

Understanding Behavior as a Form of Communication

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MassGeneral Hospital
for Children[®]

Aspire

Who are you?





*Massachusetts General
Hospital's Aspire Program*

Jenn O'Rourke (she/her/hers)

- **Assistant Program Manager** of Child Services at MGH Aspire (year-round)
- Co-director of a **therapeutic day camp** for children diagnosed with **high cognitive autism** or related profiles (during summer)
- Background is in **Special Education** and **Applied Behavior Analysis**



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Taylor Levesque (she/her/hers)

- **Assistant Program Manager** of Child Services at MGH Aspire (year-round)
- Co-director of **therapeutic day camp** for children ages 5 to 14 diagnosed with **high cognitive autism** or related profiles (summertime)
- Background in **Applied Child Development** and **Psychology**



*Massachusetts General
Hospital's Aspire Program*

MGH Aspire

*“MGH Aspire helps people with social profiles like **high cognitive autism** spectrum disorder make connections, develop independence and succeed. Our participants learn the skills they need to achieve their full potential at home, school, work and in the community through year-long programming.”*

Summer programming includes **outdoor adventure camp** in the woods (for children ages 5-14) and **community based** camps in Greater Boston

Aspire's "3S Model"



*Massachusetts General
Hospital's Aspire Program*



- Build a **shared** definition around the word “behavior”
- Understand the importance of **behavior** in a **camp setting**
- Discuss the importance of **camper-staff relationships** in managing behavior
- Explore different **behavior management** strategies

How do **YOU**
define behavior?

“What is behavior?”

A definition



Our Definition

Behavior:

- is anything a person **says** or **does**
- involves **movement** and has an impact on the environment
- influenced by **environmental events**
- can be **observed, described,** and **recorded** (ex. talking, raising hand)

SCATTERGORIES

What are the behaviors you see at camp?

What about “Problem Behavior?”

Problem Behavior definition:

- **Impedes** the camper or those around the camper from **socializing** or **learning**
- May result in **exclusion** from group, school, home, or a community setting
- May result in **decreased quality of life** for the camper, peers, staff, family, etc.

We know with all behavior:

Behavior = Communication



“How do we think about behavior?”
Context to frame our knowledge

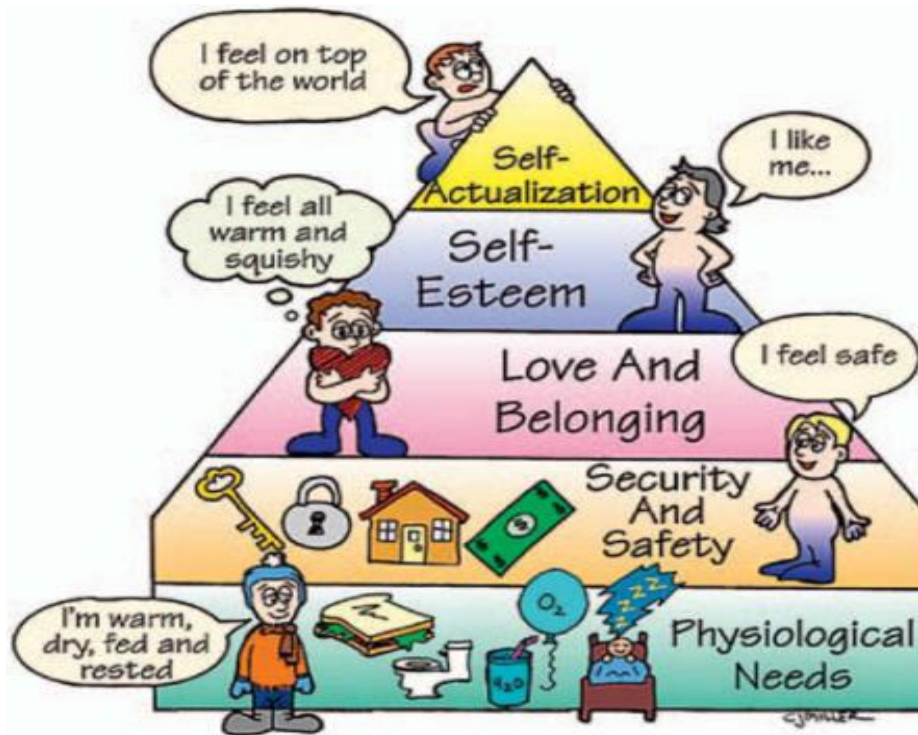


Framing Behavior Basics

In thinking about behavior, we assume:

- All behaviors are **communicative** and **serve a purpose**
- All behaviors are learned by the **consequences** that follow them
- Reinforcing **positive behaviors** increases the likelihood of them occurring in the future
- Behavior happens for a **reason**, and we take this into account when determining how to respond
- Problem behavior might be the child's best **adaptation**
- Problem behavior often represents an **unmet need**

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



“How do we conceptualize behavior?”
Theoretical foundations



Applied Behavioral Analysis

The science in which systems derived from the principles of behavior are applied systemically to improve socially significant behavior. Experimentation is used to identify the variables responsible for behavior change.

(Cooper & Heron, 2007)

For more information, please reference the following sources:

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/applied-behavior-analysis-aba-0>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapy-types/applied-behavior-analysis>

Behavior is **functional**—
it serves a purpose.

Behavior is **not GOOD** or **BAD**.



Social Attention

Seeking attention from other individuals (positive or negative)
Trying to evoke a reaction from an individual

Avoidance or Escape

Avoid an activity or task
Avoid a demand being placed
Exhibit behavior in order for people to leave you alone

Sensory Feedback

Observable behavior that meets an individual's physiological sensory needs
(ex. gross motor stimulation, tactile stimulation)

Access to an Item(s)

Wanting an item that has been taken away
Seeking an item that isn't available at given time

Using ABC Data

The ABCs of Understanding Behavior:

- **A: Antecedent-** What happens **before** the behavior occurs? What is the trigger?
- **B: Behavior-** What is the **behavior**?
- **C: Consequence/Outcome-** What happens **after** the behavior occurs? What is the outcome?



ABC data helps us to
“**chase the why.**”

A Case Example

Let's pretend you've been observing a camper in your group named Toby for several days. You've seen Toby aggress toward peers on multiple occasions throughout the camp day. Based on your observations, you've collected this ABC data:

Toby **aggresses** toward others campers. **Why** is he doing this?

Antecedent (Before)	Behavior	Consequence (After)
Sarah calls Toby a "baby" and laughs at him	Toby hits Sarah on the arm	Sarah stops laughing and walks away
Group of campers takes Toby's swim towel	Toby kicks one of the boys	The camper runs away
Toby fails his swim test and his friend laughs at him	Toby spits at his friend	Toby is removed from the water and banned from swim for the week
While Toby is drawing a picture, Amy takes his pencil	Toby throws a marker at Amy's head.	Amy drops the pencil and leaves the art cabin.

A Case Example, cont'd.

Antecedent (Before)	Behavior	Consequence (After)
Sarah calls Toby a “baby” and laughs at him	Toby hits Sarah on the arm	Sarah stops laughing and walks away
Group of campers takes Toby’s swim towel	Toby kicks one of the boys	The camper runs away
Toby fails his swim test and his friend laughs at him	Toby spits at his friend	Toby is removed from his group for the rest of the day
While Toby is drawing a picture, Amy takes his pencil	Toby throws a marker at Amy’s head.	Amy drops the pencil and leaves the art cabin.

What is the **function of Toby’s behavior? (Search for the WHY?)**

Attention, Escape/Avoidance, Access to an Item, Sensory

Now you try...

Using the ABC data given below, work with the person next to you to determine what the function of the following behaviors could be.

Antecedent (Before)	Behavior	Consequence (After)	Function?
Counselor announces that voices are too loud on the bus	Camper tells an inappropriate joke aloud to bus	Campers laugh	
Th end-of-swim bell rings to line up	Camper takes off into the deep end	Counselor and lifeguard get in the water	
Thunder and lightning occurs	Camper runs away from the group and screams	Counselor says, "You need to stay with the group."	
Campers line up for boating; Tim is the line leader	Megan pinches Tim	Tim moves to the back of the line and Megan is the new line leader	

“Why is this important for Camp?”
Redefining behavior basics



To begin...

“When we are at our worst, that is when we **most need** help and **connection.**”

-Tina Bryson, Ph.D.

You have the **option** to **ESCALATE** or **DE-ESCALATE** any situation.

Behavior Management at Camp

The **goal** of Behavior Management is to **replace inappropriate** behaviors with more **appropriate** ones!

An Example:

- **Antecedent (Before):** The counselor says “It’s time to stop playing catch and get ready for lunch.”
- **Behavior:** The camper yells “No!”
- **Consequence (After):** The counselor removes the ball and says “Okay, you are done playing catch. It’s time for lunch.”

Behavior Management at Camp

How can we **help** the camper **learn** a more **appropriate** behavior in this situation?

Let's Try this Again...

Antecedent (Before): The counselor says “It’s time to stop playing catch and get ready for lunch, but remember--if you want more time, you can ask for 1 more minute.”

Behavior: The camper asks, “Can I have 1 more minute?”

Consequence (After): The counselor says, “Of course you can have 1 more minute!”

The camper will be able to **replace** the **inappropriate** behavior (screaming “no!”) with one that is **more helpful**. This is an easier way for the camper to get what he or she needs.

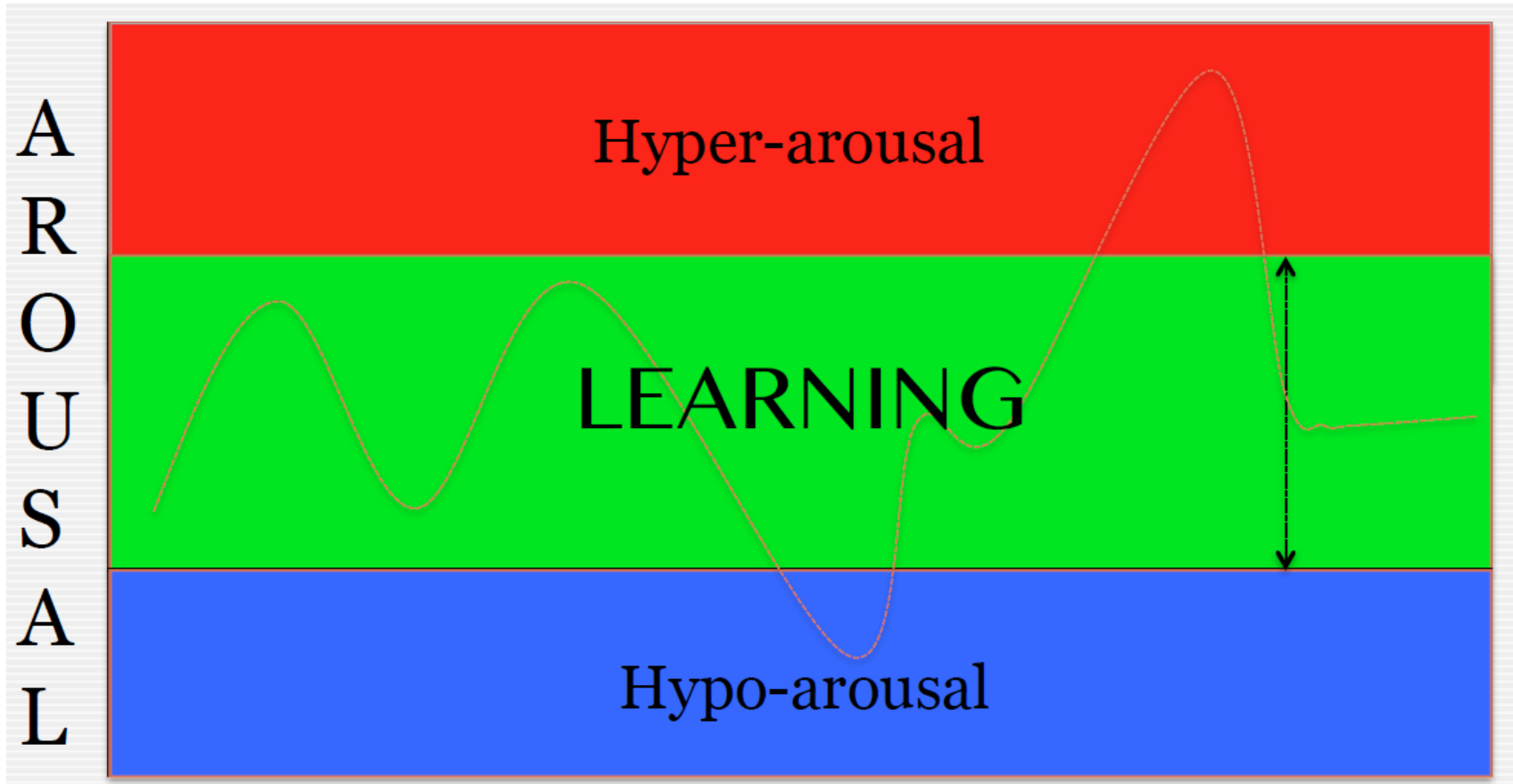
Replace our Assumptions with Curiosity.

- What is the purpose or meaning behind the behavior?
- Chase the WHY!
- Problem behavior may be the child's best adaptation:
 - may be a stress response (flooded)
 - may be a “can't” (executive function or processing challenge)
 - may be an unmet need

Problem Behavior = **skill-building opportunity**

Problem Behavior	Behavior Problem Skills camper needs to build
Blurting out	Conversational turn-taking
Losing personal belongings	Managing a checklist
Arguing with peers	Using words for self-expression
Angry outburst	Knowing when to ask for a break
Disrupting peers' play	Successfully entering a group
Bragging about winning	Sharing about oneself

When to Teach Skill-Building



“How do I use this?”
Strategies for Summer Camp



Strategies are **individualized tools*** that help our campers find success in everyday experiences.

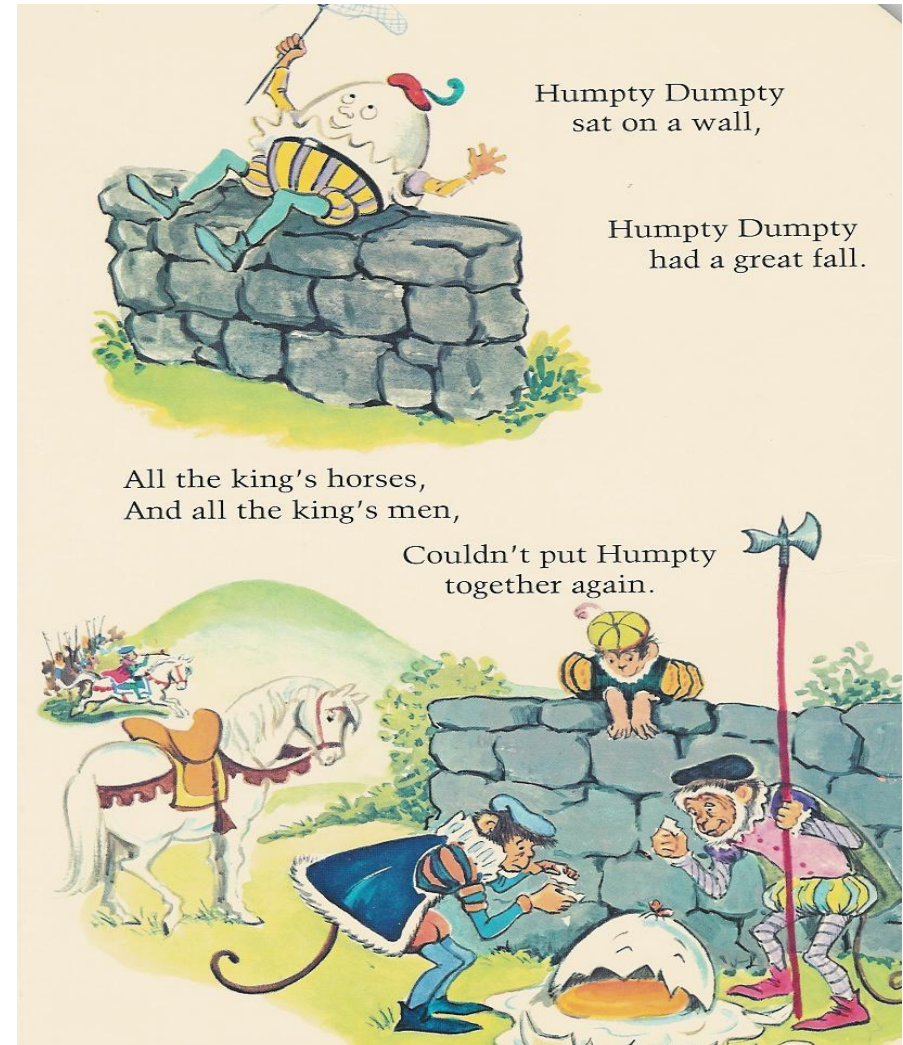
*So, a strategy that works for one camper might not work for another camper. Or a strategy that works for one camper in setting may not work for the same camper in a different setting.

Our job as staff is to **build up** campers' coping strategies **toolboxes** to ensure success throughout the day.

When to Support Campers with Strategies

Three Times to Intervene:

- **Before** the fact
 - Take the wall away before Humpty sits on it
- **During** the fact
 - Intervene just as Humpty starts to teeter
- **After** the fact
 - “Couldn’t put Humpty together again”



Two Types of Strategies

Proactive Strategies	Reactive (in-the-moment) Strategies
Strategies used before a camper demonstrates a behavior	Strategies used to react during a camper's behavior
Used while Humpty is sitting on his wall	Used when Humpty starts to teeter and fall
Used with Antecedents (before)	Used with Behaviors (during)

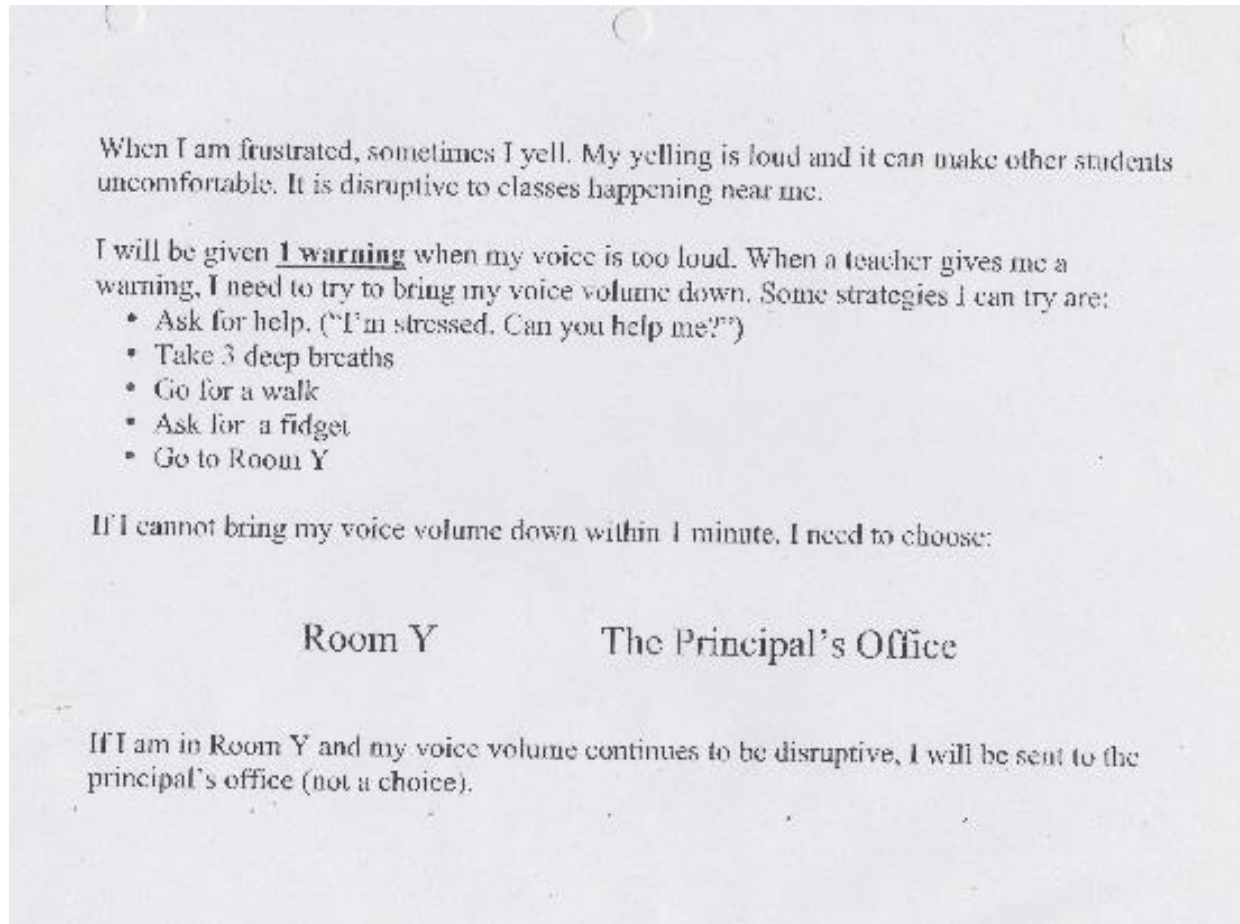
Effective behavior management **toolboxes** contain **both** proactive and in-the-moment **strategies**.

Sample Proactive Strategies

These are strategies used while a camper is still **in-control** and rational—they fall in the **learning** Green Zone.

- **Social Stories** (Carol Gray)
- **5 Point Scale**
- **Social Behavior Mapping** (Michelle Garcia-Winner)
- **Break Cards**
- **Limit Setting**
- **Collaborative Problem-Solving** (Stuart Ablon)
- **Power Cards**
- **Group Contingency Plans**
- **Comic Strips** (Carol Gray)

Sample Strategies



Social Stories

Sample Strategies





Name: Bobby My P.E. Scale

Rating	Looks like	Feels like	I can try to
5		I am losing control. <u>VERY</u> mad!	I need an adult to help me make good choices + calm down.
4		No one understands me! <u>Angry!</u>	Leave the room and go to my safe place. Read a book.
3		Jaw clenched. Frustrated and a little mad.	Tell an adult how I'm feeling.
2		My stomach gets a little queasy. I still look normal.	Slow my breathing. Ask for help.
1		calm happy	keep up the good work!

The Incredible 5 Point Scale




Social Behavior Mapping

Standing in Line: **EXPECTED** Behaviors

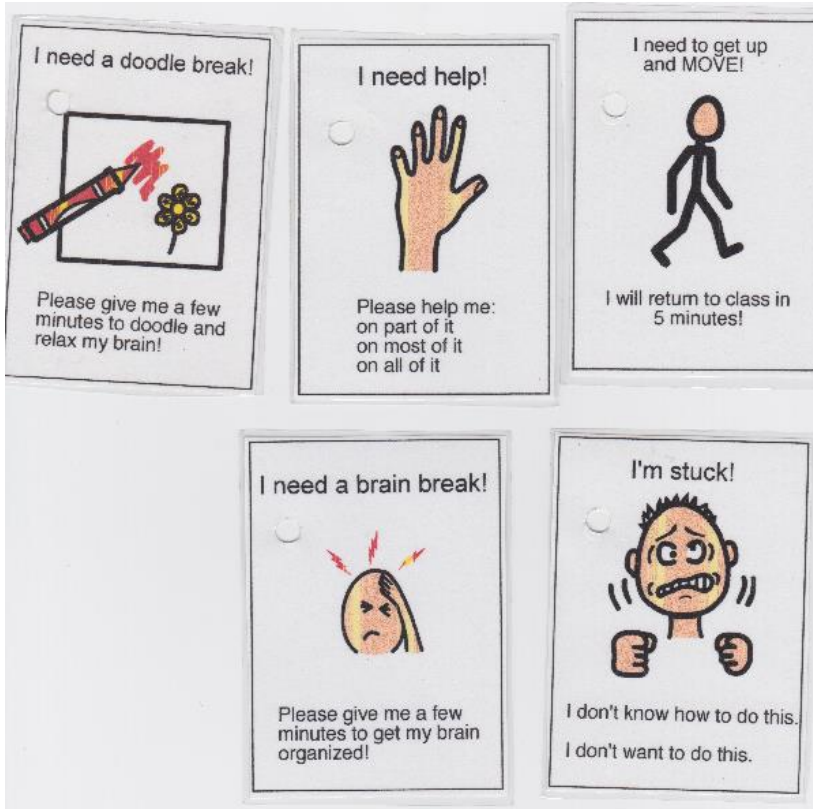
Expected Behaviors	How They Make Others Feel	Consequences you Experience	How you Feel about Yourself
"Follow behind the person in front of you" 	"Calm"	"Kids will want to line up near you."	"Happy" 
"Keep an arm's length between each person" 	"Safe"	"The counselor may praise you"	"Proud" 
"Keep your hands to yourself"	"Happy"	"You will be on time for your next activity."	"Calm"

Social Behavior Mapping

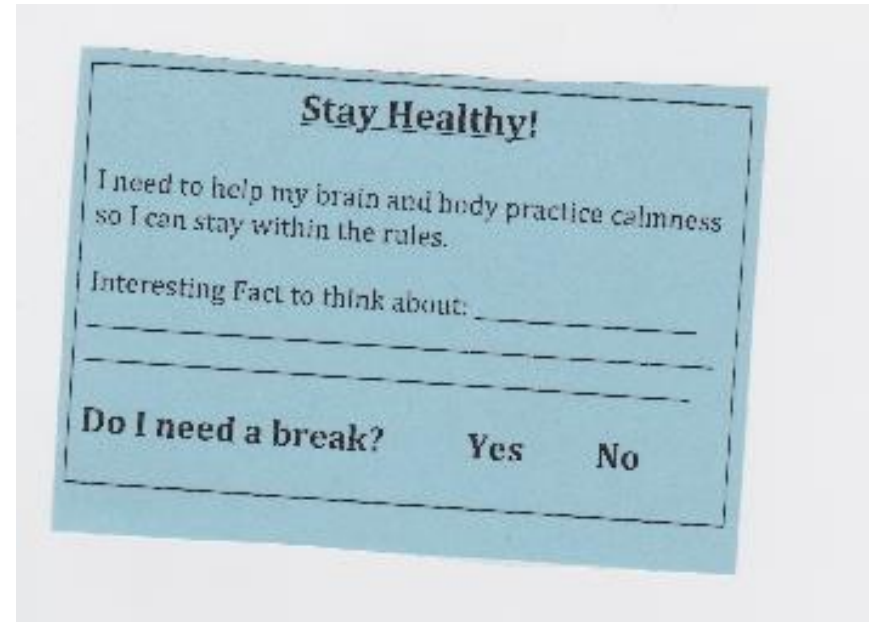
Standing in Line: **UNEXPECTED** Behaviors

Unexpected Behaviors	How They Make Others Feel	Consequences you Experience	How you Feel about Yourself
"Cutting in line" 	"Confused"	"Yelling"	"Embarrassed"
"Pushing" 	"Irritated"	Others pushing you	"Uncomfortable" "Nervous"
"Always needing to be first" 	"Angry"	Others not wanting to play with you	"Sad"

Sample Strategies



Break Cards



Keys to Setting Limits

Limits should be:

- **Clear and Concise**
 - Simple and easy to understand
 - Use camper's communication style
- **Reasonable**
 - Fair
 - Incentives, ensure buy-in
- **Enforceable**
 - Remember camp space and time
 - Follow through



Approaches to Limit Setting

1. Interrupt and redirect

Get camper's attention, ask them to do something

“Hey Johnny, please hand me that clipboard.”

2. When and then

Ask camper to do something, state positive consequence

“When you finish packing up your backpack, you can play UNO.”

3. If and then

Ask camper to do something; then positive consequence + then negative consequence.

“It's time to go to Art, then you can have a drawing break. If you do not go to Art, you cannot have a drawing break.”

Sample Reactive Strategies

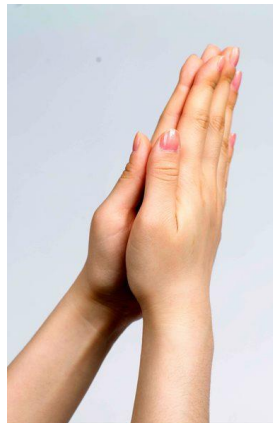
These are strategies used when a camper is no longer **in-control** of their body and mind—these campers fall in the **hyper-aroused** Red Zone.

- Sensory strategies
- Nonverbal strategies
- Designated Safe/Calming Space
- Deep (Diaphragmatic) Breathing techniques
- Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) Nonviolent Crisis Intervention Training

Sample Strategies

Sensory Strategies

- Gross motor tasks (taking walks, heavy lifting)
- Deep pressure to joints
- Tactile stimulation (hand presses, putty treasure hunt)
- Reading books
- Listening to music

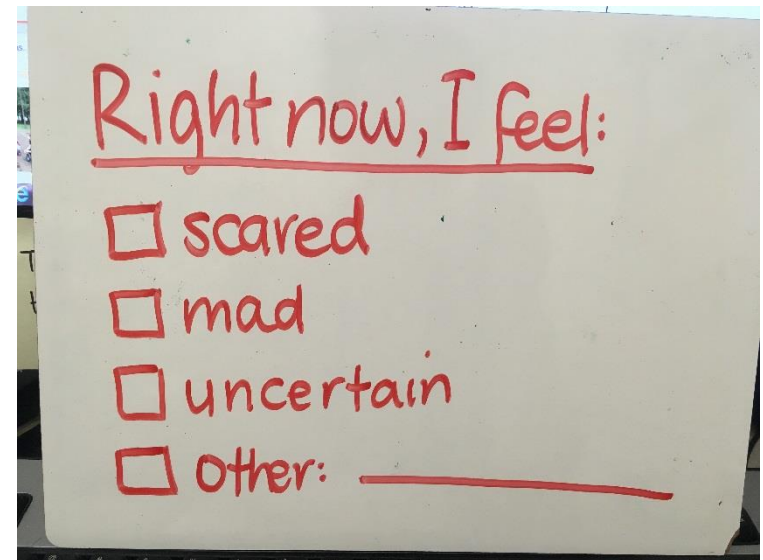


Sample Strategies

Nonverbal Strategies

- Forced Choice written on a whiteboard
- Notes passed back and forth
- Drawing pictures to express needs and feelings

I NEED HELP!		
On PART of it.	On MOST of it.	On ALL of it.
I'm Stuck!		
I don't <u>want</u> to do this.	I don't <u>know how</u> to do this.	



Sample Strategies



Designated
Safe/Calming
Space

Or even a strategy as simple as...

Getting below eye-level



“Now what?”
What to take with you



- Behaviors are **observable**, influenced by the environment, and **communicative**. Behaviors are not inherently good or bad.
- There are **4 basic functions** of behavior: seeking others' attention, avoiding or escaping a demand, receiving sensory feedback, or gaining access to an item
- ABC data allows us to **track** behaviors **over time** in order to figure out why they are occurring.

- Behaviors signal **unmet needs** within your campers. Teach **skill-building** rather than punishment (setting limits is not a punishment).
- Experiment with different **strategies** (proactive and in-the-moment) to determine which will work best for each camper during each situation.
- Teach and **normalize** a **redefined idea** of behavior management with your staff during trainings and ongoing professional development: behavior is communication.

What you do makes a difference.

Relationships matter.



Thank you!

- Please feel free to utilize and share the **handouts** provided
- If you have further questions about behavior management or general questions about MGH Aspire, you can contact us at **jorourke3@mgh.harvard.edu** or **tnlevesque@mgh.harvard.edu**



Let's take the **remaining time** to address questions related to **behavior** and **behavior management at camp**

On your way out...



- Please take a post-it note and respond to the following question:
- **“An important factor to consider when thinking about behavior is...”**
- Please stick your response on the wall before leaving
- Thank you!

Year-Round Aspire Programming

- Consultation Services (schools, agencies, workplace)
- Professional Development
- School-year Social Groups & Theme-Based groups
- Special Events
 - One-Time (Halloween at Hale, Winter Masquerade Ball, Spring Casino Night)
 - Child programs: February and April Vacation programs
- Parent Coaching
- Child Summer Camp (ages 5-14)
 - Junior Camp
 - Adventure Camp (Lower and Upper)
 - Trailblazers
- Teen and Adult Summer Programs
 - Explorations (ages 15-18)
 - Transitions (ages 16-22)
 - College Boot Camp
- Aspire Works
 - For participants:
 - Internship Program
 - Career Counseling
 - For employers:
 - Consultation & Coaching
 - Workshops
 - Workforce Development programs
 - Internship Program