

# **Strategy Tools** **for Inclusion Success**

We plan hard to offer our students daily academic instruction but often forget about the effect of student behaviors on getting those instruction to our students successfully. There's a hidden curriculum in every classroom. It's those things that aren't taught outright but have subtle effects on our students. The way we talk and the way we approach a student can all affect the relationship we have with our students.

These are some strategies to use in the daily classroom for all types of diverse learners. Some you might already know but others may be new. Don't try them all at once. Find one strategy that you like and find out where it might work for you. Next practice it in the context of your classroom environment until it's effective. Then try a new strategy. As you begin to build a personal relationship with your students, you will find out which strategies work with each individual student. While you might use these ideas for students in special education, they are effective with all students.

By Janet Brighty  
Special Education  
jlbrighty@wi.rr.com

## Table of Contents

### A. Relationships

- Show interest in the individual
- Possible results

### B. Perspective

- Student's thinking is important - not ours
- Matching viewpoints = successful communication

### C. Separate the behavior from the individual

- Behavior actions do not define the student
- Emotional message being received

### D. Walk in your student's shoes

- Think like they think
- Comfortable in classroom?

### E. Give meaningful compliments

- Not general
- Skill related

### F. Listening

- Listen without criticism
- Acknowledge details and emotions

### G. Never assume understanding

- Factors that affect understanding

### H. Repeat directions

- Processing
- Successful steps for directions

### I. Ask, don't tell

- Put responsibility on student

J. Scary mistakes

- Mistakes are emotional decisions
- Approve of making mistakes

K. Choices

- Student responsibility
- Clear consequences

L. Consequences versus punishment

- Two totally different approaches
- Good consequences – bad consequences

M. “Anger” is a smokescreen

- Misdirected emotion
- Timeline

N. Cycle of behavior model

- Daily decisions
- How to break the cycle

O. Change your voice

- Powerful tool
- Avoid “tune out”

P. Distraction

- Uses humor
- Breaks negative behavior cycle

Q. Student strengths

- Negative strengths
- Positive strengths
- Practical uses

## **A. Build a Relationship with Your Student**

Showing an interest in your students shows them that you care. Spend two minutes during any given time period to just personally talk to them. Greet them at the door with a personal fact or question. Find out if the student has a pet, siblings, or special interests. What's their favorite sport? Start a community circle in class with daily prompts like "My favorite color is....." or "If I could be any animal, I would like to be a ....." Give the students a chance to share any concerns or compliments with other students. You will be surprised at what you learn about students. Or better yet, what they learn about each other. They also begin to understand others in their classroom community and can see the similarities and appreciate the differences.

By learning more about students or letting them share about themselves, several things begin to happen. One, they might get along with their peers better. Two, they might develop more confidence speaking in front of the class. And finally, the best one is that they might feel more comfortable talking to you when there's a crisis. The middle of a crisis is not the time to try to talk to a student unless you already have a relationship. Do the groundwork when things are calm and in control. They might trust you enough so that they will come to you or respond to you when things do get tense.

## **B. Perspective is Reality**

What teachers think is not important. What students think is. No, not letting students have their way. That would be chaos. Perspective is important. It is evaluating a situation from one person's point of view. If a student's perspective and a teacher's perspective are different in any particular situation, you may as well be speaking French to the student's German. Trying to understand the student's perspective is very important.

It's a well-known fact that in an accident situation, details in the reports vary with each person. We see and hear things based on our individual senses. In every classroom, playground, or discipline situation, students bring their own perspective to the understanding of what's needed to be done or what's expected in behavior. If a student's viewpoint doesn't correspond with a teacher's viewpoint, the follow through of a direction or the giving of consequences often falls apart. In any given situation, there are always two sides of a story. The truth usually lies somewhere in the middle.

## **C. Separate the Behavior From the Individual**

When students get corrected for negative behavior, they often confuse the behavior with themselves. If they are told that the “behavior” is bad, they might infer that “they” (the students) are bad. It’s important to separate the behavior from the student. This is part of that perspective model. We may deal with a behavior problem thinking that it’s been handled the best way but if the student thinks of the interaction as critical or hurtful, they walk away from the lesson with a totally different emotional message learned than we intended. It makes no difference how we deliver a message if the student’s perspective receives the message another way.

## **D. Walk in Your Student’s Shoes**

Try to walk in your student’s shoes. How do your students feel when they walk into your classroom? How did they leave your classroom yesterday: successful, overwhelmed, full of pride, miserable failures, feeling in control, told to focus 37 jillion times, proud to have their name called, or cringing because whenever their name is called, they’re in trouble again. Try to think like they think or see your classroom the way they do. This train of thought is not easy but when you’re successful, you’ll know it. You will be exhausted!! The purpose of this strategy is not to make you exhausted but to understand how exhausted that student must feel day in and day out. Imagine going to your job everyday anticipating failure and endless corrections for all that you do wrong no matter how you try. Nothing you ever do is right!!

## **E. Give Meaningful Compliments**

Giving broad compliments like “Great job!” or “Nice work” often has little value to a student and doesn’t give them any understanding of what they actually accomplished. Make compliments apply directly to their work to show them specific things that they are doing successfully so they can identify the good actions and repeat them.

- “Good job using that strategy to solve that math problem.”

- “I liked the way you put all your papers away in your folder.”
- “You really figured out that word by using your beginning sound first and then following all the way through to the end.”

## **F. Listening**

Listen to the student. Let the student finish completely what they want to say. Don't judge the telling of the story or the student may not feel comfortable coming back to you. Acknowledge that they're upset and angry. Ask them how an incident made them feel. Sometimes just getting the time to air their frustrations can end any negative behavior. Don't allow yelling or interrupting, though. I often say “As long as your voice is quieter than mine, I'll listen to anything you have to say.” And then I lower my voice to a whisper. I keep reaffirming that I want to listen to their side of the story but I can't get the details if they're yelling at me.

When the student is telling me their side of the story, sometimes I repeat what the student said. “Let me make sure that I understand what you're saying”, then repeat back exactly what the student said. This seems to let the student know that you ARE listening to their concerns.

## **G. Never Assume a Student Understands You**

There are so many factors that can affect a student's understanding of verbal directions being given: vocabulary, speed given, life experiences, verbal processing, information retention, language deficits, and culture differences to mention a few. Keep these in mind when expecting a student to understand and follow your directions. Make the directions clear and concise: least words possible, simple words, and least number of steps at one time. Try to anticipate their needs and alter directions accordingly.

## **H. Repeat Directions**

Don't just throw directions out to the classroom as a whole. If a student has trouble following directions, they might not be able to catch your words, process their meaning, and then follow through as successfully as other students. Have the student verbally repeat the direction after you've given it. Just the process of repeating the direction might reinforce the message. Sometimes I write the directions on an index card or scrap of paper. Now I've appealed to two modalities of the listener: auditory and visual. If I have the student write the direction, I've even included a tactile approach. Sometimes I position myself close to a student that struggles to

get their eye contact. Not all students need this type of delivery but sometimes it helps the student who has trouble focusing.

## **I. Ask Don't Tell**

After you've given clear and concise instructions and a student appears to be off task, don't **TELL** the student what should be done again....**ASK** the student what they should be doing. Telling a student what to do keeps putting the responsibility for controlling behavior on you instead of them. Let them take responsibility for what they should be doing. When a student is off task, ask them what they should be doing. By repeating the directions, they take more ownership in their behaviors.

- "What page should you be reading?"
- What do you think you should be doing now?"
- Where should your assignment go?

When a student verbally says something, it often reinforces their memory.

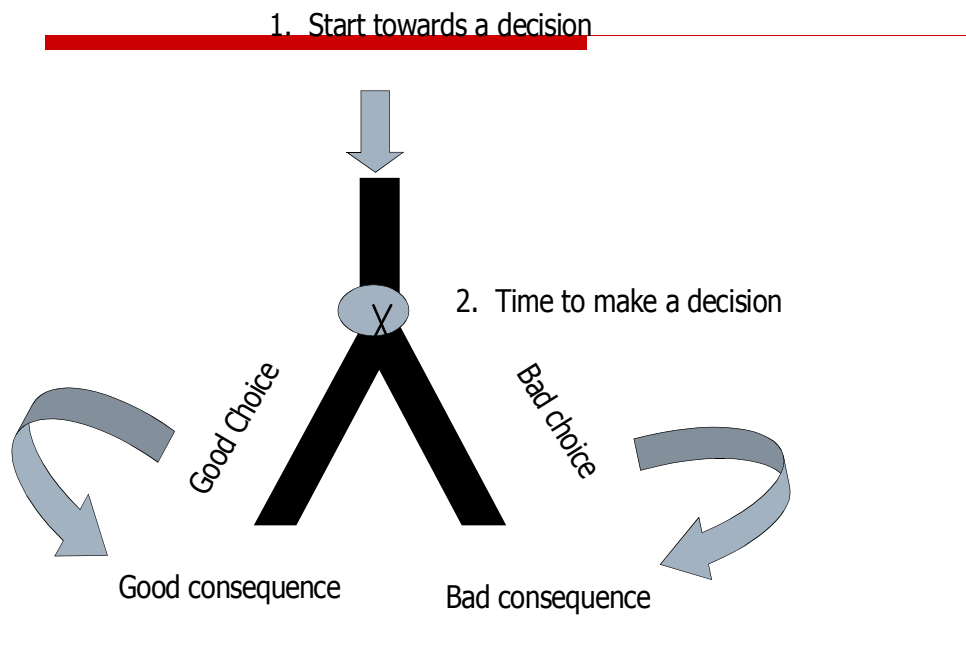
## **J. Scary mistakes**

Some students are unable to take risks either socially or academically. Every activity that they do in the school involves making a critical decision that could reflect back on them. They are so afraid of being criticized that they would rather become a behavior problem than make a mistake. They might not smile at other students because someone might make fun of them. They won't talk in front of the class because someone might laugh at them. Academically, they might refuse to put an answer down because it might be wrong. Their feedback loop tells them the answer is wrong but they don't know how to make it right. It is literally painful for them. Adding two numbers can be an emotional roller coaster to them. Sometimes we as teachers just think that students refuse to work because they are lazy but this goes back to that perspective thing. If the student feels uncomfortable, they ARE uncomfortable no matter how we try to appeal to them. Let the student know that it's okay to make mistakes. As a teacher, make a few mistakes during the day. Talk it through and model that it's okay to goof up once in a while.

## K. Students Should Make Choices

Give a choice of two behaviors with clear consequences. Be sure to follow through with the consequences. Make your classroom expectations as well as the expected consequences very clear. Talk to the students about what good behavior or work time “looks” like, “sounds” like, and “feels” like. Post the charts in your room for immediate referral in any situation. As a student begins to stray away from your expectations, tell them that they have two choices. Give them the one choice you want (stop talking, work quietly) and then give them a choice they don’t want (do it at recess time or lose points). Walk away and let them choose the behavior but always follow through with the consequences. When setting up this procedure, I show the students the following diagram.

### CHOICES and CONSEQUENCES



## **L. Consequences versus Punishment**

There is a distinctive difference between consequences and punishment. It is important to understand that.

Consequences are a direct result of our behaviors. We do something and something happens as a result. Call it cause and effect if you want. The term “natural consequences” has been used.

- I work hard in school → I get good grades
- I run 2 miles a day → I have a healthy heart
- I touch a hot stove → I get burned
- I run a red light → I get a ticket
- I break a window → I have to pay to replace it

Only two of these would be considered a form of “punishment” but they are all consequences of a behavioral choice that was made. Using the term “consequences” instead of “punishment” puts the responsibility of the action on the student. Often they view a punishment as the fault of the adult and fail to see their responsibility in the whole incident. How often have students gotten angry because they had to stay in for recess because their homework wasn’t done? Who didn’t do the homework? The student. Who gets the consequence? The person who didn’t do the homework. It’s a tough concept to grasp but eventually, they get it. Be consistent with consequences. Make it their choice to have or not have the consequence.

## **M. “Anger” is a Smoke Screen**

Young students usually react to uncomfortable situations by becoming angry. Anger seems to be an emotional reaction that they understand. They have trouble recognizing frustration, embarrassment, anxiety, fear, confusion, tiredness, disappointment, or irritation as feelings that need to be understood and addressed. When there’s an angry outburst coming or already done, try to look at what happened just prior to the outburst --- 2- 10 minutes before the actual behavior. Make a quick timeline and find the true feeling that caused the reaction. Help students deal with frustration or disappointment positively. Acknowledge that feeling that way is okay but acting on it is not.

## N. The “Cycle of Behavior” Model

There seems to be a cycle in behavior: thoughts, feelings, actions, and consequences. It just continues going around in a circle; each part based on the part before it.

Student thinks a thought ►

Then the student has a feeling or emotion about that thought ►

Then a student chooses an action to do because of that feeling ►

Then the student takes a consequence for whatever choice was made ►

Then the student thinks a thought about what just happened-----

It just keeps going and going and going all day long.

We probably go through the whole cycle thousands of times a day. We don't think about it; we just do it. Most people are familiar with actions and consequences but there are two other important parts to this cycle: thoughts and feelings. Most adults just accept thoughts and feeling but younger children haven't gotten around to organizing their thoughts or understanding their feelings

1. Thought ----I have to do dishes
2. Feelings -----I hate doing dishes
3. Action -----I do them anyway
4. Consequences -----They get done

Usually it's our daily schedule and we do it because it has to be done. We make those choices in everything we do. Sometimes they're not good.

1. Thought ----I'm in a hurry going home
2. Feelings -----I hate this stop sign on the corner
3. Action ----I don't stop at the sign
4. Consequences ----I get a ticket OR I have an accident.

Sometimes students get caught up in the cycle and begin to make mistake after mistake. Each poor choice of action results in more bad consequences and then more anger because of the consequences and then more bad choices.

It's important to understand the four parts of this cycle and how they work. Sometimes understanding the cycle can help a student. Analyzing thoughts, understanding feelings, thinking before we make a choice of actions, and learning that all actions have consequences – good and bad.

## The “Cycle of Behavior” Model (continued)

Learning where to break this cycle can help a student change a behavior. Focus on thinking cycle, identifying actual emotions, and consistent consequences. Help the student change any particular part of the thinking or emotions part. The “Action” part of the cycle is the only one we can’t help. We can warn. We can suggest other choices. We can brainstorm possible solutions but the student is the one who will actually make that choice at the moment in time. Be consistent on the consequences. When an incident has ended, go over this chart and ask “Where did it fall apart?” Discuss possible places on the chart where the cycle can be interrupted or broken.

Eventually, the students can see that if they always do what they’ve always done.....they’ll always get what they’ve always gotten. Asking if they want that to happen again might help them make another choice.

## **O. Change your voice**

Our voice is a powerful tool for the auditory learner. Student success is based on student listening and processing. Our voice is the connection. Volume, tempo, and tone all play a part in keeping the attention of students. Volume is the loud and soft part while tone is the distinctive quality in the way we speak. Tempo is the speed of our voices. If the volume, tone, and tempo of our voice stay constant all the time, we run the risk of turning into the “Blah, blah, blah” lesson. The students begin to tune us out. Change it up a little. Auditory learners are looking for differences and can get lulled into not listening. It looks like disrespectfully ignoring the teacher but it’s not necessarily that. Think of all the adult voices in every Charlie Brown movie you’ve watched....Wa, wa, wa.

## P. Distraction

Sometimes using humor can be very effective. By doing the unexpected, you can divert the attention from the student's emotions and/or behaviors to a new train of thought. It could be as simple as changing your voice or moving somewhere different in the classroom. When a student appears to be upset about something that happened, try something uncharacteristic of you.

- Make a “silly” statement
  1. “Do you think an elephant would fit in this room?”
  2. “Do you think dropping a whole truckload of blue Jell-o on Tommy would help?”
- Change your voice
  1. Use a very quiet silly sound
  2. Change from a very fast cadence to a slow cadence
- Change your location
  1. Stand with your back to the student
  2. Walk to a corner and lean your head on the wall
- Change what you're doing
  1. Pick up a Koosh ball and toss it in the air a couple of times
  2. Make wide circles with your arm

These things might sound ridiculous but they can “break” a student's thought process somewhere on the “Cycle of Behavior” chart. The student will probably give you a weird look but you might have a chance of a regular discussion to defuse the original incident. This is where your knowledge and understanding of your individual student will be invaluable. You will know what will work and what won't..

## **Q. Student Strengths**

Students come to our classroom with different strengths. These strengths are not always exhibited in a positive way. While some of those strengths might include being artistic, energetic, or quick thinking, they might appear to be doodlers, hyperactive, or impulsive. If those strengths aren't channeled in the right way, the behaviors become disruptive in a classroom.

Sometimes we see behaviors in the classroom and label them "bad". When looked at closer, they might actually be strengths that the student has learned to use the wrong way.

- Being talkative can interrupt your class but a good communicator could lead a group or read aloud from the text when needed.
- The student who appears to be hyperactive and distracts others in the classroom because they're fidgeting or kicking the desk could use that energetic personality to deliver messages to other staff members or run errands. It burns up some energy and gives them confidence.
- An impulsive child is actually a quick thinker but they are usually talking out without raising their hands or moving away from their desk. Give them something to do with their hands: hold a clipboard to write on or give them something tactile like a fuzzy piece of material to hold.

It is important to understand that you cannot expect to remove a negative behavior without replacing it with a positive behavior. It would be like leaving a "hole" in their thinking. If you do not replace the negative behavior with something you can live with, the student will fill in the blank with something else you may not like. They are only doing the best that they can do.

Negative strengths --- behaviors that a student does well but distracts from successful academics and disrupts the general workings of the classroom

Positive strengths--- behaviors that a student does well for successful, constructive accomplishments in the classroom.

**Change the former strengths into the latter strengths**

## Negative Strengths →→→Positive Strengths

<b>NEGATIVE</b>	<b>POSITIVE</b>	<b>USES</b>
impulsive		
too loud		
off task		
argues		
social butterfly		
obsessive		
stubborn		
doodles in class		
talks too much		
manipulative		
hyperactive		

<b>NEGATIVE</b>	<b>POSITIVE</b>	<b>USES</b>
impulsive	quick thinking	
too loud	voice for speech	
off task	able to multi-task	
argues	persuasive	
social butterfly	networking	
obsessive	organized	
stubborn	tenacious	
doodles in class	artistic	
talks too much	verbal skills	
manipulative	problem solving	
hyperactive	energetic	

## PRACTICAL USES FOR POSITIVE STRENGTHS

impulsive	quick thinking	Inventor Office supervisor  Idea person Challenge the time limits on small tasks
too loud	voice for speech	Group leader Public speaker  Call kids in from recess Announce lunch choices
off task	able to multi-task	Engineer Subcontractor  Give two assignments at one time Play with a piece of PlayDoh while writing Chew gum while working
argues	persuasive	Lawyer Politician  Give student 2 choices of things to do Have student supply one reason why and one reason why not
social butterfly	networking	Fund raiser Event planner  Check kids for homework done Have them (high or low) tutor other students (high or low)
obsessive	organized	Accountant/ Banker Sales Person  Straighten books in book library Put classroom's daily homework in numerical order Straighten shoes in hallway

stubborn	competitive	<p>Athletic competition Sales person</p> <p>Give time limits for finishing an assignment Challenge in classroom for time quiet or finishing daily homework</p>
doodles in class	artistic	<p>Artist Architect</p> <p>In charge of sign for door Make posters for assignments Allow assignments that are drawn</p>
talks too much	verbal skills	<p>Speaker Teacher Job Supervisor</p> <p>Allow reports to be given orally</p>
manipulative	problem solving	<p>Supervisor Social worker Therapist</p> <p>Accept student's suggestions for solutions to problems Use a lot of the 5 W questions when talking to student</p>
hyperactive	energetic	<p>Sales Person Building Contractor</p> <p>Give errands within the school building Do math facts to jumping jacks or basketball dribbles</p>