



The Stickers Aren't Working.

Moving Beyond Failed Reward Charts to Clinical Behavior Modification in General Classrooms

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School Social Work & Clinical Behavioral Coaching

Structure of Today's 90-Minute Masterclass

00 - 25 MIN

The Clinical Gap

Why reward charts fail dysregulated brains. Polyvagal foundations and translating behavior function for educators.

25 - 50 MIN

Co-Creating with Students

Student voice, interactive **Four Corners Live Strategy Lab**, and rapid preference sampling tools.

50 - 75 MIN

Coaching Teachers

Jargon-free translation, low-lift antecedent tools, zero-dollar reinforcers, and overcoming educator pushback.

75 - 90 MIN

Fidelity & Sustained Rollout

In-vivo classroom modeling, non-punitive token banking, MTSS alignment, and clinician Q&A.

The "Sticker Chart Graveyard"



Superficial Compliance vs. Function

Prize boxes cannot compete with panic, sensory overload, or executive dysfunction.

The 30-Student Load

Tracking intervals every 15 minutes collapses under general classroom realities.

The Broken Contingency Loop

When students miss a star on Monday, their motivation for the entire week instantly collapses.

State Drives Story: Regulation Precedes Conditioning



Ventral Vagal

Social Connection & Safety

Neuroception registers safety. Frontal lobe accessible for reasoning.

Reward charts can function here



Sympathetic

Fight / Flight Mobilization

Academic demand perceived as threat.
Elopement, arguing, defiance.

Survival instinct, not malice



Dorsal Vagal

Freeze & Shutdown

Head down, mutism, refusal. Profound collapse of autonomic energy.

Immune to rewards & bribes

The SEAT Framework: Decoding Classroom Function

01

Sensory

Direct internal regulation for nervous system equilibrium.

02

Escape

Avoidance of overwhelming, non-differentiated academic demands.

03

Attention

Immediate social engagement via peer laughter or adult rebuke.

04

Tangible

Desire for preferred materials, iPad access, or physical control.



**“If a student cannot do long division, we teach.
If a student cannot regulate in a crowd of thirty, we demand
compliance.”**

BRIDGING CLINICAL THEORY AND CLASSROOM REALITY

INTERACTIVE AUDIENCE EXERCISE • 15 MINUTES

Movement Lab: The "Four Corners" Strategy Jam



🚶 Stand Up & Move to Your Toughest Behavioral Wall

Walk to the corner of the room that matches the student behavior your teachers struggle with the most.

Corner A: Task Escape

Work refusal, shut-down, bathroom elopement

Corner B: Peer Attention

Class clowning, instigating, theatrical defiance

Corner C: Adult Attention

Argumentative loops, constant help bids, hovering

Corner D: Control & Tangibles

Phone refusal, possession hoarding, schedule battles

Your 3–Minute Station Task: With your group, design one zero-cost *replacement strategy* a general ed teacher can realistically deliver without leaving their front board.

Working with Students to Build Reinforcement



1. Co-Create the Menu

Never hand down a pre-made plan. Sit together and curate 4 options they genuinely care about.

Transforms compliance into personal ownership



2. Define the Currency

Agree on concrete intervals: *"After 10 minutes of math focus, you bank 2 minutes of tech time."*

Clear contracts reduce emotional negotiation



3. Weekly Menu Refresh

Preferences expire quickly. Check in every Monday for 2 minutes: *"Are these still working for you?"*

Prevents reinforcement satiation & burnout

Training Teachers: Stripping the Jargon

600 × 400

SKIP THE CLINICAL TERM

SAY THIS TO TEACHERS

Instead of "*Functionally Equivalent Alternative Behavior*," say: "**A faster, safer way for them to ask for a pause.**"

SKIP THE CLINICAL TERM

SAY THIS TO TEACHERS

Instead of "*Differential Reinforcement Schedule*," say: "**Catching them being calm before the volcano rumbles.**"

SKIP THE CLINICAL TERM

SAY THIS TO TEACHERS

Instead of "*Extinction Burst Warning*," say: "**It gets louder right before it gets better. Don't fold on day 3.**"

Discipline Models in Contrast

✖ Reactive Suppression

Focus: Extinguishing outward disruption immediately.

Timing: Intervening only after emotional escalation.

Outcome: Escalating resentment and teacher burnout.

✔ Proactive Replacement

Focus: Teaching functionally equivalent communication.

Timing: Modifying antecedent triggers before onset.

Outcome: Sustainable self-regulation and instructional calm.

Low-Lift, High-Impact Antecedent Tools



Pre-Emptive Breaks

Schedule proactive escape passes before frustration crosses into defiance.



First / Then Visuals

Micro-contracts that provide instant visual clarity for unappealing tasks.



Behavior Momentum

Deliver 2 to 3 easy, high-probability wins right before non-preferred tasks.

Functionally Equivalent Replacement Behaviors (FERB)

Identified Function	Common Maladaptive Behavior	Target Replacement Behavior (FERB)
Escape (Math/Reading)	Tearing paper, bathroom elopement	Handing "Break Card" or 2-minute pause pass
Attention (Adult)	Calling out loudly, falling off seat	Flipping color cup to yellow for check-in
Attention (Peer)	Making animal sounds, throwing pencils	Scheduled 2-minute "Jokes/News" share time
Sensory Seeking	Pacing room, aggressive chair tipping	Resistance bands on chair legs or standing easel

Stop Guessing: Assess Actual Reinforcers



The Assumed Reward Trap

A prize box has zero behavioral power if the child does not personally value what is inside.

3-Minute Paired-Choice Sampling

Present two options side-by-side: *"Would you rather sit by Sam, or earn 5 mins drawing time?"*

Preventing Reinforcer Satiation

Rotate menus bi-weekly so favorite incentives never lose their clinical motivational punch.

High-Value Zero-Dollar Reinforcers



Special Status

- Teacher chair for independent task
- Principal courier messenger pass
- Tech helper or device custodian



Time Currency

- 5 minutes independent sketch time
- First in line for gym or recess
- 3-minute preferred music access



Task Control

- Complete odd vs. even questions
- Type answers instead of handwriting
- Choose desk workstation spot

Age-Matched Reinforcement Matrix

ELEMENTARY (K-5)

Sensory & Novelty

Line leader privileges, show-and-tell showcase, teacher helper badges, sensory fidget checkout.

MIDDLE SCHOOL (6-8)

Peer Status & Agency

Preferred seating beside peers, classroom playlist DJ, 2-minute early hallway transition pass.

HIGH SCHOOL (9-12)

Autonomy & Time

Single assignment drop pass, earbud study privileges, flexible independent workstation choice.

Adolescent Reinforcement: Safeguarding Dignity



Peer Capital Over Adult Approval

Public praise can act as an aversive trigger. Private sticky notes or non-verbal signals protect social standing.

Autonomy Over Coercion

Adolescents resist perceived micromanagement. Collaborative behavior contracts foster ownership.

Time as Modern Currency

Tangibles fail with teens. Downtime passes, flexible deadlines, and independent pacing drive engagement.

Navigating Teacher Objections with Empathy

Teacher Objection

“Why should he get rewarded for what everyone else just does?”

Social Worker Coaching Frame

“Fair isn't equal; fair is giving every student the prosthetic they need to access learning. Right now, his nervous system needs this ramp.”

Teacher Objection

“I have 28 other kids. I can't track stickers every 10 minutes.”

Social Worker Coaching Frame

“We aren't tracking all day. We are picking one single 20-minute transition, anchoring it to a sticky note, and letting the student self-monitor.”

Teacher Objection

“If I let her take a break, she's getting away with work refusal.”

Social Worker Coaching Frame

“She's leaving anyway—either via explosion or via a planned pass. A planned 2-minute break keeps her in the room for the remaining 38 minutes.”

Coaching Educators: The In-Vivo Cycle

PHASE 01

I Do: Real-Time Model

Push into volatile class periods. Demonstrate micro-reinforcement delivery without interrupting instruction.

PHASE 02

We Do: Discreet Prompt

Stand beside the teacher. Provide gentle non-verbal signals to cue praise pacing and acknowledge wins.

PHASE 03

You Do: Debrief Data

Count positive-to-corrective feedback ratios together. Celebrate teacher fidelity and calibrate intervals.

Aligning Reinforcement Across the MTSS Continuum

TIER 1 • 80–90%

Universal PBIS Matrix

Predictable school-wide matrix. Universal positive recognition creates baseline psychological safety for all students.

Common school expectations

TIER 2 • 10–15%

Check-In / Check-Out

Daily designated mentor connection.
Increased feedback frequency throughout day without formal clinical classification.

Targeted relational mentoring

TIER 3 • 1–5%

Clinical BIP & FERB

Function-based Behavior Intervention Plans.
Specialized preference sampling and high-density replacement teaching.

Intensive clinical intervention

Pillars of Sustainable Classroom Modification

4:1

Praise Ratio

Behavior-specific positive affirmations for every 1 corrective prompt.

30m

Single Focus Block

Target only the single most volatile period before expanding school-wide.

0

Paper Burden

Natural visual anchors integrated onto desks without clipboards or tracking sheets.

Four Non-Negotiable Core Takeaways

1. Regulation Precedes Reasoning

A student in sympathetic fight-or-flight cannot cognitively engage with token systems. First regulate, then teach.

2. Replace, Don't Just Extinguish

Suppressing a behavior without providing a functionally equivalent communication tool always creates another escalation.

3. Protect Token Integrity

Never weaponize earned tokens by taking them away for unrelated offenses. Banked progress must remain unconditional.

4. Coach Teachers in Real Time

Handing over written behavior plans fails. Push into classrooms to model micro-reinforcement pacing in the heat of instruction.



Questions, Case Consultation & Discussion

Empowering school clinicians and teachers to decode behavior, honor student dignity, and replace frustration with function.

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Staff Development Workshops & Clinical Consultation for NY School Districts

Image Sources



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