
Homework is incomplete	Skill gaps, limited time or materials, home responsibilities	Check barriers and agree on a manageable first task.
Withdraws from peers	Preference for quiet, conflict, worry or exclusion	Offer a low-pressure invitation and listen without assumptions.
Interrupts repeatedly	Unclear routines, need for movement or connection	Teach the expected behavior and offer a planned way to participate.
Falls asleep in class	Insufficient sleep, illness or other factors	Check in privately and involve appropriate support staff if needed.

A useful first question

"I noticed something was different today. Is there anything making this harder for you, or anything I can do to help?"

Keep in mind: these examples are hypotheses, not diagnoses. Address immediate safety concerns first and follow school procedures for health, safeguarding and referrals.

Research foundation and references: see page 3. This guide is not a formal functional behavior assessment.

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CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR / REFLECTION TOOL

Student Behavior Reflection Tool

For educator or counselor use • Allow 10–15 minutes, plus follow-up.

Record observable facts, invite the student's perspective and choose one supportive action. Store notes securely according to school policy; avoid unnecessary identifying details.

Date: _____ Setting: _____

1. Observe

What happened? Describe actions, context, frequency and what occurred before or after, without labels.

2. Explore possible needs

What might be making participation difficult? What has the student shared? What remains unknown?

3. Plan a supportive response

What adjustment, skill instruction or support will you try? Who will help, and when?

4. Review progress

What observable change will indicate progress? When will you check in with the student?

Follow-up date: _____ Responsible adult: _____

If concerns persist, collaborate with the student, family and appropriate school staff. This tool supports reflection; it does not replace required assessment or intervention procedures.

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From Understanding to Supportive Action

Research-Informed Guidance for Supporting Student Behavior

For educators, school counselors, parents and caregivers | Ages 10–14

Educational Purpose

Student behavior provides an opportunity to explore what may be influencing participation, learning and social interactions. Understanding possible contributing factors does not mean excusing harmful behavior or removing appropriate expectations. It means responding in ways that promote learning, dignity, safety and personal growth.

Observe Before Interpreting

- Describe what occurred using objective, observable language.
- Consider the setting, activity and circumstances surrounding the behavior.
- Look for recurring patterns rather than drawing conclusions from isolated incidents.
- Consider developmental, cultural, environmental and individual differences.
- Avoid assigning negative labels or assuming a student's intentions.

Include the Student's Perspective

Choose an appropriate setting and invite the student to share their experience. Consider asking: "Can you help me understand what happened?" "Was there something making this situation difficult for you?" "What would make it easier for you to participate?" "What could we try differently next time?" Listen without judgment and acknowledge the student's perspective while maintaining appropriate expectations.

Develop a Supportive Response

- Teach and reinforce appropriate behavioral expectations.
- Identify and address possible barriers to participation.
- Provide opportunities to practice social, emotional and behavioral skills.
- Adjust routines or learning conditions when appropriate.
- Collaborate with students, families and relevant school professionals.
- Establish realistic goals and monitor progress.

Review and Adjust Support

Use the Student Behavior Reflection Tool to document observations, identify a supportive action and establish a follow-up date. Review whether the selected response is helping the student. Adjust the approach when necessary rather than assuming that a lack of progress reflects unwillingness. Persistent or significant concerns may require more individualized assessment and coordinated professional support.

Research Foundation

This resource draws upon U.S. Department of Education guidance for safe, inclusive, supportive and fair school climates and the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework. Academic research on schoolwide PBIS provides broader context for positive behavioral support and alternatives to exclusionary discipline. This original Emolift resource supports educational observation and reflection. It is not a formal Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA), diagnostic instrument or substitute for required assessment, individualized intervention or professional support.

Research References

Center on PBIS. (n.d.). *What is PBIS?* https://www.pbis.org/pbis/what-is-pbis

Gage, N. A., Whitford, D. K., & Katsiyannis, A. (2018). A review of schoolwide positive behavior interventions and supports as a framework for reducing disciplinary exclusions. *The Journal of Special Education, 52*(3), 142–151. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466918767847

U.S. Department of Education. (2023, March). *Guiding principles for creating safe, inclusive, supportive, and fair school climates.* https://www.ed.gov/media/document/guiding-principlespdf-56362.pdf

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