

What Is It?

When students use challenging behaviors as a way to end or avoid a task or an instruction, they may need to be taught a requesting response for help, which is a more socially acceptable way to ask for help.

When to Use It

- Requesting help is taught as a replacement behavior for a student with a challenging behavior. Typically, a requesting response is included in a behavior support plan.
- For students where the function of problem behavior serves as escape from an instructional demand, consider teaching the student to request help with the task.
- Teach a student to request help when the student knows most of the material that is being taught.
- Use with students who have a low frustration tolerance.
- Combine this intervention with other interventions that reduce the occurrences of challenging behavior. This strategy requires the teacher to initially provide direct instruction and prompting. It should be implemented during activities where an adult can provide embedded instruction for learning to request help within the classroom activity.

Steps to Implementation / How to Do It

	1. Identify the function of the challenging behavior. It should be escape from an instructional task.
	2. Select the method of communication that is most appropriate for the student to use (verbally requesting, pointing to a symbol, gesturing). This response should already be a part of the student's skill repertoire.
	3. Based on the student's behavior, identify the longest amount of time the student can engage in an activity before demonstrating a challenging behavior. This is known as the critical time period. Before reaching the end of the critical time period, provide the student with the outcome that matches the request you are teaching. For example, if you are teaching the student to request help, at the critical point just before the problem behavior occurs, provide help to the student to complete the task. Repeat this step several times to establish an association between the task and the reinforcement.
	4. Once the student associates the activity with reinforcement, prompt the student to request help at the critical point before the problem behavior occurs. Teachers can model, provide explicit instruction, or use prompting strategies to teach the child to appropriately request help.
	5. After the student correctly asks for help, immediately provide the student with help (i.e., the teacher stops to help the student when the student appropriately requests help even if the teacher believes the student may not need help).
	6. When the student is successful in requesting help over several opportunities, reduce the number of prompts that are needed to support the student in requesting the help.
	7. Once the student is successfully asking for help with minimal prompting and the challenging behaviors have stayed low, begin to delay access to the reinforcement.

Example

Molly is frequently out of her seat during independent work. The intervention team conducts a functional behavior assessment and determines that Molly leaves her seat and wanders around the classroom to escape independent work during math. The team decides to use a requesting response strategy, among others, to teach Molly how to request help from her teacher, Ms. Krogh. They decide that Molly should raise her hand and wait at her desk for Ms. Krogh to approach her. They select this response because Molly is capable of performing both of these skills independently.

After collecting baseline data, the team determines that Molly can stay engaged in independent seatwork for 5 minutes before demonstrating the problem behavior. Before teaching Molly how to appropriately request help, she must associate the task with the reinforcement. To teach this association, Ms. Krogh approaches Molly's desk after 4 minutes and 30 seconds of independent seatwork and checks in with her. At this time, Ms. Krogh provides Molly with direct attention and assistance with the task. She asks Molly how she is doing with the work and helps her with two problems. After several sessions where Ms. Krogh provides Molly with help after 4 minutes and 30 seconds of independent work, Ms. Krogh begins to teach Molly how to appropriately request help. Ms. Krogh uses a prompting strategy to teach her. After 4 minutes and 30 seconds, Ms. Krogh verbally prompts Molly and says, "If you need me, raise your hand and I'll be right over." Then Ms. Krogh models a raised hand and physically prompts Molly to raise her hand by tapping her on her shoulder. When Molly raises her hand, Ms. Krogh immediately provides her with help.

Over the next few opportunities, Ms. Krogh slowly fades her prompts. She starts by increasing her proximity to Molly and using a visual prompt (e.g., Ms. Krogh raises her hand to cue Molly). When Molly raises her hand, Ms. Krogh immediately reinforces Molly by saying, "Yes, Molly. How is it going?" Eventually, as Molly becomes more independent and successful in asking for help, Ms. Krogh fades out all prompts. While using this strategy, Ms. Krogh does not reinforce when Molly gets out of her seat. If the problem behavior continues to occur while fading the prompts, Ms. Krogh increases the level of prompting that is necessary to support Molly in using the appropriate communicative response to request help.

How to Increase Effectiveness

- The function of the behavior must be known. The appropriate requesting strategy must be aligned with the function. That is, a student should be taught to ask for help or a break if escape is the function. Importantly, do not teach a child to take a break if the function of the challenging behavior is attention.
- If the student begins to use the requesting response before the critical point has ended (and there is no problem behavior), praise the student for the appropriate requesting response and then establish an additional requirement before the request is reinforced ("Great job asking for help, please finish one more math problem and I'll be over there to help you.").

- When using this strategy, do not reinforce the challenging behavior. See the “Extinction Procedures” for additional information on eliminating reinforcement for challenging behaviors.
- If the challenging behavior occurs before the critical time period, ignore the problem behavior and do not provide help or allow the student to escape the task, even if you provide prompting for asking for help. If the behavior truly cannot be ignored (i.e., the student is significantly interfering with the learning of others or the behavior is dangerous) redirect the student to what he should be doing without mentioning the challenging behavior.
- •Minimize the likelihood that the challenging behavior will occur prior to the acceptable communicative response. You can do this by ensuring that the selected activity is in the student’s skill repertoire and that the student typically engages in the activity appropriately for the entire duration of the critical time period.
- Teach this strategy in combination with antecedent interventions that prevent problem behavior from occurring.
- Be sure to provide reinforcement for the new behavior consistently as the student first begins to learn the skill.
- Increase the likelihood of the student generalizing this skill by prompting the use of it in multiple areas of the school day. However, be careful to not overuse the strategy too often.

Resources

Carr, E. G. & Durand, M. V. (1985). Reducing behavior problems through functional communication training. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 18, 11-126.