

Externalizing Behaviors



What exactly are externalizing behaviors? Simply put, externalizing behaviors are those disruptive behaviors that disturb and/or cause harm to others. For example, physical, verbal and emotional aggression toward others, intentionally breaking and/or not following rules, lying, stealing, and vandalizing another person's property are all examples of externalizing behaviors.

Students who display externalizing behaviors do so for a variety of different reasons. These include the death of someone close to them; divorce or separation of parents; loss of friendship/s; domestic violence at home; homelessness; learning disabilities, mental, emotional and/or hormonal imbalances etc. And the list could go on and on.

So, how do teachers/school personnel address students who are exhibiting externalizing behaviors?

First, it is helpful to figure out what might be causing a student to exhibit externalizing behaviors. Remember, behavior is a form of communication, so determining the cause and/or purpose of the disruptive behavior can help teachers effectively help and/or meet student needs.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that while the behaviors may vary from student to student, the purpose of the behaviors is typically either to get something or to avoid something.

For instance, a student who constantly disrupts class by trying to be funny or yelling out answers without being called upon might be communicating a need for attention. Rather than just responding to the behavior as it occurs, try to be proactive and make an effort to give that student your attention or the attention of the class in a more constructive, planned out manner.

For example, you might allow the student who often makes jokes or blurts out answers an opportunity during the school day/week to tell an appropriate and light-hearted joke or two or give them the opportunity to be the one who answers a few school subject questions and then call upon other students who raise their hand.

Of course, as most teachers know, the example above is not a fix all for all students who blurt out answers or make jokes. Teachers know that the same strategy does not work for every student displaying the same kind of disruptive behavior. The same disruptive behavior displayed by students, such as yelling out answers or making jokes, might be conveying a completely different need and/or being used to avoid different kinds of situations and/or consequences.

Using the same example from before, where a student blurts out answers and/or makes untimely/inappropriate jokes, in this instance, instead of seeking out attention like the first student, this particular student is actually looking to receive a consequence where they aren't allowed to go out for recess. Why? Because they are being bullied by a student from another class that is on the playground at the same time or because they don't have anyone that will play or interact with them during recess.

As one can see, often times, it takes a lot of time, energy and patience to effectively direct and redirect and/or effectively address externalizing behaviors. With all the pressures that teachers and school personnel are under, especially during the last two years, it can become very draining, both physically and emotionally. That is one of the reasons why Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is so important and necessary in schools.

What exactly is Social Emotional Learning (SEL)? SEL is the process of helping students develop the skills to manage their emotions, regulate their behaviors, appropriately resolve conflict, and make responsible decisions. This is done by incorporating skill building activities and lesson plans within subject matter students are already required to do.

There is over 20 years of research that shows that SEL makes a positive difference. We further know that SEL programs have a wide range of positive outcomes, including improved academic performance, healthy relationships and mental wellness of students.

However, it must also be noted that even the best SEL programs are not a fix-all answer to some student's externalizing behaviors. Some students will need additional and/or outside services and treatment. Being proactive and having a system in place to help facilitate and connect families and students to outside resources and services is extremely helpful to all involved.

For more information and resources on externalizing behaviors, SEL programs and/or about the SCIP program, please visit www.scipnebraska.com

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<https://www.cdc.gov> › classroom-management › behavi...

www.cfchildren.org/second-step

