

GROUP DEVELOPMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS

■ One of the greatest challenges facing teachers of students with emotional/behavioral disorders is the management of instructional activities with an entire classroom of students, many (or all) of whom are uncooperative or disruptive. A typical comment heard from such a teacher is, "In a one-to-one situation, I can manage both behavior and academics without any serious problems. In a classroom full of children, I can't get through a lesson without interruption."

■
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Planning for groups is actually not very different from planning for individuals, particularly individuals with multiple problems. The factors to be considered, however, are more complex because of the interaction of the educational, behavioral, cultural, biophysical, and social characteristics of the various individuals within the group and the demands of the setting. The group dynamics in a classroom for students with emotional/behavioral disorders will be directly affected by (a) the number of students in the group, (b) the severity of their individual problems, and (c) their social and academic compatibility.

Students with emotional/behavioral disorders exhibit a number of social impairments that interfere with group functioning, including the difficulty in accepting responsibility for their own behavior and the inability to establish and nurture appropriate relationships with others. *Regardless of the chronological ages or intellectual abilities of the individual students in a group, the group itself will exhibit a certain "developmental stage."* Understanding the nature of group development, being aware of the level at which a group may be functioning, and using instructional and management techniques that correspond to the developmental stage of the group itself can enable teachers to move the entire group to the highest "stage" possible.

Selman (1981) has described specific assimilative (overtly controlling) and accommodative (avoiding or appeasing) behaviors that become evident as a normal child develops an interpersonal orientation. Figure 1 shows examples of behav-

iors typical of each age range. Progression from one level of interpersonal orientation to the next signals growth of individuals as well as the group, despite the often disturbing nature of the behaviors exhibited. For example, it is often difficult to see how lying and trickery may actually be improvements over tantrums and running away. An understanding of this "normal" progression should be reassuring to the teacher, who might view the emerging behaviors as a failure of the behavior management system when they are actually signs of progress.

Maslow (1962) has described a hierarchy of basic human needs, ranging from physiological needs to the need for self-actualization. According to Maslow, a human being must satisfy one level of need before becoming motivated to attend to the next. In many ways, the stages of group development correspond to the levels of Maslow's hierarchy, as well as the developmental stages suggested by Erikson (1963). (See Figure 2.)

STAGE 1

When students with emotional/behavioral disorders begin the school year, the group is usually at Stage 1. Even if the same group had attained a higher level during the previous school year, they seem to revert to Stage 1 with the addition of new classmates or a new adult (e.g., a classroom instructional aide). Stage 1 issues include the satisfaction of physiological needs and the establishment of a sense of safety and trust.

Stage 1 group behavior is characterized by frequent tantrums, low frustration tolerance, fighting, power struggles that center around limit setting, and both verbal and physical aggression. Unless the individuals in the group feel safe and establish a sense of trust in the teacher, the group will not be able to move beyond Stage 1 functioning.

PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS

Teachers can address the most basic level of need—the physiological—by providing physical comfort, food, drink, adequate light and temperature control, and

even clothing, if necessary. Medical care and other out-of-school needs can be provided, if not directly within the school program, through referrals to social workers and other individuals and agencies in the community.

NEED FOR SAFETY AND TRUST

How does the teacher establish the sense of safety and trust? Teachers can facilitate feelings of security in the following ways:

- Establishing well-defined, consistently executed behavior management expectations and consequences.
- Being proactive in terms of scheduling, room arrangement, and academic planning.
- Developing personal abilities to remain calm, controlled, and predictable in the face of anger and outbursts.

Figure 3 shows a variety of classroom management strategies suitable for each stage of group development. A positive indication of the group's progress (and the teacher's predictability) is that the students will know what the teacher's response will be before it occurs (e.g., a typical student comment might be, "Just shut up! I know, I know—five minutes in cool-off!").

The teacher's role at Stage 1 is that of a "benevolent dictator." Rules (primarily established by the teacher) must be calmly, consistently, fairly, and firmly enforced. *No* means *no*. *Yes* means *yes*. Consequences for appropriate and inappropriate behaviors are dealt with in a matter-of-fact manner. Each member of the group has equal responsibility in making his or her choices for behavior. As a choice is made, each member of the group has equal access to corresponding predetermined consequences, whether positive or aversive. Teachers must be especially sensitive to the students' fear of favoritism, their need for protection from real or perceived dangers, and their distrust of adults.

BEGINNINGS OF "BELONGING"

Teaching strategies that facilitate group development during Stage 1 include plan-



During Stage 2, appropriate work by students in groups of two will lead to assigning the students to groups of four.

ning and implementing academic and affective activities that bring students from a "Me" to a "We" orientation. Games that allow all students to participate without

interacting with each other (e.g., Bingo) are appropriate social activities for Stage 1.

Figure 1

Interpersonal Orientation

Assimilative

Screaming
Tantrums

Level 0 (ages 2 to 3)

Level 1 (ages 4 to 6)

Bullying, bossing, threats, verbal abuse
Denial, distortion, lying
One-way fairness

Level II (ages 7 to 11)

Pitting peers against one another
Trickery
Seeking alliances
Friendly persuasion

Level III (ages 12 to 18)

Group orientation

Expectation of consistency in self and others
Anticipation of others' reactions
Use of humor and perspective as coping mechanisms

Accommodative

Fear
Running away

Acting victimized
Lack of assertiveness
Power-oriented obedience

Being a follower
Confrontation
Asking for help
Reasoning

Figure 2

Basic Needs and Corresponding Stages of Affective and Cognitive Development

<i>Affective Stages</i> (Krathwohl et al., 1956)	<i>Basic Needs</i> (Maslow, 1962)	<i>Cognitive Stages</i> (Bloom et al., 1956)
	<i>Level I</i>	
Receiving: to be aware of	Physiological	Knowledge: to know about
	<i>Level II</i>	
Responding: to act out of	Safety and security	Comprehension: to understand
	<i>Level III</i>	
Valuing: To prefer	Belonging, love, socialization	Application: to put to use
	<i>Level IV</i>	
Organization: to establish a value system	Self-respect Respect of others	Analysis: to break into parts Synthesis: to create
	<i>Level V</i>	
Characterization: to live by one's beliefs	Self-actualization	Evaluation: to judge for a purpose

An appropriate academic activity would be a social studies lesson during which each student constructs two "milk box" buildings (a home and a business) for inclusion in a "town" assembled on a large piece of cardboard (so it can be moved out of "destruction range" when necessary). The students place their buildings in the town one at a time. The "town" concept can be expanded to provide activities for the entire school year, but it is especially appropriate at Stage 1.

Other group activities that would promote movement from "Me" to "We," and that would not overstimulate a group that is not developmentally ready for much student-to-student interaction, would be the production of a class book or newspaper, the construction of a class bulletin board, or a cooking activity that requires each student to do one part. For example, preparing a fruit salad is a great activity for a Stage 1 group. Each student can dice a piece of fruit with a plastic knife; the fruit can be combined, tossed, and stirred by the teacher; and the entire group can enjoy something that each helped to make.

Other measures a teacher can employ at Stage 1 have been discussed by Brydges (1992), Hobbs (1982), Rockwell (1993, 1995), and others. All these authors advocate the development of an integrated, thematic approach that incorporates students' ideas and interests. Figure 4 shows group activities suitable for each stage, with approximate time periods a group spends in each stage and the teacher's role.

STAGE 2

Stage 2 begins when most of the group (e.g., 7 students out of 10) is responding appropriately most of the time to the classroom management plan. A shift of thinking becomes evident in group interactions from "It's me against the world" to "It's us against the world." Major acts of physical aggression rarely occur during Stage 2, and members of the group begin to offer assistance to each other spontaneously.

NEED FOR BELONGING AND SOCIALIZATION

In terms of Maslow's hierarchy (see middle column of Figure 2), the group has moved to the level of need related to belonging or affiliation. Sharing and working in groups of two now become possible; but tattling, teasing, and other behaviors typical of normal 4- and 5-year-old youngsters begin to emerge (again, regardless of the actual chronological ages of the students).

As Figure 4 shows, the teacher's role at Stage 2 shifts from "benevolent dictator" to "director." Verbal intimidation within the group may increase as the group begins to settle on one or more peer leaders. Students now need to learn effective communication skills, and teachers must provide time in the schedule for practicing those skills—not only during a "social skills period," but also as opportunities arise during other lessons. For example, Canfield (1986) suggested teaching students to use "I" statements. Goldstein's (1988) *Prepare Curriculum* provides a comprehensive program of instruction in social skills, anger reduction, and moral reasoning. These and other commercially available social skills curricula are appropriate for use at this stage.

At Stage 2, teachers can successfully teach cooperative learning activities (Johnson & Johnson, 1987; Slavin, 1990). Groups of two can now work together, but the group is not yet ready to function as a whole. To guard against overstimulation, the teacher must constantly monitor the schedule and the work of the student dyads during cooperative learning activities. The group is also now ready to learn problem-solving and group decision-making techniques, with the teacher directing the discussions. A major focus at this stage is "making appropriate choices."

The teacher may begin to include the group in both academic and behavioral goal-setting and planning of activities. The group is now allowed to assist in refinement of preestablished rules and consequences. For example, a rule in a class for students with emotional/behavioral disorders was that all reward activities must be earned; but as soon as the criteria for earning the rewards were set, the students became oppositional. They

stated that they did not want the teacher to "tell them" the criteria or to issue reminders. A classroom meeting (Glasser, 1985) was held for purposes of determining both the criteria and the process for communicating those criteria. The group decided that the teacher should type the criteria, place them in an envelope, and leave the envelope on the counter (without talking). The students would accept responsibility for reading the criteria and signing the sheet if they agreed to participate. This procedure proved to be effective.

BEGINNINGS OF RESPECT

As students become able to work productively in groups of two, the teacher may assign them to groups of four. Groups of three should be avoided, because two students may join forces to exclude or torment the other. Card games, board games, dot-to-dot tasks, construction projects, and cooking activities are appropriate activities for Stage 2. Students can also be taught to assist one another in peer tutoring sessions, using flash cards with spelling words, reading words, or math facts.

STAGE 3

As the group moves toward Stage 3 functioning, fewer and fewer conflicts occur. Students become increasingly able to stay calm enough to go through problem-solving steps and will often initiate the process on their own. Students who are not as advanced as the majority of the group are usually either assisted or tolerated, and one or two disgruntled students will not sabotage the whole group. The teacher's role now shifts from "director" to "arbitrator" as students take increasing responsibility for their own choices.

NEED FOR SELF-RESPECT AND RESPECT FOR OTHERS

Peer confrontation strategies, as suggested by Salend, Jantzen, and Giek (1992) are appropriate for Stage 3. The



During Stage 1, individual student contributions are combined into a group effort.

teacher describes the target behavior for each student. Peers provide feedback and support for one another. During the process, the teacher rewards students for encouraging others, as well as for exhibiting the desired target behaviors.

Stage 3 functioning is characterized by social behaviors typical of youngsters in the intermediate grades (roughly ages 8-10). The teacher must still be present, alert, aware, and actively involved in planning and implementing academic and social activities. The teacher, however, can now provide opportunities for students to settle some of their differences without jumping in to rescue the students.

Because students in special education settings are monitored more closely than are other students, they often have fewer opportunities to practice communication and conflict resolution skills on their own. Students with emotional/behavioral disorders, in particular, often become so isolated and insulated by well-meaning adults that they fail to benefit from the "normal" conflicts their peers experience. Expecting too little of these students can do as much damage as expecting too much. Valuable learning experiences can be missed.

Students without disabilities normally begin to join official organizations as well as informal, loosely defined "clubs," dur-

Figure 3

Management Strategies for Each Stage of Group Development

Stage 1	
Behavior management	Behavior modification
Academic instruction	Precision teaching Technology-assisted programmed instruction
Affective instruction	Relaxation Enhancement of self-esteem
Enrichment	Activities that require individual efforts to be combined into a whole group effort or product such as Bingo, Jeopardy, class anthology of creative writing, class newspaper, class photograph album, simple cooking activities (fruit salad), craft activities (town), seasonal bulletin boards
Stage 2	
Behavior management	Redl's Life-Space Interview Cognitive behavioral strategies
Academic instruction	Prerequisite skills for cooperative learning Peer tutoring Application of content knowledge
Affective instruction	Social skills Problem-solving
Stage 3	
Behavior management	Cooperative discipline
Academic instruction	Cooperative learning
Affective instruction	Transfer of social skills
Enrichment	Any age-appropriate activity

ing the intermediate grades. Sports, popular music, clothing styles, and collecting things become important topics of interest to a group at Stage 3.

NEED FOR SELF-ACTUALIZATION

The need for recognition, the next level of need on Maslow's hierarchy, combined with the feeling of belonging that was established during Stage 2, launches indi-

viduals toward new levels of self-esteem during Stage 3. Activities related specifically to the further development of self-understanding, self-esteem, and self-management are particularly appropriate at this stage.

At Stage 3, the group is able to work together in the selection and attainment of both academic and social goals, and individuals within the group should be ready to begin the transition to a less restrictive environment. The teacher will

allow students to initiate and manage group projects. It should be noted, however, that the group may be capable of carrying out these activities with their own teacher but still be unable to transfer these behaviors to other settings and with other people.

Group activities at Stage 3 could include dramatics, planting a garden, constructing an aerobic obstacle course for the school, publishing a newspaper, tape-recording songs to be played over the school intercom, or preparing a luncheon for invited guests. A major focus at Stage 3 should be on a cooperative and supportive environment—helping others, sharing, and working for the good of the entire class, the school, and the community.

NEEDED: AWARENESS, SENSITIVITY, AND ALERTNESS

Facilitating group development through the three stages described here requires both an awareness of emerging group growth and the ability to use management and instructional strategies that are sensitive to basic needs. The teacher must be alert to changes in group functioning, willing and able to shift from one role to the next, and capable of making the necessary adjustments in the classroom to match the dynamics of the group when it is ready to move to a higher level.

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Figure 4

Approximate Time Period Required for Each Stage

Stage 1

4 to 12 weeks

Stage 2

4 to 18 weeks

Stage 3

Ongoing to Transition

Teacher's Role at Each Stage

"Benevolent Dictator"

1. Remain calm, fair, and consistent.
2. Set limits.
3. Promote safety and trust.
4. Use ecological and behavioral interventions.

"Director"

1. Provide choices in limited situations.
2. Establish problem-solving procedures.
3. Teach students to make choices and accept majority rule.
4. Model problem-solving steps.
5. Promote partnership activities.

"Arbitrator"

1. Provide less external control.
2. Remain aware and available.
3. Open student choices to group discussions.
4. Allow students to initiate and manage projects.

Group Activities

Photograph album.

Anthology of stories, poems, and artwork.

Model town, Indian village or other construction project.

A paper chain that represents each individual's contribution to a group effort, through links added for star days, books read, or some other group goal.

Interviews taped on audio or video equipment.

Simple cooking activities.

Peer tutoring.

Games requiring two people, such as Checkers or connect-the-dots.

Whole group projects that can be broken down into a puppet show with scriptwriters, stage construction, etc.

Plays.

Gardens.

Construction of aerobic obstacle course.

Newspaper publishing.

Luncheon for invited guests.

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