

Behavior-Prevention Strategies

Toolbox II: Working with Students with Special Needs – Part II

1. **Build relationships!** The student should know that they are safe, known, and cared for.
2. **Provide clear, simple rules and expectations.**
3. **Use clear language** when communicating (do not use sarcasm, idioms, lots of words, etc.).
4. **Be aware of your surroundings** (exits, distractions, potential triggers) and how they affect the student you're working with. Be sure the student is physically safe. Always be ready with a backup plan in case the environment for a specific activity is not suited to the student's needs.
5. **Be calm and have patience.** If you stay calm, the student you are supporting will be more likely to stay calm.
6. **Maintain an arm's-length distance from the student you are supporting at all times.** Keeping an arm's-length distance keeps you safer when a student escalates, and it keeps your student safe if you need to stop them to protect them. When you maintain an arm's-length distance, you can use your body to block students who try to run away, rather than reaching out to grab them, which can injure both of you. *Note: "Buddies" should always dress for success. Wear clothes that are appropriate for the church setting but also comfortable, allowing you to move around easily, including sensible shoes that allow you to run. Do not wear high heels or flip flops.*
7. **Always try to be proactive instead of reactive.** Have strategies in place and ready to use to help keep your student regulated.
8. **Have a predictable routine.**
9. **Prepare for transitions** using verbal reminders and transition tools such as visual schedules, first/then pictures, timers, etc.
10. **Provide choices when possible;** choices should be your preferred choices (only offer two choices).
11. **Pay attention to the student's position in the room.** Does the student do better in the front, in the back, or to the side? Sitting in the back of the room or on the end of a row of seats makes it easier to leave if a break is needed.
12. **Provide incentives.** Some students who are struggling need an incentive to motivate them to work through a successful morning. Remember, some children who struggle with behavior challenges have to work extra hard to keep their bodies in control. Providing an incentive to work for can be the extra motivation needed to maintain control.
13. **Use sensory tools and strategies.** Have a "sensory break box" available for students who need it. Items in the box should include a variety of fidget tools, weighted objects (weighted stuffed animal, small blanket, or lap pad), visual timers (sand timers, liquid timers), noise-reducing headphones, and supplies for breathing activities (bubbles to blow after taking deep breaths, written "belly breathing" tips, etc.).

