



Behavioral Support Strategies Within Provision of Speech/Language/Communication Services

November 2020

UtABA School Collaboration Committee appreciates the time and effort spent by the multidisciplinary work group in contributing to the development of this document:

Lillian Adolphson
Member, UtABA School Collaboration Committee

Casey Dupart, MA, BCBA, LBA
Utah State Board of Education
Member, UtABA School Collaboration Committee

Christine Manning, M.ED., BCBA, LBA
Manning Consulting
Chair, UtABA School Collaboration Committee

Rob O'Neill, PhD, BCBA-D, LBA
Department of Special Education, University of Utah
Member, UtABA School Collaboration Committee

Rachael Waller, MS, BCBA, LBA
Weber School District
Member, UtABA School Collaboration Committee



Behavioral Support Strategies Within Provision of Speech/Language/Communication Services

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide suggestions and strategies for SLPs and SLTs who are providing speech/language/communication services to a variety of student groups with varying levels of cognitive and adaptive behavior skills who may exhibit issues with motivation and challenging behaviors (e.g., refusals, verbally/physically aggressive behavior, property destruction, self-injurious behavior). This document provides (1) a general outline and framework of behavioral support considerations in the provision of services, (2) links to suggested strategies for use with students at a variety of ages and levels of functioning, and (3) links to a variety of resources that may be useful in implementing the strategies discussed in this document.

Disclaimer: The information provided in this document does not, and is not intended to, constitute behavior analytic advice; instead, all information provided is for general informational purposes only. The information provided does not create an agreement for service with the recipient [BACB Ethics Code 8.04(d)].

General Framework for Behavioral Support Considerations

Prior to Beginning Services

- 1) Meet with and develop initial rapport with student by engaging in positive activities (including talking with students about their specific preferences in regard to recreation, food, games, movies, free-time choices, and specific items).
- 2) Figure out best/preferred times to schedule sessions.
- 3) Identify motivating items/activities (interview, checklists, etc.).
- 4) Attempt to determine function(s) of challenging behaviors (what reinforces/motivates them; checklists, interviews, observations).
- 5) Based on the information you have gathered, develop a plan for how the student will be reminded/prompted to attend a session (electronic alarm, verbal prompt/reminder from teacher, etc.).



6) Develop a clear basic schedule of activities for your initial session(s) (activities, rewards, etc. using verbal/written/picture schedules).

Initial Session(s)

1) Implement the plans you have developed above. (See recommendations in other parts of this document re: strategies such as behavioral momentum, providing choices, incidental teaching, maintaining a high ratio of positive to negative/corrective statements, use of more structured reward systems (point/penny cards, stickers).

2) Responding to Occurrences of Challenging Behavior: Knowing the “function” of the challenging behaviors can be useful in making decisions about how to respond to it. The basic idea is that the more we can avoid rewards for challenging behavior the less likely they may be to occur. Importantly, at the same time we should be teaching and rewarding alternative behaviors that allow the student to access similar rewards (e.g., asking for a break).

Ongoing Considerations for Therapy/Support

1) Services can be provided in varied locations; such variation is especially important when attempting to establish generalized responding. Alternative settings may include shooting hoops on the basketball court, playing a game in the hallway, participating in a “lunch bunch” in the classroom, having a group discussion about a movie played in the classroom, etc.

2) Along with varied locations, opportunities should train targeted skills across people, settings, and activities (e.g., teaching greeting skills in the hallway/cafeteria/ playground).

3) In ongoing activities all relevant strategies can be considered for use. These include behavioral momentum, opportunities for choice, feedback/encouragement, teaching alternative functional communication responses, reducing rewards for challenging behavior, and more systematic reward systems if they seem useful/desirable.

Prior to Beginning Speech Services

1. Review records and assessments to identify strengths, skill deficits and potential challenges to working with the student.
 - a) As you learn about your student, determine which teaching settings will likely be most productive. If your learner requires intensive prompting and repetition to acquire new skills, and structured setting may work best to teach, using incidental teaching to generalize skills and help maintain the student’s motivation.



- b) Learn about your student's engagement in problem behavior, and what others who have worked with the student have found to be effective in redirecting problem behaviors. Identify potential triggers that are likely to result in problem behavior. Identify proactive strategies that can help prevent these triggers from leading to problem behavior.
- 2) Get to know the student and build rapport:
- a) Meet with the student to learn about interests at school and home. Make your initial meeting fun. Smile and be happy! Rather than bringing the student to the speech room, consider walking around the school or finding a neutral location to get to know the student. Ask the student about their family, their favorite things about school, and their friends. Be fun and engaging so that the student enjoys being around you!
 - b) Ask about past experiences with speech services and what the student liked and didn't like. Did the student find previous speech services overwhelming, boring, necessary, or fun? This will help determine how to provide services and what interventions may be beneficial at the start of services.
 - c) Ask about potential activities and privileges the student likes using a survey or checklist (see resource list).
 - d) Find out when and where the student would prefer to do speech for consideration in scheduling. Check with the teacher and/or administrator to determine if any subjects or times of day would not be allowed or preferred. For example, if a student has deficits and is behind in reading, the teacher may ask you not to pull the student from the classroom during this time. You will not want to offer that time as an option when meeting with the student.
 - e) Find common interests with the student and let the student get to know you.
 - f) Ask the student how they want to be reminded of therapy sessions (low volume alarm, phone reminder, SLT picks up, teacher excuses student, etc.).
 - g) Set a tone of enthusiasm, warmth, and empathy.
- 3) Talk with teachers/parents/guardians
- a) Contact the student's parent(s) or caregiver(s) to introduce yourself. Ask them what factors have made speech services successful in the past, and what frustrations



they have had related to their child's services. Show genuine interest in what the caregivers tell you about the student. Ask what questions they have for you about the services you will be providing.

- b) Ask parents and/or the teacher about the student's interests, preferred activities and potential turn offs that often lead to problem behaviors. Preference surveys may be beneficial because you can refer to them later.
 - c) Ask about successful strategies that have worked to prevent and manage problem behaviors in the past. Note that some of these strategies may have perpetuated the problems and seek consultation from a behavior specialist about the continued use of these strategies if desired.
 - d) Encourage questions related to services you will provide.
 - e) Consider the teacher's preference for scheduling and location related to student's skill deficits. If the student has problems transitioning to speech, talk with the teacher about doing sessions in the classroom at first.
- 4) Gain consensus among members of the IEP team related to priorities during your sessions.
- 5) Consider consulting a behavior specialist if the student has significant behavior problems.
- a) Check to see if a behavior specialist is currently assigned as a member of the student's IEP team.
- 6) Plan your service delivery model:
- a) Identify the appropriate setting for services, including the location and the ideal time of day. This may include interviewing the student to identify specific activities or classes they don't want to miss while participating in speech services.
 - b) Be creative when identifying the location for services (classroom, speech room, hall, playground). Consider the potential for distraction for the student when deciding on the location.
 - c) Plan how the student will arrive at speech services by discussing options and listening to student preferences. You may need to identify strategies to facilitate independence by creating a self-management plan for the student to track their appointments and independently leave the classroom to attend speech sessions. This prevents the need for you to go to the classroom to remind the student of



their appointment, which could result in embarrassment, especially for older and less severely impacted students. The student may want to set a low volume alarm on their phone or watch or use a time management app or set a calendar alert on their phone. If you are implementing a self-management plan for the student to independently transition to speech sessions, include the teacher in this plan so that they can provide support in case the student fails to respond to the cue to go to their appointment. Some students may prefer to have the teacher excuse them, or have you pick them up from class. Be flexible and try to provide as much choice as possible.

- d) Consider how to arrange the location where services will occur. Limit free access to reinforcing items so that the student is motivated to earn these items during sessions. For students with limited interests, ensure that you have a variety of activities available to help you find something the student will be interested in.
- e) If you will be providing group instruction, consider matching peers according to interests and skills, and identify characteristics in peers that will foster a successful group.
- f) Traditional service delivery models may not be the most effective for some students. Consider collaborated, integrated, and/or peer-mediated service delivery models.

Special Considerations for Students with Significant Disabilities

In addition to recommendations that apply to all students, there are some noteworthy caveats to consider prior to starting services with a student with significant disabilities.

- 1) It may be helpful to find out about any particular interests that are not typical through communication with the student's caregivers and/or teacher.
- 2) Assess the student's ability to make requests. At times, skills targeted for intervention during speech services include teaching the student to make comments and use full sentences when the student lacks the ability to request basic wants and needs. It would also be beneficial to ask about nonvocal communication in this capacity: crying, hand leading, approaching certain preferred items.



3) Plan collaboration with the IEP team upfront:

- a) Decide with the IEP team what the priorities are during speech services before starting services. Deciding what and when to reinforce will depend on the most important objectives during speech services.
- b) Decide how and when you will communicate progress with skills learned and how teachers, parents, peer tutors can help the student practice the skills outside the therapy room. (generalization)

4) Plan the environment:

- a) If a student struggles with transitions, providing services in the classroom may prevent a loss of therapy time due to lengthy transitions.
- b) If the student has difficulty with self-control, limit the number of items accessible in the therapy room
- c) If the student has few interests, consider placing several items in the room to observe what items the student gravitates toward. These items may be potential motivators during speech sessions.

First speech session

Make building a rapport the first priority by engaging in small talk and getting to know them. Listen to what they have to say. Make a connection by pointing out some common interests.

1. Have some items available that you know they will like (Legos, Minecraft game, coloring/art activity etc.) and offer these freely.
2. Help the student set goals for speech therapy, both daily small goals and long term. Plan to review the student's progress on their goal in subsequent sessions.
3. Allow the student to have input about how therapy is carried out. Consider their input related to location and the activities available.
4. Set clear rules and clearly communicate them. Set no more than 3-5 rules stated positively and are observable as shown below.



Examples of effective rules	Non-examples
Follow directions the first time	Make the teacher happy
Stay seated unless given permission	Do your best
Raise your hand and wait to be called on	Don't talk out
Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself	Be nice
Keep your cell phone out of sight unless given permission to use it.	Be respectful

5. Establish and communicate procedures. What is the procedure to get a drink, go to the restroom, take a break, sharpen a pencil, etc. Can they bring food/drinks to session?

6. Have a schedule for the session. This could be a list of activities to complete that day or some type of visual daily schedule that you check off as they are completed. Review the schedule at the beginning of the session.

7. Maintain a high ratio of positive to corrective feedback. This will help maintain rapport and maintain their motivation to come to sessions. Be aware, some students prefer more private positive feedback since public acknowledgement, even positive can be embarrassing.

8. Informally assess the student and reflect on the first session. How did they respond to your interactions? What was particularly helpful or difficult for the student? How was your pace? Did the student have ample time to process and answer your questions? Watch for non-verbal cues that tell you if they are interested, motivated, bored, or anxious, embarrassed, or even angry about attending. Find ways to model problem solving with the student to address these concerns.

Additional considerations for student with significant disabilities for the 1st session

Since these students are significantly more impacted by communication deficits it is important that your actions are salient to communicate that working with you will be enjoyable. This is also known as earning instructional control.

1. Have multiple preferred items and activities available. Put them in the room and see what the student touches, picks up or engages with. Note how long and in what ways the student interacts with the item.



2. Offer the items with no strings attached but don't be pushy. If they don't want it, don't try to talk them into taking it.
3. If the learner helps themselves to the item let them have it. Make occasional comments about what they are doing in an upbeat way. Pay attention to the student's reaction to your comments. Sometimes too much talk can be aversive.
4. Show that you are willing to give an item repeatedly with no strings attached.
5. Pick up another item and engage with it. If the student approaches you and shows interest in the item, give it to the student.
 - a. Once the student is approaching you, start to interact.
 - b. Do not ask the child to do anything
 - c. Do not ask questions
 - d. Imitate the student and respond to the student's reactions.
 - e. If they ask/tell you to do something, comply to all requests, within reason.
 - f. Avoid blocking/restricting items if possible. Don't have any items out that you don't want touched.
 - g. Comment on what you see.
 - h. Find ways to make the current activity more fun using your imagination. If the learner likes how you add to the fun, they will want to listen to you.
 - i. Bring in new items and parallel play to see if the student has any interest. This is particularly helpful for students who don't seem to be motivated by anything. If the student joins you, interact with them. If not, don't force or try to talk them into participating.
 - j
 - k. Carefully observe and note the child's reactions to you. If the child willingly approaches you and wants to interact, you are ready to gradually add requirements.
 - l. The first requirement may be that the child is required to request items that you have. If the child independently makes requests of the items/activities you have, then it is time to add more tasks related to the learning priorities.
 - m. The timeline for this to happen can range from minutes to months depending on the learner's skills, problem behaviors, and how long the problem behaviors have persisted.
 - n. Add visual supports for communication - even for vocal students
 - o. Even if you have focused on rapport building and associating yourself with fun activities, you may still experience challenging behaviors. If this is the case, it may be beneficial to seek out the advice of a BCBA, behavior specialist, (or whomever the school district has designated as a behavior specialist) who can collaborate with you to increase attending (listening and following instructions) and instructional control, which are prerequisites for continued learning repertoires. Behavior specialists may need to assess the student for individual abilities and deficits to create a more individualized



plan. If sufficient progress has not been demonstrated in an individualized plan, it may be useful to seek out and employ a BCBA if there is currently not one employed by the district.

Ongoing speech sessions

1. Check-in with your student each session to find out how they feel about their speech therapy sessions. For students requiring mild/moderate support, ask them to identify skills that they hope to gain from the services, such as learning how to ask a peer to a dance, dating etiquette, and other social skills that will help them develop and maintain positive peer relationships.
2. Review reinforcement contingencies at the start of each session by either establishing what the student would like to earn or reviewing contingencies that are already in place.
 - a) Use praise and rewards strategically. The use of praise and rewards can promote emotional engagement by aiding in building your relationship with the student and maintaining positivity towards therapy.
 - b) Consider appropriate reinforcement strategies and schedules. Your initial goal should be to pair your sessions with frequent access to reinforcement so that your student is motivated and excited to participate in sessions. As the student demonstrates success, reinforcement should be adjusted so that the student is required to do more before earning access to reinforcing items.
 - c) Students requiring significant supports may need tangible reinforcers that are provided frequently after only a few simple tasks. Token boards or other visual supports such as a visual task schedule (to show what needs to be completed and then what will be earned) may be helpful.
 - d) You may need to conduct ongoing preference assessments throughout your sessions, to learn what the student will be motivated by. This can include simply holding up two items and asking the student what they want to earn, and then having that item visible while the student engages in the required tasks.
3. Facilitate shared control:
 - a) Allow opportunities for the student to make choices. The student can choose the order to complete the session's activities, pick materials (e.g., selecting books, worksheets, etc.), or when possible, pick a location for their session (e.g., indoors,



outdoors, in your office, etc.). Giving students choices can increase participation while building their ability to apply self-ownership over their learning.

4. Provide novelty and fun in instructional activities. Variety and novelty can improve engagement and make learning fun. Methods such as project-based and inquiry-based learning, class and group discussions, role-playing as well as peer-assisted learning can be beneficial.
 - a) Consider integrating popular culture into your sessions. Movie clips can be a highly effective form of video modeling for teaching social skills (you can demonstrate both good examples of a skill being demonstrated, as well as non-examples through movie clips).
 - b) Incorporate various activities and strategies depending on the needs of the student. For example:
 - i) Social Skills training: focus on the student's needs and build on their strengths.
 - ii) Tutoring: Arrange a tutor for the student, during school or after school.
 - iii) Individual mentoring and guidance: An evidence-based program fostering engagement such as Check and Connect. This program is successful because the mentor builds a positive and supportive relationship with the student while monitoring signs of disengagement such as attendance, grades, and behavioral needs.
5. Provide challenging tasks. Older students should have tasks that are more complex and include multidimensional problems. Remember to allow opportunities to generalize skills across settings (classroom, cafeteria, library, home, community, etc.).
6. Identify the student's interests, values, goals on an ongoing basis. This can be done through surveys, interviews, discussions, or observations. You can tie this to activities and challenge the student to think about how the activity applies to their life or future.
7. Create short-term and long-term goals and develop plans for achieving them. Goals should be realistic and geared to the specific needs of the student. For students in higher grades, challenge the student to reflect on their future self. Prompt with questions such as "What do you need to do in speech therapy?" Provide activities to help the student develop strategies for attaining short-term and long-term goals. For instance, activities might focus on the importance of work for therapy, managing time, or working with others to reach



goals. Help the student to set methods for monitoring their progress such as recording their daily completion of therapy work. Long-term goals can be monitored by students reflecting each week on completed therapy assignments to help meet those goals.

8. Encourage self-comparison over social comparison. It is more motivating to compare one's performance to previous performance. Student's comparing themselves to others can be demotivating. Encourage the student to focus on self-progress instead. Redirect questions such as "How am I compared with everyone else?" to "How much have I improved?"
9. Collaborate with the classroom staff on an ongoing basis. Many times, students with significant disabilities are pulled out for speech services for 30 minutes once a week with the SLP/SLT. It is important that these students get many opportunities to practice and generalize what they are learning in that 30-minute weekly session. Consider training classroom staff to implement the techniques used in your sessions.
10. Use Antecedent Strategies. These are proactive strategies aimed at preventing problem behaviors from occurring)
 - a) Offering Choices to facilitate shared control (e.g., "do you want the red or the blue chair?" "do you want to start with ___ or ___?")
 - b) First/Then or If/Then statements (e.g., "First you need to sit at the table, then you can choose a sticker." or "If you sit nicely until the timer beeps, then we can play a game.")
 - c) Visual Supports – You may need to include visual supports such as a visual timer, a visual activity schedule that includes pictures or icons of what activities will be completed (the students transfers the picture from the "To Do" column to the "All Done" column after each activity is completed)
 - d) Group Contingencies: This intervention is used with a small group of students all earning points or tokens toward a common reinforcer such as playing a game, going outside, watching short video clips, etc. Behavioral expectations are set and explicitly taught and practiced so that students can demonstrate understanding of the expectation. When the students complete a task, the teacher may hand out a cotton ball or marble to fill a small jar. When the jar is full, all of the students earn the end reinforcer. Filling the jar is one idea. Others may include star charts, puzzles, Mr. Potato Head, color the spots on a giraffe, fill in a dot-to-dot, or make a paper chain from one wall to the other in the speech room. Whichever system you use, make it visual so students can see how close they are to earning the terminal reinforcer. The



SLT may decide to provide additional “bonus” pieces for students who are exhibiting the desired behavior more frequently. The SLT should also be aware that some students will have a difficult time and may need additional support and a little more flexibility in how they earn the item.

- e) Behavior Momentum: Start with 2-3 short, simple (and possibly fun) tasks for the student to engage in. Provide praise, high-5, or other reinforcement at the conclusion of each task. After the completion of 2-3 short simple tasks, a more difficult task is presented, and reinforcement delivered at the conclusion. Then repeat this cycle, introducing 2-3 short, simple, fun tasks to the student followed by reinforcement and then a more difficult task.
- f) The flexibility of location and practice: Speech services may not always be most effective in the speech room. With the approval of your supervisor, speech services may take place in other, more preferred locations. Examples may include Playing HORSE on the basketball court, out at recess, walking around the school, or playing a game in the hallway. This may alleviate the stress, repetition, and boredom that may accompany speech services in the office setting.
- g) Incidental Teaching: You may decide to follow the student’s lead as to where they want to go and what they want to do and provide speech services along the way. This is much less stressful and includes the option of choice because of the loose structure.

11. Use Consequence-based Strategies to Respond to Problem Behavior and to Increase Appropriate Behavior:

- a) Provide frequent praise for compliance and participation. Use specific praise that identifies what the student did well rather than general praise (e.g., say, “I love how you are sitting calmly and looking at me!” rather than “You’re doing great!”).
- b) Redirection: Use positively stated corrective feedback that informs the student what to do rather than what to stop doing. For example, say, “Right now I need you to keep your hands in your lap” instead of “Stop throwing the cards on the floor!”
- c) Use the “Help Strategy” if your student is becoming frustrated. Examples include statements such as, “It looks like you need help with (task). I can help with that” or “Remember you can ask me to help you with (task).”
- d) Avoid power struggles by using the “Wait Strategy” if your student is engaging in problem behaviors. Examples include “I’m going to wait until you are sitting quietly,”



or “I am going to wait for you to show me a quiet voice.” Then allow your student time to correct their behavior.

- e) Home-school collaboration could be helpful. The school and family can work closely to monitor and encourage engagement. Examples can include teacher-student-parent conferences, daily or weekly report cards or behavioral contracts, as well as electronic posting of assignments and work completed.
- f) Home notes to students and/or parents: A little note can be sent home with the student that expresses appreciation for how they follow the rules and participate in discussion while at speech. Make sure the note has specific praise for what the student did correctly and how it affected you.
- g) Increase the schedule of reinforcement: Sometimes motivation lags due to a student being bored, tired, sick, hungry, or disinterested. The SLT should ensure the item(s) being used for reinforcement are, in fact, reinforcing to the student. Preferences and desires change often and so should your reinforcers. To improve motivation, the SLT may decide to increase the frequency in which reinforcement is given. This may occur in several ways:
 - i. Provide reinforcement based on the number of items completed. If a student is used to receiving reinforcement after the 4th item on the list, offer reinforcement after the 2nd time on the list is completed. You do not need to indicate to the student when you plan to deliver reinforcement. Effective reinforcement should be delivered for appropriate behavior, frequently and unpredictably.
 - ii. Provide reinforcement more frequently by using a time-based measure. If you provide reinforcement about every 10-minutes, decrease that amount of time to 7-minutes or when you see the student demonstrate the most appropriate behavior.
 - iii. Provide smaller incremental reinforcers that lead to a larger reinforcer later. SLT’s may choose to use a token economy system and provide a small token, sticker, smiley face, tally mark for each time the student completes an item successfully. When the student earns a specific number of smaller tokens, they can exchange them for a larger reinforcer (i.e., 10 tallies = 3 minutes with sand).