Classroom Management

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Frontline staff require classroom management skills and supervisor support to create a safe space and productive learning environment for adolescent pregnancy prevention (APP) program delivery. This tip sheet describes strategies for frontline staff to prevent and respond to challenging student behavior, as well as tips for how supervisors can support staff's efforts to manage the classroom and deliver high-quality programming. Frontline staff should work with supervisors to select strategies that are appropriate for the amount of time available in the classroom. Also, implementation of some classroom management strategies may alter APP curricula, so it is important to prioritize curriculum fidelity when selecting classroom management strategies.

PROACTIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Proactive classroom management strategies focus on events or circumstances that immediately precede disruptive student behavior. Much of the research on proactive classroom management strategies was conducted with students with emotional disturbances or learning disabilities, but these strategies are now used successfully with a wide range of students in many types of classrooms. Like their peers, students with emotional disturbances or learning disabilities require classroom management strategies that emphasize instruction in how to behave, support for desirable behavior, and correction of environmental factors that set the stage for misconduct (Kaufman, 2009). To develop and select appropriate class-wide or individual strategies (Kern & Clemens, 2007), program delivery staff should observe and document information about the classroom and events that appear to be linked to inappropriate behavior as well as those that are associated with desirable behavior. Class-wide strategies address the needs of most students in a given class (*Table 1*) and are appropriate for a generally disruptive classroom. A small number of students will not respond to class-wide strategies; in these cases, individualized strategies are needed (*Table 2*). Staff should discuss individual challenges and strategies with the teacher before implementation begins. Frontline staff can enlist the help of the teacher to adapt strategies for the unique needs of the populations they serve and for the context of APP program delivery.

It is important for frontline staff to learn about existing classroom management approaches (e.g., positive behavioral interventions and supports, such as tickets provided by the school to give to students for appropriate behavior) in the classroom in which they will be implementing APP programming so that staff can incorporate or build on these strategies if appropriate. However, these approaches may need to be negotiated, particularly if incentives are required from the APP grantee; grantees should discuss the use of APP grant funding for purchasing incentives with their project officer. Frontline staff and supervisors should communicate proactively with the teacher to clarify expectations (e.g., that the teacher will always be present,

whether the teacher will manage classroom behavior, that the teacher will neither disrupt nor lead APP activities). To avoid future problems or miscommunication, it may be helpful to have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the grantee and the school or other organizational setting (e.g., detention center) that clarifies classroom management roles and expectations for both program delivery staff and teachers as well as their respective organizations.

Table 1. Class-wide Strategies

Strategies	Examples
Establish clear classroom rules and expectations.	Create a group agreements poster and/or place a laminated index card of the printed group agreements on each student's desk. Keep the group agreements posted at all times and refer to them when challenges arise.
Maintain a predictable routine or schedule in the classroom.	Start each session on time and post the agenda for the day. Check off agenda items as they are completed to build a sense of accomplishment for all.
Increase praise for appropriate behavior.	If staff notice that a student is in his seat and is focused on his work, the facilitator might say, "Josh, I love how you are sitting quietly and working on your worksheet. Great job." This statement provides a prompt to the rest of the class that in-seat, on-task work is expected and that positive attention facilitator is available for engaging in such behavior.
Match task difficulty to students' capabilities.	Match language to students' literacy levels and provide materials that are within the instructional level of the students (i.e., not too difficult but still challenging). If students struggle (e.g., because English is their second language), ask them to work in pairs.
Provide frequent opportunities for students to respond to material or requests.	Increase the frequency of opportunities in which students have to actively respond (e.g., reading aloud, writing answers to a problem, answering a question or responding to a facilitator's cue, writing a response).
Arrange classroom seating so that it is appropriate to the instructional activity.	Although a U-shape, a circle, or putting desks together for group work may enhance student engagement, other arrangements may help with managing a disruptive classroom. When students' desks are arranged in rows, students tend to stay on task, speak out less, and complete more work; in this arrangement, students may be more engaged with the lesson than with each other. (Work with the teacher to determine the best seating arrangement, and put seating back in its original place when class is over.)
Use effective instructions.	Features of an effective instruction or request include gaining the student's attention (e.g., do not give instructions while students are moving around the room), giving one instruction at a time in a firm (but not angry) voice, and waiting for student compliance. Make sure instructions are brief and clear, give partial instructions and wait for those to be completed before giving more, and make sure that instruction language is appropriate for students' literacy levels. In addition to giving verbal instructions, write, print, or post instructions for all to read. Having written or posted copies of the instructions allows students to refer to this information if they have questions or concerns.

Intersperse brief and easy tasks among more difficult ones.	A simple problem may be interspersed after every third complex problem. Many evidence-based programs are designed this way.
Keep the pace of instruction moving.	Avoid getting stalled by too many questions, provide a question box or "parking lot" to minimize interruptions, and decrease pause time between student response and presentation of the next task.
Provide opportunities for choice of activities, materials, or task sequence.	Give students options for how to complete an activity without changing the learning strategy too drastically. For example, present choices to the class to complete a written true/false quiz, get up and move to the side of the room that represents their response, or vote by raising their hands or using printed cards. Be sure to prioritize curriculum fidelity when considering this strategy, and consider contacting the developer to discuss proposed changes.
Incorporate student interests and preferred activities.	Ask students about things that are important in their life, and incorporate the language of current youth culture in role plays. (Be sure the goals and messages of the role plays remain unchanged.) Prioritize curriculum fidelity when considering this strategy, and consider contacting the developer to discuss proposed changes.

Table 2. Individual Strategies

Strategies	Examples
Present materials that are appropriately matched to students' instructional level.	If a comprehensive functional assessment of a student identifies difficult work as an antecedent to problem behavior, make changes to his assignments that eliminate difficult tasks.
Provide a variety of ways for students to complete a task.	Provide an alternative mode for written assignments, such as a computer, audio recorder, discussion, having one person in a group take notes, or drawing.
Incorporate students' interests into the material.	Conventional worksheet and workbook assignments can be modified so that they integrate a student's interests or result in functional or meaningful outcomes. Be mindful of maintaining curriculum fidelity when selecting this strategy.
Allow opportunities for choice.	Offer a choice of materials used to complete a task and/or a choice of the order in which some activities are completed. Offer the student leadership opportunities, such as distributing handouts or taking notes for the class.
Provide scheduled attention to reduce the need for students to engage in attention-seeking behavior.	Allow a student to occasionally "check in" with an adult at the school, which can decrease attention-seeking problem behavior (Bambara & Kern, 2005). When a student seeks peer attention, pair the student with a peer to complete activities.
Establish a clear and predictable schedule.	Provide warnings about an upcoming transition to prepare the student that an activity will soon end.

STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR

Because proactive strategies alone are seldom sufficient, program delivery staff should recognize that problem behaviors are often the result of student skill or performance challenges, such as the inability to perform assigned work or the absence of needed social skills. Classroom management generally requires skill

instruction as well as consequences for students when problem behaviors occur. Before administering consequences, staff should try appropriate, less-intrusive strategies to improve student behavior (e.g., behavior reminders, warnings, elimination of behavioral triggers). If these do not work, the following are some strategies that may be used to respond to problem behaviors:

- **Behavior-management training** (American Federation of Teachers, 2010) provided to students includes the following:
  - *Self-instruction* involves "self-talk" and "self-prompting," which are ways of talking through problems. To address concerns by some students who may feel that APP activities are not relevant for them because they are not dating or sexually active, frontline staff can share that they felt this way when they were younger and learned to replace negative thoughts (e.g., "This information does not apply to me, and I don't want to be here") with positive ones (e.g., "One day, I'll need to know this when I'm dating or have a partner, or a friend may need my help, so it's important for me to learn this"). This brief approach to modeling self-instruction can be helpful for students to address inappropriate behavior, and it can be useful for students as they learn to establish healthy relationships and manage conflict with others.
  - *Relaxation skills*, including breathing and physical exercises, allow students to reduce stress and the physical symptoms of anger.
  - *Social problem solving* helps students view situations as problems to be solved and not as battles. For example, students may learn to focus on a common goal, such as everyone getting their opinion heard and everyone feeling respected, and to brainstorm multiple ways to address a situation.
- **Response cost** is the taking away of privileges or other valued items in response to student misbehavior, which can be effective provided that the student actually values the privilege or item being taken away (Intervention Central, n.d.). For example, a student could be given five good-behavior points at the start of class and then have one deducted for each incident of misbehavior.

Remember that because some problem behaviors may be responses to triggers from earlier trauma, a trauma-informed approach may involve removing a student from the classroom. Adolescents who have experienced trauma may encounter situations that trigger a distressing memory, such as discussions about refusing sexual activity, negotiating contraceptive use, or identifying healthy (or unhealthy) relationships. Triggering such memories may result in adolescents re-experiencing the intense, distressing feelings from the traumatic event, leading to withdrawal, behavioral outbursts, aggression, and other types of responses (Martin & Ashley, 2012). Staff who receive training in trauma-informed care can learn to recognize adolescents' behavior when they re-experience a traumatic event. Instead of intervening immediately to bring the adolescent back into the APP activities or insisting that the adolescent immediately talk about how he or she feels, staff may have a plan in place to escort the adolescent to a quiet place and help him or her feel safe and calm while staff seek guidance from a school counselor (Cole et al., 2005).

SUPERVISOR SUPPORT FOR PROGRAM DELIVERY STAFF

Supervisors should assure program delivery staff that the staff's expected role in classroom management will be clearly outlined, the supervisor will facilitate open and frequent communication between the project team and the school or detention center, and the supervisor will observe a few sessions to assess program delivery staff needs.

Supervisors can support program delivery staff by holding a joint meeting with the program delivery staff and the teacher or school administrator to discuss topics such as the expected classroom management strategies,

the role of the teacher, and logistical considerations. Supervisors can also help by inviting school administrators to observe lessons; by communicating about program delivery when there is school staff turnover; by asking teachers and school administrators to sign MOUs or letters of commitment; and by making personal visits to the school to discuss the goals of the project, the progress of implementation and classroom management, and administrator involvement in the project's success. It is important for supervisors to be proactive in setting boundaries and expectations for teachers and other school staff and to discuss what their role will be.

Supervisors should also discuss the following with program delivery staff:
- recognizing staff ethnocentrism (i.e., the attitude that one's own group is superior);
- understanding that definitions of appropriate classroom behavior are culturally defined, developing knowledge of adolescents' cultural backgrounds, and identifying culturally appropriate classroom management strategies (Weinstein et al., 2003, 2004);
- opportunities for observation and dialogue with experienced staff, self-reflection on their classroom management practices within a supportive environment (Dobler et al., 2009), and participation in group discussions to enhance staff confidence in their classroom management skills (Prince, 2009); and
- supervisor observations of the classroom as well as positive reinforcement and direction for needed changes.

Supervisors should provide a classroom management checklist that program delivery staff can use to self-assess across time (e.g., see MacSuga & Simonsen, 2011). Supervisors should provide consultation to frontline staff about what is observed and documented on the checklist, incorporating performance feedback and action planning to develop or enhance classroom management strategies that are not being used or that need improvement, as well as to enhance or maintain strategies that are being used (MacSuga & Simonsen, 2011).

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