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, which is a socially acceptable way to request a break.

When to Use It

- A requesting response is taught as a replacement behavior for a student with a challenging behavior. Typically, a requesting response is included in a behavior support plan.

- This strategy is taught to students whose challenging behavior serves the function of escape.

- Requesting responses are used when students need to learn alternative behaviors to replace their challenging behaviors.

- A requesting response should also be combined 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 the requesting response within the classroom activity.

Steps to Implementation / How to Do It

☐	1. Identify the function of the challenging behavior. It should be escape to use this strategy.
☐	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 a break, at the critical point just before the problem behavior occurs, proactively "release" the student from the activity and provide a break. 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 a break 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 a break.
☐	5. The student should also be taught how to take a break (i.e., length of the break, available activities/locations for the break, how to re-engage with the task when returning from break). The student should also understand that they are expected to return to the activity or task after taking a break.
☐	6. After the student correctly demonstrates the requesting response, immediately provide the student with the break (i.e., the teacher provides the break regardless of where the class is in the activity).
☐	7. When the student is successful in demonstrating the appropriate communicative response over several opportunities, reduce the number of prompts that are needed to support the student in completing the requesting response.

ESCAPE

TEACHING
STRATEGY

Intervention Guide:
Teaching a Request for a Break

ibestt

> 8. Once the student is successfully completing the correct response with minimal prompting and the challenging behaviors have stayed low, begin to delay access to the reinforcement.

Example

Amira is frequently out of her seat during independent work. The intervention team conducts a functional behavior assessment and determines that Amira leaves her seat and wanders around the classroom to escape the tasks. The team decides to use a requesting response strategy, among others, to teach Amira how to request a break. They decide that Amira should raise her hand and wait at her desk for her teacher, Ms. Wooten, to approach her to give her a break. They select this response because Amira can perform both skills independently.

After collecting baseline data, the team determines that Amira can stay engaged in independent seatwork for 3 minutes before demonstrating the problem behavior. Before teaching Amira how to appropriately request a break, she must associate the task with the reinforcement. To teach this association, Ms. Wooten approaches Amira's desk after 2 minutes and 30 seconds of independent seatwork and tells her she can take a walk to the office to drop off some papers. After several sessions where Ms. Wooten provides Amira with short breaks after 2 minutes and 30 seconds of independent work, Ms. Wooten begins to teach Amira how to appropriately request a break. Ms. Wooten uses a prompting strategy to teach her. After 2 minutes and 30 seconds, Ms. Wooten verbally prompts Amira and says, "If you need to take a break, take this break card out of your desk and put it in the corner of your desk." Then Ms. Wooten models taking the index card with "break" written on it out of Amira's desk and puts it in the corner of her desk. When Amira takes out the break card, Ms. Wooten immediately provides her with the break.

Over the next few opportunities, Ms. Wooten slowly fades her prompts. She starts by increasing her proximity to Amira and using a visual prompt (e.g., Ms. Wooten raises her eyebrows in an expectant look or points to Amira's desk). When Amira takes the break card out, Ms. Wooten immediately reinforces Amira by saying, "Yes, Amira. You may go sit in the bean bag for a minute." Eventually, as Amira becomes more independent and successful in using a requesting response, Ms. Wooten fades out all prompts. While using this strategy, Ms. Wooten does not reinforce when Amira gets out of her seat. If Amira gets out of her seat, Ms. Wooten takes Amira back to her desk without saying anything. If the problem behavior continues to occur while fading the prompts, Ms. Wooten increases the level of prompting that is necessary to support Amira in using the appropriate communicative response to request a break.

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 take a break if the function is escape. 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 appropriately requesting a break and then establish an additional requirement before the request is reinforced ("Great job asking for a break, please finish one more math problem before a break.").

- 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 behaor 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.

- If the challenging behavior occurs, wait until the challenging behavior stops before beginning another opportunity to ask for a break. The time between the challenging behavior and the opportunity to request a break must be long enough so the student does not begin to associate the challenging behavior with gaining access to a break. 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.

- If the student has difficulty returning from the break,

  ° determine if the student has the skills or pre-requisite skills to complete the task. Often, students do not have the pre-requisite skills to do the activity that is being asked of them. If this is the case, modify the next activity to an instructional level for the student. Additionally, provide more instruction so the student can catch up academically.

  ° choose break activities that are naturally terminating (e.g., a short snack, a drink of water, taking a note to the office and walking back). Once the break naturally ends, it is easier for the student to transition back into the activity.

  ° the student may require additional reinforcement for leaving the break activity. This reinforcer should only be available when the student returns from the break. For example, if the student leaves a bean bag after a 3-minute break, the student receives one piece of candy if he transitions back to his seat without screaming.

- Once the student can request a break successfully and return from the break without challenging behaviors, it is time to delay access to the break. This may be done by making completing the task more reinforcing than taking a break. For example, if the student completes the entire math worksheet, he can have access to a short, preferred video clip instead of accessing the bean bag for a 3-minute break. The student will still be allowed to take the bean bag break but the video clip will not be available.

Resources

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

Stormont, M. A., Rodriguez, B. J. & Reinke, W. M. (2016). Teaching students with behavior problems to take a break. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 51, 301-306.