

Basic Principles of Behavior Modification

Excerpt from *Motivational Interviewing for Effective Classroom Management: The Classroom Check-Up* (Reinke, Herman, & Sprick, 2011)

Behavior is learned. Learning occurs as a result of the consequences of our behavior. In other words, our behavior is influenced by the events and conditions we experience. When our behavior is followed by a pleasant consequence, that behavior tends to be repeated and learned. When our behavior is followed by an unpleasant consequence, the behavior tends not to be repeated and thus not learned.

Any behavior that occurs repeatedly is serving some function for the individual exhibiting the behavior. In striving to support teachers to help students, it is essential to understand and communicate that *every* behavior serves a purpose. Students who consistently complete work assignments, come to class on time, and behave responsibly do so because they find good grades, positive parent and teacher attention, and a sense of pride of accomplishment reinforcing. Similarly, a student who repeatedly disrupts class and argues with teachers is getting some benefit from this behavior. Although the teacher provides reprimands and the student's parents are frequently called, the student likely finds the immediate consequence of attention from teachers and school staff to be reinforcing. Finding other ways for the student to appropriately gain attention from adults could help to meet this need and decrease the student's argumentative and disruptive behavior.

Altering the classroom environment can change student behavior. Behavior is affected by events that happen immediately before a behavior (antecedents) and events that happen following the behavior (consequences). By changing the variable affecting behavior, we can increase or decrease behaviors in the classroom. This means that we can change student (and adult) behavior by manipulating these variables.