



Handout #2

Case Studies: Real-Life Stories of Four Students With Challenging Behaviors

Part 1 (Introduction) of the *Course Enhancement Module (CEM) on Evidence-Based Behavioral Interventions* includes references to the real-life experiences of four students with challenging behaviors. These students include students who did and did not receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Handout #2 provides case histories of four students:

- Chuck, a curious, highly verbal, and rambunctious six-year-old boy with behavior disorders who received special education services in elementary school.
- Juanita, a charming but shy six-year-old Latina child who was served as an at-risk student with Title 1 supports in elementary school.
- Fred, an inquisitive, resourceful 12-year-old student with traumatic brain injury who received special education services in middle school.
- Hui Lum, a bright, energetic 15-year-old young woman with cerebral palsy who was above average academically and received Section 504 accommodations in high school.

Please note that the information presented in each case study accurately depicts the experiences of each student and his or her family, teachers, and classmates. However, the students' names and other identifying information have been changed to ensure family and student privacy.

When discussing these case histories with teacher and leader candidates, it may be helpful to consider the following guiding questions:

- What were the student's behavioral challenges?
- What were the behavioral interventions that each student received?
- What were each student's behavioral outcomes—after he or she received the behavioral intervention?

Each case history in the handout contains sufficient information to answer each guiding question. Also, when discussing the case histories with teacher and leader candidates, it may be interesting to note the similarities and the differences in answers to each question across the four students.

The four case histories discussed in Part 1 of this CEM illustrate the range of evidence-based behavioral interventions that are appropriate for use with students with challenging behaviors. Case histories offering additional illustrations of evidence-based behavioral interventions are interspersed throughout Parts 2 – 5 of the module.

Chuck's Story

Chuck lived with his parents and younger brother in a small rural community in Oregon. Shortly after his fifth birthday, Chuck's parents enrolled him in a general education kindergarten class at a nearby elementary school.

Chuck had several behavioral challenges in kindergarten. His teacher reported that Chuck frequently had difficulty following directions and would sometimes throw a tantrum when he did not "get his way." He also had problems getting along with his peers. Chuck did not like to "wait for his turn" or "stand in line" with his class. Chuck's mother reported that he displayed similar behaviors at home. For example, his mother was concerned that Chuck often "did not listen" to her or her husband. He often tried to "be the boss" with his brother—both at home and during family outings in the community.

Chuck's problem behaviors continued and escalated in first grade. For example, he repeatedly defied his teacher and refused to follow her instructions. Loud verbal arguments led to fistfights with other boys, and occasionally girls, at lunch or recess. Given the increasing frequency and severity of these and other problem behaviors, Chuck was referred to the school's Individual Education Program (IEP) team, assessed, and identified as a student with behavior disorders.

At the beginning of second grade, Chuck's principal, his teacher, and his parents decided to enroll Chuck in a special program called *First Steps*, an evidenced-based behavioral intervention program for young children developed by researchers at the University of Oregon. The intervention had school and home components.

- ***At school.*** Chuck's second grade teacher used a "token economy" program to positively reinforce his appropriate behavior. The teacher set clear behavioral expectations for Chuck's behavior in the classroom, hallway, lunchroom, and playground. Chuck received "tokens" for appropriate behavior (e.g., waiting quietly in line), but lost tokens for misbehavior (e.g., talking out of turn or leaving his desk without permission). Chuck turned in tokens for special prizes. He could choose something fun for himself (e.g., extra library time) or the whole class (e.g., playing Simon Says or extra recess). He could also earn special time with his mom or dad (e.g., go for a walk in the woods).
- ***At home.*** A First Step interventionist visited Chuck's home once a week for six weeks. The interventionist taught his mother to play short games that would help Chuck be more successful at school. His mom really liked the games; she even modified some of them so that they could be played with both Chuck and his brother. She said that she felt more empowered as a parent. She felt the First Step activities offered her a structure and helped her learn how to interact with her children in a positive way.

The *First Steps* intervention was effective with Chuck. His third grade teacher reported that Chuck focused on his schoolwork, was near grade level academically, and especially enjoyed reading. His soccer coach reported that he followed team rules and got along with his teammates.

Juanita's Story

Juanita lived with her father, mother, and five siblings in a large city in Arizona. She was enrolled in a general education first grade class at her local neighborhood school. Juanita qualified for Title 1 supports, including the free and reduced-price lunch program, but did not receive special education.

Juanita's first grade teacher reported that she was an average student academically. The teacher reported that Juanita generally paid attention and tried hard to complete her seatwork and other academic assignments each day. Juanita's reading and math skills were near grade level and similar to those of most of the other students in her class.

However, her teacher also reported that Juanita had several behavioral challenges at the beginning of first grade. Her teacher indicated that Juanita shy and timid, often refusing to "stand up for herself" when interacting with her peers. She rarely volunteered to participate in group activities in class or on the playground. Instead, Juanita would often avoid or withdraw from social situations, especially those requiring her to work together with other students.

In response to Juanita's behavioral challenges, her first grade teacher referred Juanita to a new behavioral intervention program at her school. The program was based on behavioral studies of young children like Juanita conducted by researchers at Arizona State University.

Juanita's behavioral intervention had two main components:

- ***Social skill instruction.*** Her teacher explicitly taught Juanita specific social skills in targeted areas such as answering questions, controlling her anger, and getting along with others. For each target skill, Juanita learned how to perform the skill effectively as well as when to use the skill in what social situations.
- ***Cooperative learning groups.*** Juanita participated in a small cooperative group with three other students who behaved properly at school. Her cooperative group provided opportunities for Juanita and the other students to model and role-play target social skills.

In addition to her behavioral intervention, her teacher positively reinforced appropriate behavior by Juanita and her classmates. Her teacher also provided opportunities for Juanita to observe and learn how her classmates behaved in different social situations during class, in the hallway, at lunch, and on the playground.

By the end of first grade, Juanita's social behavior had changed dramatically. Juanita had gained self-confidence when interacting with her peers in class, during lunch, or on the playground. She began making friends with other students, including asking her mother to arrange for "play dates" with her friends after school or on weekends. No longer socially isolated, Juanita and her family looked forward to her continued learning and achievement in second grade and beyond.

Fred's Story

Fred lived with his family and attended his neighborhood school in a suburban community in Oregon. Fred was seven when he was hit by a car—an accident that left him with reduced use of his right leg and arm, difficulty speaking, and even more difficulty learning. Fred's learning and behavioral challenges continued through elementary school and into middle school.

By sixth grade, Fred frequently misbehaved at school. When presented with a complex or difficult task, Fred would frequently whine and stomp his feet. When particularly frustrated, Fred would run out of the room and, on several occasions, left the school grounds without permission. After Fred threw a typewriter through a classroom window, his principal considered asking the district to place Fred in a special school for students with severe behavior challenges.

Fortunately, his teachers and family asked behavioral researchers at the University of Oregon to help them design a new behavior management program for Fred. The team analyzed possible reasons for Fred's problem behaviors, including identifying environmental events (e.g., transitioning between class periods) that triggered his outbursts. The team also planned how to positively reinforce Fred for displaying appropriate behavior in different situations at school.

Fred's new behavior management program had several interrelated components, including:

- **Academic Instruction.** Fred was provided an adapted curriculum for his academic instruction. For example, Fred learned functional skills, such as reading lunchroom menus or shopping at a nearby grocery store. Fred received individual (one on one) tutoring. He also received integrated academic instruction in small groups of students, including instruction with both special education and general education classmates.
- **Self-Monitoring Strategies.** Fred was taught specific strategies to help him resolve difficult social situations. For example, Fred learned how to (a) interact properly with his peers, (b) tell his teachers when he was frustrated, and (c) initiate self-imposed "breaks" rather than becoming violent. Fred's teachers recorded data on the frequency of his use of (and his success in using) these strategies in different school environments.

Over time, Fred's behavior management program led to the creation of a social network to support Fred. Key members were Fred's mother, his special education and general education teachers, and his middle school principal. The network coordinated systematic positive reinforcement and support for Fred in displaying appropriate behavior at school and home.

The last two years of middle school were a great success for Fred, his teachers, and his family. Fred continued to progress in each academic subject. His behavior also improved. For example, the number of classroom disruptions requiring the principal's attention dropped from 40 episodes in seventh grade to only four minor events in eighth grade. Best of all, as Fred learned to monitor and manage his own behavior, he began displaying a renewed interest in learning. Fred entered high school with a newfound pride in himself and what he could do independently.

Hui Lum's Story

Hui Lum lived with her father in an apartment in a large city in a Mid-Atlantic state. Hui Lum was unable to walk unassisted and had limited use of her hands due to her cerebral palsy. She routinely used a wheelchair at home, in school, and in other community settings.

Hui Lum's special educators and her father worked well together, coordinating the supports she needed to be independently mobile. For example, her physical therapist taught her how to maneuver her wheelchair. Her father redesigned his apartment to make it wheelchair accessible. Importantly, Hui Lum was a motivated, high-achieving student in elementary and middle school.

Hui Lum received special education from kindergarten through eighth grade. However, given her strong academic record, her father and her special educators agreed that she should exit special education and receive Section 504 accommodations in high school.

Hui Lum's Section 504 team included her school psychologist, homeroom teacher, and occupational therapist. The team provided several accommodations for her academic classes:

- Ready access to textbooks, work sheets, and other academic materials with large print,
- Untimed tests or extra time to complete tests and other written assignments, and
- A para-educator who offered her bathroom and other independent living assistance.

With these accommodations, Hui Lum did well academically during the first month of ninth grade. But she had a recurring behavioral problem. She was late to most of her classes on most days each week. Arriving to class on time was especially challenging when her classes were on different floors of the school building or when she needed to get items from her school locker.

Hui Lum's 504 team collected data on her tardiness and analyzed why she was often late for class. The team then revised her 504 Plan to address Hui Lum's problem with tardiness:

- Hui Lum's class schedule was adjusted to eliminate her changing floors between classes.
- Hui Lum's occupational therapist helped her improve (and confidently use) her independent mobility skills within her large high school building. For example, she learned how to open and close doors and maneuver her wheelchair to travel the school hallways; and how to manipulate the lock and get books and other items from her locker.
- Her homeroom teacher, her other teachers, and her father provided positive reinforcement to Hui Lum for being on time.

Hui Lum's behavioral plan was successful. One month after her plan had been implemented, Hui Lum met her behavioral goal of arriving at 90 percent of her classes on time. Her teachers reported that she responded well to their positive reinforcement and was actively engaged in all of her classes. Hui Lum continued to achieve throughout high school, graduated on time, and entered college ready to prepare for a successful career as an independent young adult.