

Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development.

Christine Reeve: I'm your host, Dr. Christine Reeve. For more than 20 years, I've worn lots of hats in special education but my real love is helping special educators like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research-based practices in a practical way in your classroom to make your job easier and more effective.

Welcome back to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I'm Chris Reeve. I am very happy that you've joined us. We are doing a couple of episodes on behavioral frequently asked questions. Today's question actually relates to training parents and other service providers or caregivers. It's a question I frequently get asked when I talk about behavior support in the classroom is how do you recommend training parents or other service providers or caregivers in implementing behavioral support? Should this be something that, as teachers or case managers, you should be facilitating? Is it something that should have a different role? Is it something that is not within your purview?

Now I say all of this with the full understanding that there's a lot of stuff that you have to do as a teacher and/or a case manager. I'm not trying to add anything to your pile at all, trust me. But I do think it's important that we recognize that IDEA does include parent-caregiver training as an IEP support or service, and it is something that is expected to be included for carryover of skills if the student needs it. But that does not mean that you have to be making home visits or doing large training programs, and it doesn't necessarily even mean it has to fall on the teacher.

I want to talk about all of that today and I'm going to give you some specific ways to help the families of your students handle their behavior in a more proactive way, and more in line with what we might do at school, with the understanding that strategies I would use at home are usually going to look different than strategies I would use in the classroom, similar to how I might use different strategies in the special ed self-contained classroom than I would in a general ed classroom.

With those caveats, I think we then have to think about what we should be doing to help our families and what we can do, and who is providing that. That's what I'm going to talk about today. If you are interested in more para training, staff training resources, we have a ton in the Special Educator Academy. Come and get your free seven-day trial. We have tutorials that can be downloaded to share with staff. We have strategies for promoting effective collaboration across home and school, as well as some strategies to help families manage behavior.

We also have a whole course on behavioral problem solving, and it is designed to be taken in little 20 to 30-minute bursts so you don't have to take the whole course at one time. We would love to see you there. You can find out more about that at specialeducatoracademy.com. Let's get started.

The answer to this question about how we train parents or caregivers in managing behavior depends in part on the school system and the unions, the rules, and roles regarding who works with families in your district. For instance, I've worked in some districts that have a dedicated

parent advocate who might be a good person to provide training to the family. In some districts, as an outside consultant, I have made home visits, taking someone from the classroom team with me, and I do it as part of my consultation to help bridge the gap between school and home.

In some school districts, it might be something that falls to a counselor or a psychologist and there will be times with some families where they need more support than you can give. Just because IDEA does include parent and caregiver training as an IEP support and service, it doesn't mean that every behavioral need that a family is having is something that needs to be trained and addressed with the school. If the school isn't seeing those behaviors at school, it's going to be more difficult for them to address something at home. I think that that is a really important caveat.

There will be times when you need to refer out that you need to find resources in your community to provide more support to families than you're able to give in your role. I am in no way saying that we need to blur your boundaries. In fact, I'm saying we need to make the boundaries pretty clear. I also think it's important to recognize that this type of training does not have to look like "training." We can do this type of training in a variety of ways. Sometimes it can be done with general parent training done through say, guest speakers, or one person from each special ed team takes a night to do a parent night.

That may be all that some of your parents need to manage behavior at home. But in a lot of our instances with a lot of our students with more severe behaviors, we are looking for more carryover of say, functional communication training of asking for a break or asking for attention. We're trying to get families to where they can get those skills at home and reinforce them as well.

For those types of things where we've figured out a function for the behavior, we think it is similar at home, and we want to transfer what we are doing successfully from school to home, there are a couple of things that we can do depending on our situation and how your district works that can be effective, and some of them are not going to require a huge amount of time on your part outside the classroom.

You could have the family come in for after-school time and demonstrate what you're working on with the students so they would come in when the child is in the classroom, but the rest of the kids have gone home or maybe they come in when the rest of the kids at recess and you use that time if you can't work outside your time periods where the families aren't available at other times.

Doing it at school has the advantage that the student is used to using this skill like asking for attention in that setting. Now I'm a big proponent in behavior support, that as a school, we have expertise that families traditionally don't have. That's not to say that some of our families aren't extremely educated and talented in this area. But for the majority of our families, this is a new thing too. For the majority of us, it's not necessarily new. In that case, we want to try whatever strategies we're going to use to see if they work at school before I would ask families to do it at home.

Until I know it's going to work in more controlled, more staffed, more trained environment, I'm not going to ask the family to do it at home. That's kind of my general rule is we need to figure this out, then we can help you figure out how to adapt it in your situation because I think that's also an important thing to remember. Families are not going to be able to pick up a strategy that you used in the classroom that has three adults and six kids and move it to a home environment where dad's on a business call, mom's cooking dinner, and there are three other kids in the house that they have to be concerned about. That's a very different staff ratio, very different expectations.

I think it's important to recognize that we're going to have to adapt what we do so that families can be more successful with it in their environment. But first, we need to figure out what works and what the issues are. If we're talking about carryover of making a request for a break, asking for attention, or something like that, have the family, once you figured it out, you know what works for the student, having them come into the classroom means the students are in a comfortable environment where they can be successful and the family can see that they are successful. That's going to be the most reasonable way to both get them on board as well as be able to demonstrate what you are talking about.

You could have the parents come in and you could meet with them with the counselor or the parent advocate to describe what you're doing at school and demonstrate what you're doing and do some role-playing. You might even be able to show them a video of you working with the student using these strategies to demonstrate for them. That's something where they would come in and you could talk specifically about their child with their behavioral concerns and talk about what is working at school. You are not required to make sure that their home is behavior free, but you do want to make sure that your strategies are being carried over if they're effective.

You can make a home visit, and I always recommend that you don't do that by yourself, that you take someone else with you. You just never know what's going to come up when you get into someone's house. It's kind of an awkward situation as well. I've always found it really useful to have just another person from the district with me so that we're both seeing the same things. Then you could demonstrate these strategies at home.

Now I would like to have them come into the classroom where we can be successful with it before I would go out to the home only because you showing up in the home is a vastly new thing for them. It's sometimes hard to structure that because their behavior may not be the same because they're not used to asking for a break or asking for attention in the home environment. I would try and demonstrate a school before we would do a home visit.

But then you could go and demonstrate what you're doing at home, help the parent think about how they're going to adapt the strategies at home to meet their needs, and perhaps have them try out some of the strategies with the students so that they're comfortable with it and know what their questions are.

This is also sometimes really a helpful time to remind them that they don't have to use, say you found that using a visual schedule has been very effective for your students, I wouldn't go into

the home and say, “Now, have everything during your day, all day Saturday be on a visual schedule,” that's asking too much of both the student and their parents.

Instead, I would look at how we can break the routine down and let's take one routine and start with a schedule. Then we'll take another problematic routine and start with a schedule. We're not going to try to do everything all at once. We're going to do it in small bursts so that the parents and the child can both be successful.

Another idea is that you can have the parents come into the school. If they can't come into the school due to schedules and you can't go home, then maybe you make a video model of you working with the students. It might be helpful for them to see the beginning of the sessions and then a few sessions later, because one of the things I hear a lot from professionals, much less families, is “Well, yeah, he does it for you, because you've been doing it for this long,” so maybe they need to see that it started out and it wasn't quite as successful as it looked at the end.

Because they may get frustrated with it very early on. If they know that you kind of struggled through the difficulties at the beginning, it makes it okay for them to have those struggles as well. Having some earlier sessions as well as some later sessions can be a really good way to help them see that they're not alone in struggling with this behavior. They're also not seeing when the student has mastered this skill, they're seeing it when you're actually teaching the skill, and that's the piece they need to see the most.

Whatever the strategies you might try, I always recommend getting the strategy going at school and then getting it working at home. I would never ask a family to do something I haven't tried with a student unless we're adapting and I just haven't tried it because I haven't been in that environment. It will always be easier—and I know your job is not easy—but it will be always easier for school staff to get a strategy going at school than it will family at home just because our world is more structured at school and we're not with them 24/7. We have more staff, their behavior and their learning are our focus, and you have more experience than most of your families.

Even those of us family members who have trained have a harder time using the strategies that we use in the classroom with our family members, or at least that's true for a lot of us. I know it's certainly true for my family where my autism-teacher sister and myself really struggled sometimes with my sister with autism because we're wearing our sister hat, not wearing our teacher hat. Once we put our teacher hat on, we realize what we're doing doesn't make any sense.

Even when you have very experienced families, it's hard to see something when you're that close to it. Having somebody come in from the outside and give some support can be really useful at times. I hope that helps to give you some ideas of things to try. I'm interested to know if any of you have made home visits, if you provide parent training. I will be sharing that on social media and I would love to get your opinion on it on my Instagram or on my Facebook.

I'll make sure that those links are in this blog post as well. I hope that that gives you some tools to use and I hope that you will come back next week when I will actually be talking about

interactive whiteboards and how to use them responsibly. Until then, have an amazing week, and thanks for all you do.