

# **POSITIVE APPROACHES TO ADDRESSING PROBLEM BEHAVIORS OF STUDENTS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES**



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**AbleNet University Webinar**  
**August 6, 2020 (Webinar-1)**

# Learning Objectives

- **Problem behaviors interfere with student learning, educational advancement, interactions with peers and adults and school success.**
- **This 2-part webinar series, you will learn how to:**
  - **1) Use proactive strategies to provide a supportive environment so triggering events are removed.**
  - **2) Teach new skills to the student that will replace problem behaviors.**
  - **3) Maximize clear rewards for appropriate behavior.**
- **A number of diverse student-specific scenarios across situations and settings will be depicted to illustrate positive, proactive, and functional behavior intervention strategies.**

# Webinar Series Content

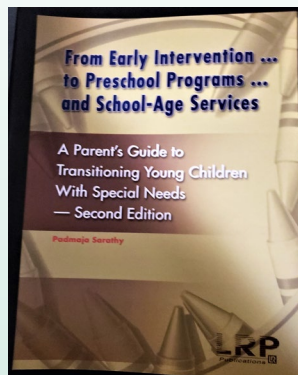
- **Webinar – Part 1**

- **Overview of Proactive Practices to address Problem Behaviors**
- **Creating a Supportive Environment for to Reduce Occurrence of Problem Behaviors**
- **Detailed Illustration of Implementation of Personalized Positive Strategies**
- **Reflections and Additional Case Scenarios**

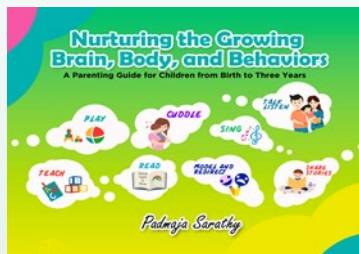
- **Webinar – Part 2**

- **Multiple Depictions of Student-specific Problem Behavior Scenarios**
  - **Addressing Transition-related Challenging Behaviors**
  - **Communication Difficulties Leading to Problem Behaviors**
  - **Addressing Self-injurious Behaviors**
  - **Teaching Self-management of Aggressive Behavior**
    - **Meditation on the Soles of the Feet**
- **Helpful Tips**

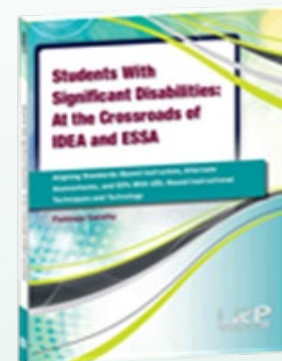




**Early Childhood Transition Guide**



## Executive Function

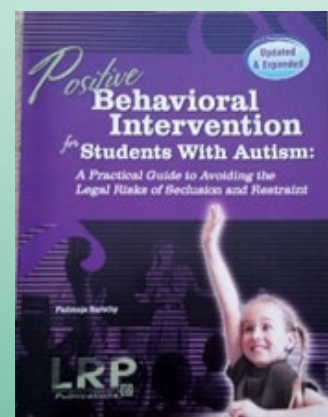


**Severe & Multiple Disabilities**



## Padmaja's Sarathy' Books and Publications

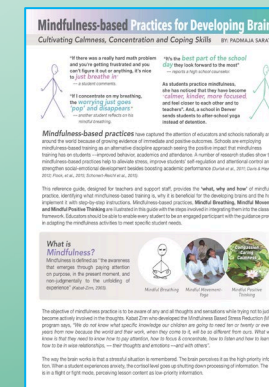
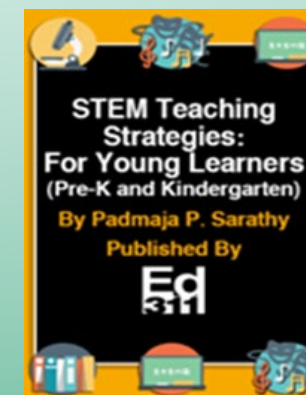
- ❑ **Autism: Support Strategies & Interventions, Autism Seven Steps of Support; Music CD – Transitions**
- ❑ **Behavior Guide (Preventive and Positive Approaches) and Mindfulness Guide**
- ❑ **Early Childhood: Transition; Parenting Guide; Executive Function - Early Years; and STEM Teaching Strategies**
- ❑ **Paraeducator Training Guide and DVD**
- ❑ **Severe and Multiple Disabilities; Significant Disabilities and ESSA**



**Autism Spectrum Disorders**



**Behavior Guide**



**Mindfulness Guide**



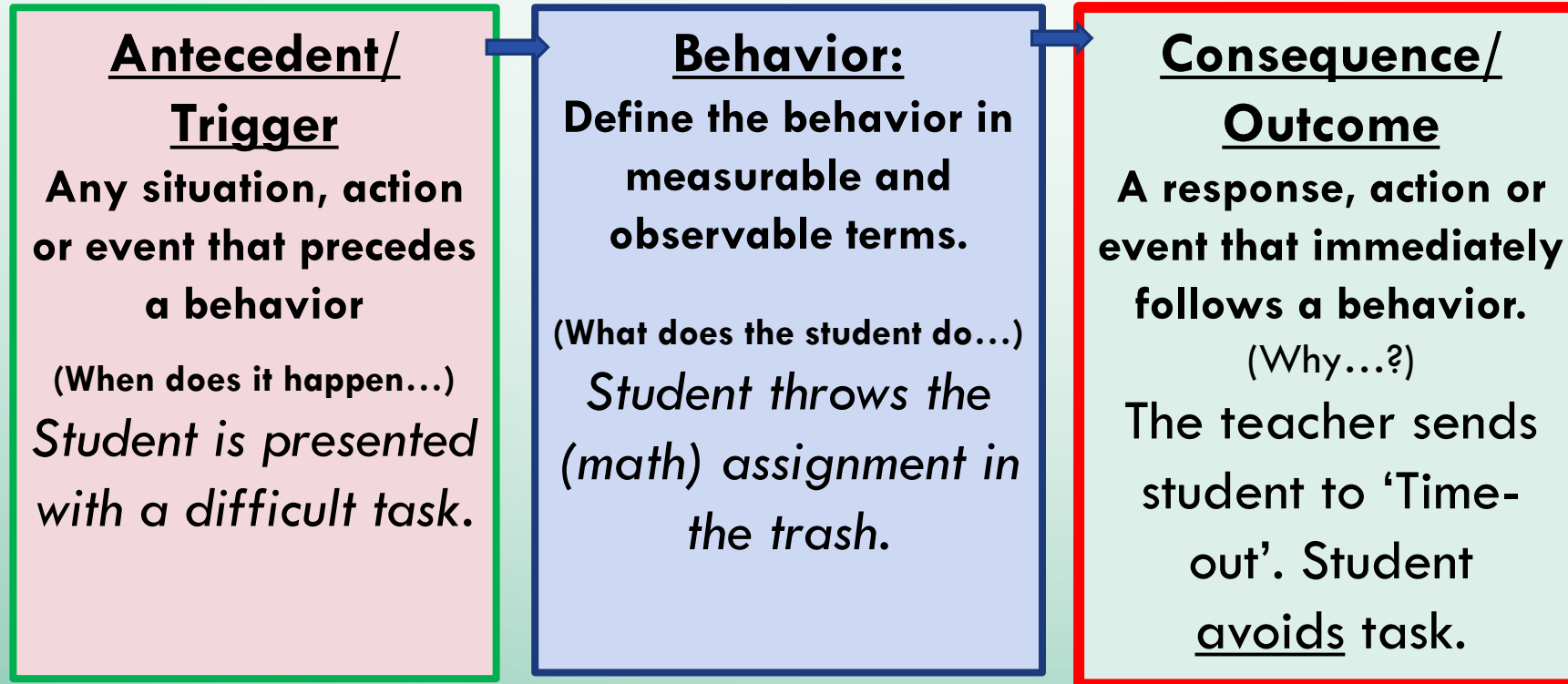
# **Problem Behaviors Interfere with Learning**

- **Problem behavior impacts...**

- **Learning**
  - **Development**
  - **Interaction with peers and adults**
  - **School success - Student attainment of educational and social goals may be jeopardized.**
  - **Future outcomes**
- **Many students make great strides when adults work to peel back student's defensive layers. They show their softer sides.**

# Proactive Approach – Understand The Behavior

- Gathering data in an Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence (ABC) format – a first step



Develop a hypothesis based on the behavior data collected – what, when, where and why it happens. The final summary culminates in the Functional Behavior Assessment data.

# Understand the Behavior

## Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence (ABC)

### Antecedents that trigger problem behaviors

- Transitions
- Seeking attention
- Escape/avoid activity
- Teacher directions
- Difficult tasks/activities
- Needing sensory input
- Confusion about the task
- Self-esteem issues

### Behavior: Describe Behavior Precisely

- Throwing toys/pencil
- Refusing to complete an assigned task
- Fighting with another student
- Taking (grabbing) materials from another student
- Hitting/pinching adult/peer
- Running away from group adult/classroom, etc.

### Consequence/ Outcome

- Obtaining adult attention (redirection or reprimand)
- Receiving a reward/ reinforcer (praise, favorite activity or toy)
- Avoiding/escaping an undesirable activity or a difficult or boring task (example: cleaning up)

Poorly defined examples are: "Jimmy was "aggressive" or non-complaint" or "disrespectful".



# Severe Punishment for Minor Infractions

**A 9-year-old with autism placed in a duffel bag, tied up and “treated like trash”**

**Why?**

**For alleged misbehavior**

**A child placed in seclusion – isolation room for 5 hours**

**Why?**

**For arguing with the staff and for being uncooperative**

**Children were placed in secluded spaces daily.** (Illinois schools, Tribune-ProPublica investigation)

**Why?**

**For refusing to do classwork, for swearing, for spilling milk, for throwing Lego blocks**

**Students were frequently restrained and secluded repeatedly.**

A single child was confined to a room almost 100 times in a school year  
Another restrained 745 times in the school year.

Children as young as 6 years of age were restrained or put in seclusion multiple times (Fairfax County Schools)

**Why?**

**For being disrespectful, profane or not following rules**

❖ **Civil rights data collection shows that students with disabilities are disproportionately restrained and secluded.**



# What Are Some Triggers?

- **Wants to escape the activity** (activity is not engaging, boredom due to non-involvement in the lesson, etc.)
- **Seeking attention** (making attention-grabbing noises; grabbing and pinching while working one-on-one with adult)
- **The task is too difficult** (tears up a math worksheet)
- **Over-stimulating environment** (assembling in a large gathering - gym, school assembly hall, cafeteria, etc.)
- **Moving from a preferred to a nonpreferred activity**

# What Are The Triggers?

- **New personnel, new situation, new setting** (Anxiety and stress, fear of the unfamiliar)
- **Asked to stop an activity and move to another activity** (Circle to Centers, computer to group instruction, unpredictability, stress & anxiety due to not being sure of what to expect in the next activity)
- **Difficulty with communicating needs and wants** (feeling overstimulated or experiencing pain & discomfort and unable to request help)
- **Poor executive function skills** (attention difficulties, difficulty with filtering out distractions)
- **Transition-related Issues** (arrival, dismissal, going to or coming in from recess, etc.)

# What Drives A Punitive Response?

## Let's Reflect...

1. **Punishment will teach the student a lesson?**
2. **We often react immediately to the situation instead of being reflective?**
3. **Flexibility and accommodation reflects a poor discipline approach?**
4. **Providing alternate choices is giving in to the student?**
5. **To demonstrate that adults are in control. If teachers didn't exercise control, it reflects poorly on classroom management?**
6. **Sending the student to timeout in the room or out of the room is reinforcing. It gives a break from having to deal with challenging behaviors?**

# Prevention is the Best Strategy

**Positive Classroom Climate**

**Positive Teacher-Student Relationships**

**Close Supervision and Monitoring**

**Increasing Contingent Praise**

**Providing Feedback, Error Correction  
and monitoring progress**

**Teaching Classroom Rules  
Keep it Simple & Pair with Photos**

**Promoting Active Learner Engagement**

**Increasing Opportunities to Respond**

Conroy et al., 2007

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# Children with Autism & Understanding Triggering Events

- Children with autism experience stress, anxiety or discomfort with the presence of some environmental conditions (Klein, et al., 2001):
  - Noisy classroom
  - Too many children
  - Other children in close proximity
  - Large open spaces
  - Visually over-stimulating environment
- Some common 'rage' triggers for children with autism are (Brenda Smith Myles, 2006)
  - Being ordered to do something
  - Being told not to do something
  - Being asked to do multiple things at once

## Understand Characteristics:

- Behavioral
- Social-Emotional
- Cognitive-Academic 
- Communication 
- Motor 



# Time in Timeout

**Timeout**

**Isolation**

**A generally  
recommended  
guideline for the length  
of timeout is one  
minute for every year  
of the student's age.**

**Calming Safe  
Space**

With Tools to Calm  
Down

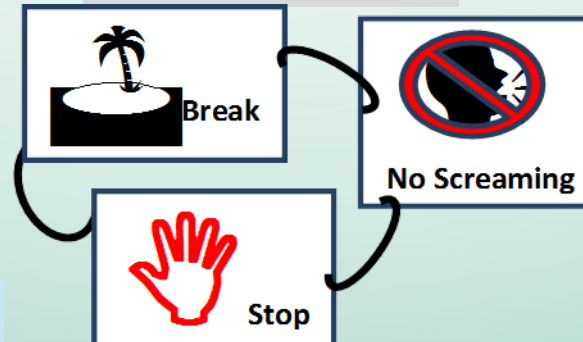
# Proactive Instructional & Emotional Supports

 **Visual Supports**  
**Consistently Implemented**



**Visual Boundary**  
**Personal Space**

## Rule Cue Cards



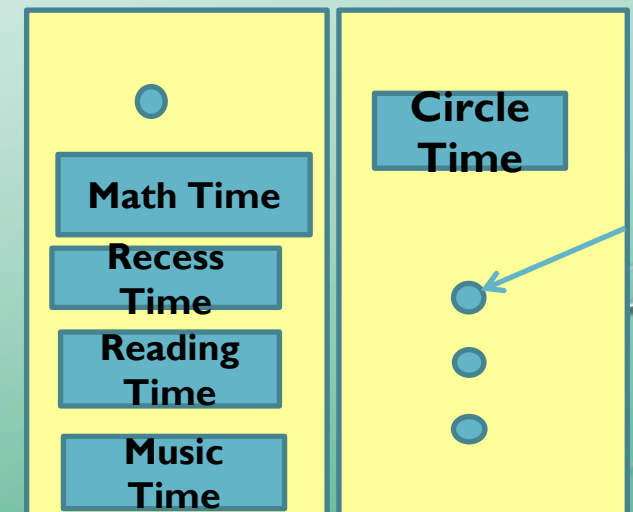
**Designated 'Safe Space'**



**First...** (Math) Work **Then** ... Computer or Feed Fish

## Visual Schedule

Activities to do	Activities done
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>●</li><li>Math Time</li><li>Recess Time</li><li>Reading Time</li><li>Music Time</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Circle Time</li><li>●</li><li>●</li><li>●</li></ul>



# Proactive Instructional & Emotional Supports

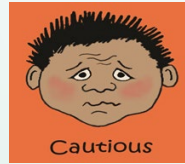
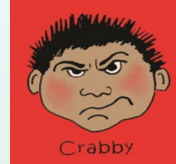
**Music & Joyful breaks**



**Physical Movement**



**Build Learner's Emotional Competence.**



 **Visual Supports**



**Role-Play & Drama**



**Lots of Highly Engaging  
Hands-on Activities**





**Use proactive strategies to provide a supportive environment so triggering events are removed.**

**Teach new skills to the student that will replace problem behaviors.**

**Maximize clear rewards for appropriate behavior.**

# Case Scenario - Problem Behaviors

## Elementary Classroom

- *Student, a second grader, exhibited severe problem behaviors (aggressive behaviors). Diagnosed with autism, he is able to attend to and use computer independently for more than 15-20 minutes. He has limited verbal communication skills and uses picture support.*
- *He refused to stay at his desk during small-group instruction, ran around the classroom, threw objects, kicked and hit adults.*
- *A couple of times when he appeared to be calmer were: when he listened to music sitting on paraeducator's lap and completed a puzzle with teacher providing one-on-one prompting.*
- *There is a calming room within the classroom for the student to go to calm himself down and have a sensory break with several bolster pillows.*
- *After a break in the calming room, student was just as agitated as before. Did not know how to calm down.*

# Student-specific Interventions and Positive Supports

- **Use visual supports:** To reduce the student's frustration with communication and to reduce problem behaviors
- **Watch student for exhibiting any trigger behaviors** (Precursor behaviors – any evidence of fidgetiness, swinging legs or feet, clenching fist, etc.)
  - **Intervene before behavior escalates.**
- **Post a stop sign at the door** to prevent the student from running out of the door. use the sign to teach the target student to “stop”, “turn around” and “sit in chair” (or “return to seat”).
- **Tape a boundary around the student's desk** with student's photo & name on his desk to designate his space to sit and work. When he starts wandering around, point to his desk.



# New Replacement Skills To Teach

- **Teach the student 'what to do' with his hands** instead of hitting others. Each time that he tries to grab adults, say to him “hands to yourself” or” hands on desk”, “stay in personal space”, etc.
  - **Provide fidget toys** (koosh ball, tangle toy, key ring, etc. to use) and remind student to use it prior to walking away from his desk and engaging in aggressive behaviors (throwing objects, kicking adults, etc.).
- **Use rules cue cards** (with visuals paired with pictures) to teach the students appropriate behaviors in all settings, in the classroom, gym hallways, etc.
- **Teach rules aided with pictures:** universal symbol for ‘no’, a stop symbol, a symbol for hands on desk or lap, maintaining personal space, etc..



# New Replacement Skills To Teach

- Teach and train the student how to use and maintain 'personal space' (2 feet of space) between himself and the adult.
- Use 'Social Narratives' to teach appropriate social skills.
- Build emotional literacy.
  - Teach how to identify feelings and express them safely.
- Teach how to use the calming space to practice calming
  - Teach calming techniques and breathing exercises.
  - Learn to recognize and regulate one's emotional state, responses and stress levels to gain self-regulation to achieve longer term outcomes.



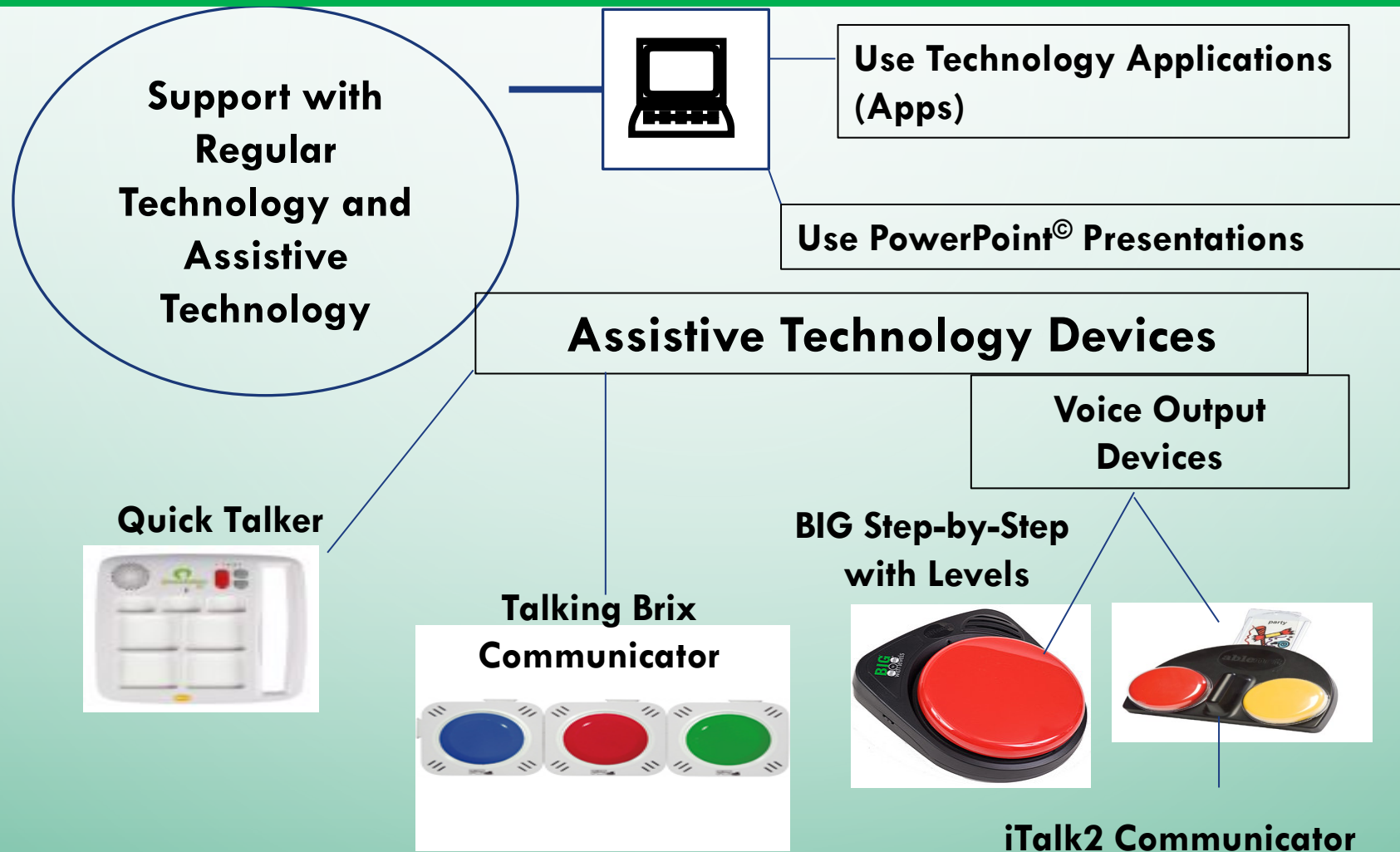
# Instructional and Communication Supports



- **Instructional delivery and behavior problems are linked.**
- **Make the instructional delivery highly interactive and engaging** aided with visual aids, graphic organizers, story boards, manipulatives, etc.
- **Offer the student a role to play** prior to the activity to motivate and engage the student during the lesson before he seeks attention in inappropriate ways.
- **Incorporate lots of hands-on activities using real-life situations.**
- **Provide communication support with assistive technology.**
- **Teach how to use 'Structured Work System' to increase on-task behavior and independent functioning.**
  - **Offering a visually-based approach –to assist the target student to better understand and cope with their environment, daily activities and routines.**



**Motivate with the use of assistive technology to communicate student's needs.**



**Technology for Personalized Supports**

Downloaded photos used by permission from AbleNet  
([www.ablenetinc.com/Assistive-Technology](http://www.ablenetinc.com/Assistive-Technology))







# Maximize Rewards for Appropriate Behavior

- **Provide positive strokes with encouraging comments** – Be specific, and descriptive.
- **Offer Choices** – Choice-making is empowering. Preferred activity (computer time) follows a required task (If-Then option).
- **Embed multiple breaks in the visual schedule.**
- **Offer lots of communication opportunities** - “Teach student how to ask for “assistance” or request a “break” when frustrated, upset, or bored or indicate any discomfort/pain, etc. (using a picture or a photograph).”
  - “As soon as the student asks for help, praise him/her for it and provide assistance.”
- **Consider developing a behavior self-monitoring-recording chart to assist with behavioral intervention.**
  - For each time segment that he is sitting and attending, he earns points.

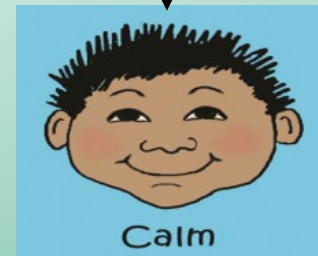
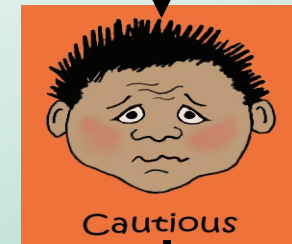
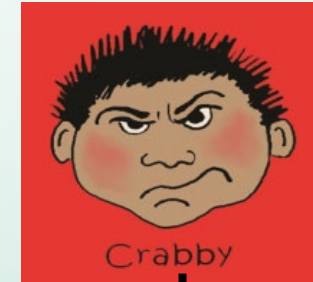


# A Self-Monitoring Checklist

## Self-management is the ultimate goal.

<u>Rules to Remember:</u> When working at your desk	
	Work quietly.
	Quiet voice
	Raise hand for help.
	Finish the task.
First -Then  	Check your schedule for next activity when finished.


Self-Monitoring to Calm Down



# Case Scenario – Problem Behavior

- **Unfamiliar people cause anxiety and result in aggressive behaviors.**
- *A first grader got into an argument with the substitute teacher within a few minutes of her arrival. For her disobedience, she was immediately sent to timeout.*
- *Later, she had a mini-meltdown (screaming and shouting, pushing the adult) on her way back to the classroom from music.*
- *The substitute teacher sent her to the office as a punishment. Alice spent the rest of the day in office timeout away from her classroom totally missing out on instruction all day.*
- *This pattern is repeated whenever there is a substitute teacher.*
  - *The student requires time to adjust to strangers.*

# Proactive Strategies and Replacement Skills

- Preparing the student ahead of time for the change in personnel.
- Understanding and responding to behavior – Acknowledging student's anger and frustration
- Building student's emotional competence: Label feelings and expressing them appropriately.
- Use calming cards to identify feelings and how to express them safely. 
- Teaching problem-solving strategies - Turtle Technique

Recognizing  
that you feel  
angry

Thinking 'Stop'



Going into the shell,  
taking deep breaths,  
calming down

Coming out of shell  
when calm, and think of  
solutions to problem

# Building Emotional Competency

**Help student to develop competence in identifying and managing her emotions.**

Role-play conflict resolution and problem-solving techniques using real-world scenarios and classroom situations. Teach positive ways to resolve conflicts.

Books to assist with  
role-playing  
emotions:

On Monday When it  
Rained by Cherryl  
Kachenmeister

**Happy**



**Situation**

**Sad**



**Situation**

**Angry**



**Situation**

**Scared**



**Situation**

Books to assist with  
emotions & calming:

When Sophie Gets  
Angry - Really,  
Really Angry by  
Molly Bang

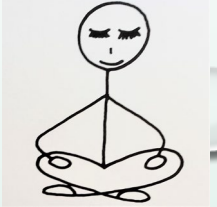
**Role-play and problem-solving to recognize and manage emotions**

# DO'S AND DON'TS

- **Gain greater awareness of distinctive characteristics of a student with ASD in responding to their needs.**
- **Consider student's strengths, preferences, and social, communication, and academic needs in planning activities.**
- **Ensure there is minimal amount of sensory distraction/overload during instructional time.**
- **Avoid visual clutter.**
- **Prevent frustration.**
- **Infuse student's interests into the instructional activities.**
- **Be flexible. Modify task demands: make it less complex to facilitate student success.**
- **Provide lots of opportunities to make choices (controlled choices).**
- **Use assistive technology to aid communication. Match it to student's skill levels.**



# Calming Strategies for Stress Reduction During the Current Crisis



- *To help to calm down, focus on something positive, and reduce our stress level and build our resilience.*
- **Mindful Meditation Practices**
  - Breathing Exercises (Alternate Nostril Breathing)
  - Yoga (Super Brain Yoga)
- **Visual Imagery**
- **Positive Reflections**
- **Chocolate and Bricks Activity** (From 3-Minute Motivators by Kathy Paterson - New Edition, 2014) To release frustrations and appreciate something good.



Thinking  
of others



# RESOURCES

- **Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports ([www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)).**
- **Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning ([www.vanderbilt.edu/CSEFEL](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/CSEFEL))**
- **Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Learning (CSEFEL):**  
**<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html>**
- **CSEFEL Resource –Teaching Your Child to Identify and Express Emotions:**  
**[http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/documents/teaching\\_emotions.pdf](http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/documents/teaching_emotions.pdf)**
- **Conroy, M.A., Sutherland, K.S., Snyder, A.L., Marsh, S., (2008). Classwide Interventions. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 40(6), 24-30.**
- **Cook, C.R., Fiat, A., Larson, M., Daikos, C., Slemrod, T., Holland, E. A., Thayer, A. J., Renshaw, T., (2018). *Positive greetings at the door: evaluation of a low-cost, high-yield proactive classroom management strategy*. Volume: 20 Issue: 3, Page(s): 149-159**

# RESOURCES

- **National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations: Brogle, B. Jiran, A. & Giacomini, J. ‘How to Help Your Child Recognize and Understand Anger’. Backpack Connection Series.  
[www.challengingBehavior.org](http://www.challengingBehavior.org)**
- **Sarathy, P. (2014). *Positive Behavior Strategies for Students with Autism: Practical Guide to Avoiding the Legal Risks of Aversives*. (updated edition, 2014), LRP Publications.**
- **Sarathy, p. (2015). *Autism Spectrum Disorders: Seven Steps of Support*. Naples, FL: National Professional Resources, Inc.**
- **Sarathy, P. & Lipsett, A.B. (2019). *P.R.E.V.E.N.T. Problem Behaviors: Seven Contemplative Discipline Steps*. Education 311, Austin: TX. ([www.ed311.com](http://www.ed311.com)).**
- **Sarathy, P. (2020). *Mindfulness-Based Practices for Developing Brains: Cultivating Calmness, Concentration and COPING Skills* (2020). Education 311, Austin: TX. ([www.ed311.com](http://www.ed311.com)).**



**THANKS.**

**A special thanks to AbleNet University  
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**Upcoming Webinars:**

**Problem Behaviors Webinar Part 2: On September 29, 2020**

**Promoting Access, Engagement and Learning Success for Students with Severe  
Disabilities: October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020**