

4 FUNCTIONS OF BEHAVIOR



The WHY, WHAT, WHEN & HOW We Can Respond



Escape

WHY?

To avoid or to end something that a person does not enjoy.

WHAT it can look like:

Arguments, tantrums, going to the bathroom as the lesson begins, frequent visits to the nurse without justification, off task behavior, skipping class, excessive absences

WHEN a behavior happens:

A task or situation is under stimulating, difficult, or disliked/non-preferred

HOW we can respond:

- Private conversation
- Break down the task
- Use “first, then” prompts
- Offer choices & breaks
- Change time/place of task



Attention

WHY?

To receive attention from or gain access to others.

WHAT it can look like:

Interruptions, noises or sound effects, frequently calling out, inappropriate comments, humor, talking to a classmate at inappropriate times, asking for excessive help, intentionally bothering classmates

WHEN a behavior happens:
A student wants to be noticed

HOW we can respond:

Avoid reinforcing negative behavior, teach & model new behavior, use non-verbal cues, create time for appropriate attention, give reinforcement, create routine check-ins, use 2/20 technique



Tangible

WHY?

To gain access to a preferred item or activity.

WHAT it can look like:

- + Study for a good grade
- + Finish task for free time
- Cutting in line
- Outbursts - Stealing
- Tantrums - Lying

WHEN a behavior happens:
A student wants an activity or item

HOW we can respond:

- Teach how to request
- Increase accessibility
- Provide a transition activity/object
- Use “if, then” prompts
- Positive/token reinforcement



Sensory

WHY?

To continue stimulation because the behavior feels good or to remove something that feels bad.

WHAT it can look like:

- Bouncing or wiggling
- Humming
- Picking at fingers
- Covering ears
- Scratching or cutting
- Wearing a coat all day

WHEN a behavior happens:
Anytime, especially when someone is anxious, excited, or uncomfortable

HOW we can respond:

Movement break, sensory tool, remove source of discomfort, redirect to a more appropriate behavior