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SPEAKERS

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Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development. 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 to the Autism Classroom Resources podcast. I am Dr. Christine Reeve, and I'm the host. And if you don't know me, my background is in clinical psychology with my PhD doing research on functional communication training. I'm also BCBA. But my focus has always been on taking the research that's out there in the field, and making it accessible and usable in real life environments.

Now you are listening to Episode 209. And we are in the midst of a behavioral series talking about replacement behaviors for challenging behavior. We've talked about replacements for escape behavior. And last week, I talked about behaviors that function to get access to items or activities, and what we do when we can't give access to them.

And if you haven't listened to it, you may want to hop over to [autismclassroomresources.com/episode 206](https://autismclassroomresources.com/episode-206) to hear more about functional communication training process. I talk about how to make it work and break down the steps that we need to take. I used escape related behaviors as an example. But it definitely applies to all the different functions.

This week, I am turning my attention to attention seeking behavior. Because I'm guessing all of us have worked with students who are engaging in behavior, because it gets a reaction or attention from their environment. It's important to recognize that all attention is not equal. And we're going to talk about that today.

At some point, we've probably thought I pay attention to them all the time, the function can't be to get more attention. And it's probably not to get more attention, the function is probably to get attention on their terms, not yours. And that's what we're gonna be talking about today is how we manage that. And if you feel like you have a student who is eating up all of your attention, but is still engaging in challenging behavior, this episode might help. So let's get started.

I want you to think about a student named Katie. And Katie is just got you flummoxed, you're not sure what to do about her behavior. You've done a functional behavior assessment, the function definitely seems to be gaining attention of those people around her. It might be peers, it might be adults, she doesn't seem to care whose attention it is. She just engages in attention seeking behavior all the time.

Sometimes it's minor problems, where it's just so attention seeking and annoying. Maybe when you're working with one student with another student, Katie will throw something and then look at you and smile. And you ignore it because you know it's to gain attention. But it's aggravating, and it's exhausting when it happens 100 million times.

And then there's Michael. Michael's FBA indicated that he would hit and kick other students. And he was reinforced by the negative reaction that he got from them because it was upsetting to them. So he would laugh and jump up and down while the other student was crying. And needless to say, that does kind of add insult to injury at that point. Kids get more upset when people are laughing and crying at them after they have hurt them.

So if you've had Katie or Michael in your class before, those are the kinds of behaviors I'm going to talk about today, because it doesn't define who they are. And it's interesting, because we might have some students whose behavior might be worse in severity but sometimes these behaviors, these attention seeking behaviors will wear you out because they're just so baffling, especially when you have a student who's already getting tons of attention to start with.

So, for both Michael and Katie, you've already done the legwork. Okay, you already know from your FBA that the type of attention that Katie wants from her teacher, and you have FBA data that clearly shows a pattern of gaining attention from specific people for Michael. Perhaps your student does both these things and you just you can't figure out how to stop it. You have this information, but nothing that you're trying is working.

The reactions that we provide to students in response to their behaviors are often more reinforcing than we realize. And the same is true if the attention comes from peers. Essentially, it's a kind of power, even when we're trying not to react. These students can have a really big impact on the

classroom environment with their challenging behavior. You know, the old adage that if we just increase positive behavior, we have less negative behavior is true. But it doesn't always work with this kind of behavior.

We also tend to think if I'm paying him lots of attention, then I shouldn't be seeing attention seeking behaviors. And in fact, when I'll ask people, do you think that the behavior could be to gain attention, they'll say he has attention all the time. No, it can't pay attention. But it can.

Challenging behavior to gain negative attention has three significant advantages over positive behavior that you're trying to give attention to. Okay?

One is it's consistent. Negative behavior is typically more consistent at getting a big reaction in the environment than positive behavior. So you know, when somebody is nice to another kid, we may or may not see it and we may or may not reinforce it. But when they pull another student's hair, we are very aware of it. And people do respond to it, even if it's just the other peer.

So even when we're trying to reinforce positive behavior, we consistently have to intervene with a negative behavior that could hurt somebody. But we don't consistently have to respond or even notice the positive. So the negative behavior has, typically, a longer, more consistent reinforcement history than the positive behavior. Negative behavior works.

There's also the magnitude. So even when we're trying to make sure that we attend to positive behavior, the magnitude of our response is typically not the same level that is provided to keep a student from getting hurt or from hurting themselves. We tend to go Oh, good job, Michael, as opposed to, No! Or the other kids screaming or the outrage that causes across the whole classroom when he pulls another kid's hair. So the magnitude of the response is naturally bigger for negative here.

And then there's a learning history. Students typically have a longer history with using the negative behavior to get a reaction than the positive. Now, it's really important that when I say learning history, I don't mean that this is the behavior that somebody else created that you have to deal with. I'm not worried about that. Children will learn to do one thing in one environment and one thing in another. I have a whole episode on that, if you want to know what it is just email me and I will be happy to point you to that.

But chances are pretty good that this behavior, if you've done an assessment on it, has been happening for a while. And it's probably an easier pattern for them to follow. And it's their automatic habitual response. Think about how long it takes to change a habit, that's what changing behavior is. It's changing a habit. All of this means that the negative behavior is naturally getting a reaction more efficiently than positive behavior.

And I talked about the efficiency of the response in Episode 206. I talked about how important it was to find a response that gets the behavior, gets the reinforcer, gets the outcome they want, quicker, easier, and more consistently. So efficiency is made up of learning history, predictability, and magnitude. And that's one of the reasons why the negative behaviors really persist.

So what do we do with all of that? Well, you know, of course, it depends on the student. But knowing as much information as possible from your FBA is going to be really helpful to figure out what that individual response should look like.

So here's some general ideas that we might try. One thing is to kind of turn the tables on the behavior. One is to increase the magnitude. So give huge reactions to positive behaviors that stopped the whole class in their tracks, much like a crisis would, but for positive behavior instead of problem behavior.

So I used to have a kid who engage in behaviors to get people to engage with him. And so in order to turn it around, he would engage in just these really negative comments to get people to talk to him. So we set it up so that when he followed the rules that all of his tokens, the whole class would stop and sing For He's a Jolly Good Fellow. And that was a way that it took us You know, a minute to do that.

But the fact that he got everybody's attention, really allowed that reinforcer to compete with the impact that his negative talk had on other people. And it worked, because everybody and all the attention was on him. And in the case of functional communication training, we need to give them the control over that behavior of getting that response. So we need that's what's key, it's getting the ability to manage when it happens, and have it be predictable. And we'll talk more about that in a few minutes.

Another is looking at replacement behaviors. Make sure that you're teaching replacement behaviors, like we talked about in episode 206, like asking for attention. And make sure that the response to that request gets them a big reaction.

In Episode 207, I talked about the quality and the kinds of breaks that you could provide, and how you need to match it to the characteristics of the students. The same is true with giving attention. It's not enough to just say, hey, that's really good work, then go back to what you're doing, that might work for some students. But for others, you're gonna have to get a really big reaction, like singing For He's a Jolly Good Fellow with the whole class.

So Katie might need to have that predictability of I have a way to get attention, not just accept it when it comes her way in a passive manner. So here's a little easier because you can set up

when it comes her way, in a passive manner. So here is a little easier, because you can set up situations where she can ask for attention by calling your name and get it consistently at a high magnitude. So you can practice that over and over in the types of sessions that I talked about in episode 206.

And if you're looking for more tips, and ideas, really, of how to put functional communication training together, come and join the Special Educator Academy where we have a whole specific workshop on how to do it. It's got a videotape of kind of some of the strategies that we can use, I take you through the steps of how you actually do it, and what the research tells us. And you can find more information about that at specialeducatoracademy.com.

Michael needs skills to get other kids attended to him for appropriate behavior, that's more consistent than the response that he gets for the negative behavior. Now his situation is a little bit more complex than Katie, because other students are involved. So we may need to set up a subset of other students to be his buddies, who can be a little bit more patient with them than maybe the run of the mill student in the class. And then who we can teach to respond to the right behavior, with big reactions, similar to those who would get with the negative behavior, and to not respond as much when he engages in the negative behavior.

So remember that you want to get the replacement behavior happening as easily as the challenging behavior. And you'll have to make the reinforcer even more powerful to do that. So you also want to make sure that your replacement behavior clearly serves the same function as a challenging behavior.

And another thing we can do is increase the consistency. So how predictable using this strategy is, is a key element and the efficiency of the response. So rather than simply increasing the amount of attention that a student gets, replacement behaviors allow the student to get the attention when he or she wants it, not when we think they need it, or when we have time.

Now, in order to really boost those replacement behaviors, we have to make sure that the response they get, the attention that they get, or the reaction they get is really consistent. And that means that the positive behaviors get big reactions, as consistently as a negative behaviors have in the past. And you're going to set up again, teaching sessions where you can practice that for 2, 3, 5 minutes at a time during the day. So that you're able to control the variables and get it going to start.

When you do that, keep in mind that you are teaching. You are teaching the student how to manage his or her own behavior. You're teaching them how to communicate for what they need, and you're teaching more appropriate behavior. And you may as we talked about in episode 206, that may mean that math, you lose five minutes of math because you're working on this every day. But once you get to it, you're gonna get more things done. The behavior is what's going to make a much bigger impact on the student's outcome than the math in the long run. And I talk all about that in episode 206.

Another thing you can do that works really well with a student like Michael, is, in addition to teaching appropriate ways to get attention, you can highlight giving attention for that, and not giving attention for negative behaviors. But that can be really tough to do for kids like Michael, because his behavior impacts other students in the class, and I can't ask them not to respond. I might have a few that I can teach how not to give a big reaction. But that's not going to be true of all the students. And he will just go and engage in that behavior with the ones who given that reaction.

So how do you keep from sending the message that Michael's behavior is okay, but don't attend to it? Well give your attention to the student who deserves it. So the student that Michael hit or kicked, that's the student we fuss over, that's the student that we focus on. Even if they don't require a big fuss. We want to go over I'm really attend to the victim, because that is sending the message that you want the class to learn and sending that message to Michael.

You know, first of all, you're letting the student know who got hit or kick, I'm sorry, he shouldn't have done that. But if we attend to Michael, it's A) only going to increase the behaviors over time, because it's reinforcing it. But it also is going to tell the rest of the kids this is what we do. Ignoring his behavior doesn't necessarily make sense to the rest of the students either. Attending to the victim means that you can essentially not attend to Michael, but send the message that this is not okay. So that's a way to shift that attention focus.

Does that mean that I always have to be paying attention to Katie? It doesn't. It might mean for the short term that I do. As I'm teaching the skill, I need to do it more consistently. But then we can teach Katie to wait for our attention.

And one of the things that we can do when we teach waiting is to do some of the strategies that we talked about in last week's podcast. I talked about using a timer. So maybe we start with wait for five seconds. Oh, now I can talk to you. Now we go to wait for 10 seconds. Oh, now I can talk to you. Now let's go do this. So gradually increasing the amount of time that you are making them wait for that attention.

So you want to make sure that you are doing it in a way that is consistent and gradual. So that if you if you start to see more behavior problems back up a little bit.

If you're looking to teach your students how to gain attention on their terms, and then learn to wait for when it's available, my social stories for justice behaviors, along with the visuals in the behavioral toolkit for waiting in my store might be able to help. There's a protocol in there of the steps for teaching students to ask for attention, and then learning to wait. So if you'd like those tools to get you started, where they're just ready to print them out and use them, check it out at autismclassroomresources.com/waiting.

Now, none of these solutions are going to change our behavior overnight. And it's likely that you'll get pushback and worse behavior before it gets better. But you can put strategies in place to positively and effectively reduce attention seeking behavior without just ignoring it, because that is going to make it escalate initially. And if we have to intervene, it might make it worse.

And whatever you do, do it soon. Because the longer that we let it go on, the harder it is to change. That reinforcement has gone on for a while and it's a habit that we have to change just like biting your nails, and eating healthy foods. It's going to take some time.

But when the student knows how to get attention when they want it, I think you'll find that they don't need to have it all the time. Some of them you will have to be really specific and fading that out. Some of them are gonna get it as soon as they figure out that when I asked I get it.

So those are all tips for how to handle those kinds of situations. I know they're very common in the classroom. If you have suggestions, hop over to Spotify and leave me a comment or a suggestion to share with the community about how you have dealt with these types of situations. And who knows. If you're asking a question it very well may become another podcast episode.

If you're looking for more on functional communication training, we have a whole workshop on it as I mentioned in the Special Educator Academy, specialeducatoracademy.com.

If you want to get started with preventing challenging behavior, check out our free webinar at autismclassroomresources.com/behavior-webinar and I will be back next week to talk about the nuts and bolts of teaching students to request attention now that we talked about why it's so incredibly important. If you are enjoying the behavior series on the podcast, don't forget to hop over to Apple podcasts, leave a rating, leave a review, I'd love to hear from you. Share a comment on Spotify. All those ways are ways to expand our reach and help more people. So talk soon.

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