

Behavior Strategies for SLPs

Behavior needs can impact speech therapy in a lot of ways. I've written about it before here on the blog but I thought it was worth revising this month. Students can be resistant to working with us for so many different reasons. Are they hungry? Did they get enough sleep? Is this activity hard for them? Are you asking them to leave a preferred activity? Do they have a short attention span? A negative previous experience in that space? Are they just having an "off" day? There are so many contributing factors to behavior! If you're new to working with students, it can feel like you're grasping at straws.

If you remember one thing from this post, remember that your whole goal with behavior supports is to encourage momentum. Let me say that again. Momentum. You are not "rewarding" bad behavior by using a behavior strategy such as rewards or breaks. You are just trying to get momentum. Think about it. Sometimes therapy takes you 20 minutes just to elicit a word 5 times. That isn't very effective therapy if you're managing so much behavior you only get to 5 trials. **Another day**, when there is no behavior impacting the learning, you might get those same 5 trials in one minute. If you can just get the students momentum going, you should have less resistance between each trial and hopefully get more learning happening. MOMENTUM. Just prevent that kiddo from getting stuck. Whatever you need to do in that moment to get the **momentum rolling**, is the goal.

Kammie Green: much variation

Kammie Green: consistency

I'm going to run through a list of behavior strategies I use regularly. I'm sure you use the same ones, but sometimes it's nice to see them written out in one place!

Schedules: Daily schedules help kids know **they have** expectations that day. Get your picture on an icon and make sure you are on the schedule. If my teachers forget, I just call the student over and tell him I'm "oops, we forgot to add Speech to the schedule, can you help me add it?". Letting him help gives some feeling of **control**!

Kammie Green: more than just your expectations

Kammie Green: control leads to more success

Speech Activity Schedules: Use a schedule within the speech session so he knows what he needs to accomplish to be “done”. If you need even more support, you can do more of a **work bin system**. **Brick schedules found here.**

Kammie Green: have a process or list of things the kid can see

Warnings: Give the student a one minute warning (or more if needed) that he will be coming to speech soon. I actually usually ask a child, “Are you ready for speech right now or do you need one more minute?” **Honor the minute if they say they need it!**

Kammie Green: allow time for flexibility

Entice: If the student is struggling to transition to you, entice them! Make sure you have a highly preferred object available and entice the student over. Use a timer and let them use it for one minute. **Let that same item be the reward at the end of the session.**

Kammie Green: give prize at the time that works

Choice of order: We all like a little **control** so let your student pick the order of the activities they must do. This can help you get that momentum going by letting the child select a preferred activity first.

Kammie Green: important

Juicy rewards: Find something **really rewarding** like a trip to the sensory room, a walk around the building, or a few minutes on the iPad to reward.

Kammie Green: major rewards for great progress

Sensory supports: Make sure you have access to plenty of **sensory supports** for your student. Timers, weighted materials, fidgets, chairs with tennis balls on the feet, cube chairs, wiggle cushions. Make friends with your OT so you can borrow all the things. My favorite **fidgets are here** and **behavior supports for circle time are here.**

Kammie Green: balance and comfort

Routines: Routines are part of improving behavior! When kids know what to expect, they can better prepare themselves! **Make sure their days have structure and routine in all parts, not just while they are at speech.**

Kammie Green: involves parent

Reduce Words: If a child begins to exhibit frustrations, reduce your words. Use visuals and nonverbal communication while you focus on simple phrases like first/then.

Kammie Green: go simpler when the child is frustrated

Model with visuals: Grab a visual for the behavior you WANT to see. Not the negative behavior. If the child is laying on the floor, you need a “sitting body” visual. If the child is hitting you, you need a “quiet hands” visuals.

Kammie Green: have the child model what you are expecting

“Clean up” for 20 mins: One classic Jenna strategy (my go to many days) is to have the student help you clean up for a long period of time. While they are helping you clean up make them practice every one of those task cards or sort the items into categories. You can have them create sentences or answer questions about any skills. The art of clean up therapy is often underrated.

Kammie Green: incorporating real world situations into speech

Distract: Distraction works wonders especially with our little friends! Avoid a fight to help them get the momentum going by distracting them! I usually use my cell phone to do this. Ask a child if he wants to see a picture of your dog while he walks to speech. Once he’s in the room, the momentum is already going your way!

Kammie Green: entertainment

Timers. Timers are magical creatures sent here to save us. Get a bunch. Keep them handy. Kids love them. My favorite timers are here.

Kammie Green: visual of how long they can/have to do something

Token Boards: Some children love working for a token board. I never give the tokens for complete work because I often need that to be flexible. I just space them out during the time the child is with me. Usually giving more at the beginning to get the momentum heading my way!

Easier task: If your student is resistant to an activity, try giving them an easier task first. Lots of time, success can make them brave enough to try that hard thing!

Kammie Green: ease into difficulty

First/Then: I use a first/then board all day with my preschool friends. And at home when I don’t want to fold laundry. First fold the laundry, Then read your book!

Kammie Green: sequence events to make understandable to kids

Change the space: Does it really matter if he’s sitting at your table in your speech office? I doubt it. If your students is resistant to your space (maybe last year he didn’t love the interactions he had in his space with his SLP). Change where you do therapy and maybe it will change that behavior.

Kammie Green: change of environment leads to change of mind

Learning targets: Make sure your student knows what he is working toward!

Can you imagine working on IEP paperwork (non-preferred task) without knowing when you'd be finished? Your student needs to know when he will be "finished" or what the goal is!

Kammie Green: address what you want done

Reflect understanding: "I hear you saying you don't want to finish those cards. Here are your choices." Our kids with communication disorders are often NOT understood. Check that understanding and then reflect it to the student. Be compassionate but firm.

Kammie Green: make sure the child knows you hear them and provide options

Most of all, remember that what works one week, might not work next week! If your student continues to display behavior difficulties that impact his learning, get that team together for a behavior analysis and work together to make sure he's succeeding at school. Behavior can be really hard to deal with during speech when all we want to do is be able to get back to the actual speech and language skills. If you have more "go to" interventions to prevent behavior difficulties with students.

Kammie Green: flexibility

Kammie Green: impacts speech

Kammie Green: addressing behavior in other places will assist this behavior