

STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES / ADDRESSING UNDERLYING MOTIVATION



This **Quick Training Aid** was excerpted from a Guidebook entitled: *What Schools Can Do to Welcome and Meet the Needs of All Students*, Unit VI, pp 16-17 and Unit VII, pp 23-28. Center for Mental Health in Schools (1997).

Beyond discipline, is a need to address the roots of misbehavior, especially the underlying motivational bases for such behavior. Consider students who spend most of the day trying to avoid all or part of the instructional program. An intrinsic motivational interpretation of the avoidance behavior of many of these youngsters is that it reflects their perception that school is not a place where they experience a sense of competence, autonomy, and or relatedness to others. Over time, these perceptions develop into strong motivational dispositions and related patterns of misbehavior.

Misbehavior can reflect proactive (approach) or reactive (avoidance) motivation. Noncooperative, disruptive, and aggressive behavior patterns that are proactive tend to be rewarding and satisfying to an individual because the behavior itself is exciting or because the behavior leads to desired outcomes (e.g., peer recognition, feelings of competence or autonomy). Intentional behavior stemming from such approach motivation can be viewed as pursuit of deviance.

Of course, misbehavior in the classroom often also is reactive, stemming from avoidance motivation. This behavior can be viewed as *protective reactions*. Students with learning problems can be seen as motivated to avoid and to protest against being forced into situations in which they cannot cope effectively. For such students, many teaching and therapy situations are perceived in this way. Under such circumstances, individuals can be expected to react by trying to protect themselves from the unpleasant thoughts and feeling that the situations stimulate (e.g., feelings of incompetence, loss of autonomy, negative relationships). In effect, the misbehavior reflects efforts to cope and defend against aversive experiences. The actions may direct or indirect and include defiance, physical and psychological withdrawal, and diversionary tactics.

Interventions for such problems begin with major program changes. From a motivational perspective, the aims are to (a) prevent and overcome negative attitudes to school and learning, (b) enhance motivational readiness for learning and overcoming problems, (c) maintain intrinsic motivation throughout learning and problem solving, and (d) nurture the type of continuing motivation that results in students engaging in activities away from school that foster maintenance, generalization, and expansion of learning and problem solving.

Failure to attend to these motivational concerns in a comprehensive, normative way results in approaching passive and often hostile students with practices that can instigate and exacerbate problems. After making broad programmatic changes to the degree feasible, intervention with a misbehaving student involves remedial steps directed at underlying factors. For instance, with intrinsic motivation in mind, the following assessment questions arise:

- Is the misbehavior unintentional or intentional?
- If it is intentional, is it reactive or proactive?
- If the misbehavior is reactive, is it a reaction to threats to self-determination, competence, or relatedness?
- If it is proactive, are there other interests that might successfully compete with satisfaction derived from deviant behavior?

In general, intrinsic motivational theory suggests that corrective interventions for those misbehaving reactively requires steps designed to reduce reactance and enhance positive motivation for participating in an intervention. For youngsters highly motivated to pursue deviance (e.g., those who proactively engage in criminal acts), even more is needed. Intervention might focus on helping these youngsters identify and follow through on a range of valued, socially appropriate alternatives to deviant activity. From the theoretical perspective presented above, such alternatives must be capable of producing greater feelings of self-determination, competence, and relatedness than usually result from the youngster's deviant actions. To these ends, motivational analyses of the problem can point to corrective steps for implementation by teachers, clinicians, parents, or students themselves. (For more on approaching misbehavior from a motivational perspective, see Adelman and Taylor, 1990;1993; Deci & Ryan, 1985.)

On the following pages are two versions of an interview instrument that can be used to elicit a student's perception of the problem and underlying motivation to address the problem. One form of the tool is for older students, the other for young students.

(Version 1: For use with all but very young students)

Student's View of the Problem -- Initial Interview Form
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Interviewer _____ Date _____

Note the identified problem:

Is the student seeking help? Yes No

If not, what were the circumstances that brought the student to the interview?

Questions for student to answer:

Student's Name _____ Age _____ Birthdate _____

Sex: M F Grade _____ Current Placement _____

Ethnicity _____ Primary Language _____

We are concerned about how things are going for you. Our talk today will help us to discuss what's going O.K. and what's not going so well. If you want me to keep what we talk about secret, I will do so -- except for those things that I need to discuss with others in order to help you.

(1) How would you describe your current situation? What problems are you experiencing? What are your main concerns?

(2) How serious are these matters for you at this time?

1	2	3	4
very serious	serious	Not too serious	Not at all serious

(3) How long have these been problems?

___ 0-3 months ___ 4 months to a year ___ more than a year

(4) What do you think originally caused these problems?

(5) Do others (parents, teachers, friends) think there were other causes?
If so, what they say they were?

(6) What other things are currently making it hard to deal with the problems?

(7) What have you already tried in order to deal with the problems?

(8) Why do you think these things didn't work?

(9) What have others advised you to do?

(10) What do you think would help solve the problems?

(11) How much time and effort do you want to put into solving the problems?

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	not much	only a little bit	more than a little bit	quite a bit	very much

If you answered 1, 2, or 3, why don't you want to put much time and effort into solving problems?

(12) What type of help do you want?

(13) What changes are you hoping for?

(14) How hopeful are you about solving the problems?

1	2	3	4
very hopeful	somewhat	not too	not at all hopeful

If you're not hopeful, why not?

(15) What else should we know so that we can help?

Are there any other matters you want to discuss?

(Version 2: For use with very young students)

Student's View of the Problem -- Initial Interview Form
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Interviewer _____ Date _____

Note the identified problem:

Is the student seeking help? Yes No

If not, what were the circumstances that brought the student to the interview?

Questions for student to answer:

Student's Name _____ Age _____ Birthdate _____

Sex: M F Grade _____ Current Placement _____

Ethnicity _____ Primary Language _____

We are concerned about how things are going for you. Our talk today will help us to discuss what's going O.K. and what's not going so well. If you want me to keep what we talk about secret, I will do so -- except for those things that I need to discuss with others in order to help you.

(1) Are you having problems at school? ___Yes ___No

If yes, what's wrong?

What seems to be causing these problems?

(2) How much do you like school?

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	not much	only a little bit	more than a little bit	Quite a bit	Very much

What about school don't you like?

What can we do to make it better for you?

(3) Are you having problems at home? ___Yes ___No
If yes, what's wrong?

What seems to be causing these problems?

(4) How much do you like things at home?

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	not much	only a little bit	more than a little bit	Quite a bit	Very much

What about things at home don't you like?

What can we do to make it better for you?

(5) Are you having problems with other kids? ___Yes ___No
If yes, what's wrong?

What seems to be causing these problems?

(6) How much do you like being with other kids?

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	not much	only a little bit	more than a little bit	Quite a bit	Very much

What about other kids don't you like?

What can we do to make it better for you?

(7) What type of help do you want?

(8) How hopeful are you about solving the problems?

1	2	3	4
very hopeful	somewhat	not too	not at all hopeful

If you're not hopeful, why not?

(9) What else should we know so that we can help?

Are there any other things you want to tell me or talk about?