

## CEP 832 Case Study

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The experiences a child has as a student in elementary school have a large impact on how they will succeed as they get older. Students sometimes have behaviors that can interfere with their success in school. As an educator it is my job to create a way for these students to be successful. I am dedicated to the individual success of each of my students. Even though it may be difficult to find a way to meet each student's needs, it can be done with organization, dedication, and patience.

My student is a 5 year old kindergartener with Williams Syndrome who spends her entire day in my Cognitively Impaired special education classroom. This student spent two years in an Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) classroom where her behaviors were also observed. The problem observed was that she was throwing tantrums in the class. Whenever she was expected to do something she did not want to do she would begin to throw a fit. These tantrums included the following behaviors: screaming, yelling profanity, saying mean things ("I hate you", "stupid", "idiot"), threatening to hurt adults ("I'll hit you", "I'll bust your face", "want me to hurt you, I will"), throwing supplies (pencils, scissors, glue sticks, crayons, etc.), tipping over chairs, spitting, biting, hitting, kicking, blowing snot, and scratching. These behaviors were observed on a daily basis. The length of time that these tantrums would last ranged from 2 minutes to ending when a parent had to come take her home from school. The staff in my classroom is very patient and we work well as a team to deal with as much as we can before going to the extreme of going home.

At the beginning of the school year I was prepared for the tantrums as I had the opportunity to observe this behavior last year when she was in ECSE. As I looked back at the type of "stance" that was presented in the classroom at the start of the year, I feel like we have grown so much. Originally I thought that I was well prepared to handle whatever behaviors she might present at the start of the year. In regards to Instruction, I felt like I had a good handle on my expectations for this student as well as for the rest of my class. It is a requirement within my classroom to have differentiation for each student the first day they come to school. I was able to discuss with her previous year's teacher and knew where she was coming in academically. This part of the preparation was simple for me.

In the area of classroom management, I never really seem completely prepared at the start of a school year. The diversity within a classroom always plays a part in how a teacher manages the class. With the students I had from the previous year, I thought the consistency and the plan that I had used the year before would be a great way to start the new school year. This expectation was to encompass all of my students; or so I thought. The basic idea is for the students to visually see how their behaviors are impacting the classroom environment. I have a stoplight pocket chart with each of the student's names on a stick. If the students break a classroom rule (Be Responsible, Be Respectful, Be Safe) which had been discussed in detail he/she is moved to yellow. If the behavior is unsafe, the student goes directly to red. If behaviors continue their stick is moved from yellow to red. If the behavior stops and the student is following all the rules, he/she gets moved back down one step (from yellow to green or red to yellow). This system allows the students to make up for their mistakes. Little did I know that this classroom

management system would backfire on me when working with this specific student. Any time her stick was moved off of green (even with a warning or multiple warnings) she would erupt into a tantrum.

Now that I look back at disciplinary interventions at the start of the year, I did not do well in this area. I was so stuck on “making” the student follow the same expectations as the rest of the class that I didn’t realize that I needed to adjust my thinking in this area. I didn’t take the time to really focus on correcting or changing the behavior. I just thought that if I stuck to my expectations the changes would come with time. I was not flexible at all in this stance. Now I realize how much change can occur before a solid plan is in place that works effectively.

As a special educator I am always working on student socialization. Appropriate socialization is always a concern with my students. This student specifically possesses a characteristic common of those with Williams Syndrome of being overly friendly. This student has two behaviors that are inappropriate in nature. She will say hi and talk to anybody she sees, regardless if she knows them or not. I have witnessed this in the school setting but also after school with parents she does not know. Another behavior she has that is inappropriate is the fact that she yells out inappropriate words in any setting. Often times I hear her use profanity or use mean words such as “stupid”, “I hate you”, and “idiot”. These behaviors are ones in which my other students pick up on as being severely inappropriate behaviors. In this situation I was able to incorporate role playing so that all of the students in the class understand that what is happening is inappropriate. We were also able to incorporate a positive way to react to the inappropriate behaviors that the other students are seeing and hearing.

In regard to my stance at the start of the school year I would have to say that I came into the year thinking I was going to be able to work well with this student and her family. I was confident in finding a way to meet her needs and best help her with her behaviors. As the year got started I found myself second guessing my actions. I doubted some of the decisions I made after it was too late. I would question whether I should have given the amount of chances that I gave or if I should have worded something differently from what I did. When a situation wouldn’t go the way I hoped it would, I found myself frustrated with myself for not being able to remain calm and come up with another way of going about it. A challenge I faced early on was communication between me and my staff in the room. There were always 2 adults in the room with me and although I would come up with a way of testing another solution I would forget to share it with my staff prior to a situation occurring. This would cause confusion and things wouldn’t go as smoothly as hoped. I also think that the fact that I was unsure of my classroom management style working for this student was presented in a way that the child could read. I think she could tell that I was somewhat unprepared for what she might do and this may have caused her to react in a more severe way. She was probably able to identify the frustration in my voice during these tantrums as well. I noticed that even though I tried so hard not to let myself get frustrated; it happened anyway and I could not control it.

For a short time, we thought that we could simply use preferred tasks as a way to avoid tantrums. When we wanted her to complete a task, we would show her a visual and also tell her that she was to do “this” then “that”. This way we would get the work done that we needed her to do and she would be rewarded with something she enjoyed. This did not work from the beginning. We also tried to

incorporate a visual schedule with her with the thought that it would ease her anxiety throughout the day. This schedule only made things more difficult for her. She was constantly asking for the preferred tasks that were scheduled for later in the day and she would become fixated on this event. When she was told she had to wait and that it would happen later she would melt down. She also discovered that she could take the schedule and manipulate it to put it in an order she wanted and not the actual schedule for the day. This just created more problems throughout the day because it was a constant battle to get the schedule to stay the way the adults set it up.

At one point, mom suggested changing the subject on her when a potential tantrum was beginning. Simple attempts at changing the subject did not work for us in the school setting. No matter how exciting we tried to make something, she did not care what we had to show her or tell her. It seemed to me like she knew exactly what we were trying to do. At times, she gets fixated on a topic and even though an answer is provided to her, it does not seem good enough for her. In an attempt to distract her we tried ignoring her request for constant answers over and over hoping she would eventually stop asking.

Throughout the last 5 months I have learned a whole new definition of patience. Not only have I learned patience but I've also learned how to adapt to change. After about a month of school and a strong attempt to get this student to abide by the classroom behavior management system I realized there needed to be some sort of change to help her be successful. In an attempt to stick with the green, yellow, red chart I decided to make it personal for her. Rather than having her just end on a color she needed to know what the consequence at home would be if she landed on yellow and again on red. In talking with her parents we proposed an idea to have a yellow day mean that she would not be allowed to watch t.v. when she got home from school (specifically SpongeBob) so we put a picture of a t.v. with SpongeBob on it with a "no" symbol over it next to the yellow light on her chart. If she ended up having a red day, her consequence was not being able to watch t.v. or color. Coloring was always her second choice activity if she was unable to watch t.v. Next to the red light we put the same t.v. with SpongeBob picture and a picture of a coloring page both with a "no" symbol over it. This allowed her to see that she was going to miss out on those activities if she was not able to get her behaviors back to what is appropriate. It was my hope that parents would follow through with the consequences at home and from the feedback I heard from the student the next day, it seemed like they were making sure she paid the consequences. This system did not work very well from the beginning but we stuck with it so we could really see a true picture. When she was moved from green to yellow or red she would begin a tantrum and it took much coaxing to get her just to stop the crying and yelling so she could be moved back to green. About a month after using this system we knew a change had to be made.

The next attempt used was to add a system where she started her day with the numbers 1, 2, 3 written on the board. I completely dropped the green, yellow, red pocket chart with her because it typically caused her to start a tantrum. This new system provided a visual and verbal consequence for the student. If she started breaking the rules she was first given a warning (unless it was an unsafe behavior such as throwing or knocking things over; these behaviors were given no warning, if the behavior continued an adult would erase her number 3. At this time, the hope was that she would stop what she was doing so that she did not lose another number. If the behavior continued someone would then

erase the number 2 and I would contact her mother or father and she would have to talk to them and explain to her what was happening. Typically this step helped her realize that I meant business and that her parents were supporting me. This would allow her to regroup and join the class. When each number was lost, there was no way to earn the number back. If she continued to misbehave and she lost her number 1 at any point in the day, another phone call was made to have one of her parents come pick her up and she would spend the remainder of her day at home. At the time that we put this into place the parents were being very cooperative and making sure that she was not rewarded when she went home. Their promise was that they would make sure she missed out on watching t.v., coloring, or playing with her brother. She was allowed to read books and that was it. The parents also said that they made her do things like clean her room or help with chores.

This intervention seemed to really help with the whole feeling of the classroom. I felt like I was more comfortable with the way each day was going. I was prepared to deal with the situations as they arose and I think she also felt this comfort. There were guidelines that were set and were meant to be followed, nobody second guessed the intervention. It was so good to see positive change in her behaviors.

Shortly after Winter break, I started to see some regression in this students' behavior. I felt like we were going backward. I was so frustrated that the successful intervention was now no longer working for any of us. In fact, the behaviors were getting worse. I was starting to hear things that I had not heard before and it seemed like there was so much anger behind the tantrums when before the tantrums seemed almost uncontrollable. These tantrums were coming from some sort of frustration on the student's end. I could not figure out why this change was occurring. I finally accepted that something needed to be done so that she felt success at school again. Just as I was about to adjust the plan we had been using, the parents shared with me that they had split up. I then decided that we should keep the plan as it was for a few weeks to see if we could be a little more understanding with her while she was going through such a tough time at home. I and my staff started making sure she knew how much we cared about her, gave extra hugs, took her out of the classroom for a break (walk) when she seemed to be getting restless, etc. We really did not see any improvement in behavior that was a result of these extra kind gestures.

In February, I finally decided something had to be changed. I couldn't allow these severe behaviors to continue to occur. I was also becoming really concerned with the fact that she was being sent home so often. The parents were becoming more and more shocked by the behaviors we were seeing and really surprised when I shared the profanity that we were hearing from their daughter. I provided both parents the opportunity to come in and observe through a 2-way mirror that we have that looks into our classroom. Her mom came in a few times to observe and was very disappointed to witness her daughter hit me.

After seeing her daughter behave in such a negative way, it was decided that we needed to have a "team" meeting to come up with a plan to best help their daughter. I had wanted to start a "time out" type plan with her but I knew that she would not stay in her "time out" spot. The only option I had to offer parents was for them to provide permission for us to use a "time away" room with her. In the past

this did not go over well when it was presented to them (the previous year this was tried). Dad was completely on board but mom would not allow the previous teacher to use this space. This year after having witnessed the awful behaviors her daughter was exhibiting, mom agreed to allow us to use the room for her so she and her classmates and teachers were safe during these tantrums. The time away room is a room next to our classroom that is empty where the child can go and shut the door (with a window so we can watch and make sure she's safe) to be away from everyone else. In this room the student is allowed to yell, scream, kick, hit as much as she wants. There are no rules to this room except that when the timer goes off, she must discuss what happened and she must be calm before returning to the classroom.

The new plan was built upon the one already in place using the 1, 2, 3 system. The specific behavior we are working on is "Doing what the adults say". With this new plan, if she does not do what she is asked after given the direction 1-2 times, a number is taken away and she is taken to "time away" until she is ready to come back. The other part of this is if she does something unsafe like throwing something or touching another person (student/teacher) she immediately loses a number. When in time away a timer is set for 3 minutes. After the 3 minutes, the adult opens the door and asks if she's ready to talk about what happened. If she says "yes" then we discuss what she did in the classroom and why it was not ok. She is still learning this process so we have to walk her through it a little bit but she is really beginning to get it and knows when and to whom she has to apologize. If she is not ready to talk after 3 minutes, she goes back in the room for another 2 minutes. This continues until she is ready to talk. This system was started on March 11. From March 11 to March 25 she has been to time away a total of 5 times. On two of those days she stated that she was not ready to come out after the first 3 minutes.

So far this has been working really well. As much as we hate to have to use "time away" we have already seen an improvement in behaviors and she has not had to be sent home since we started this. In fact, she has only lost 2 numbers one time and most days she does not lose any numbers. I'm curious to see what happens after Spring Break. I'm ready for a slight regression but am hopeful that she will quickly remember the expectations.

With this new plan in place (about 3 weeks) I have felt really successful with this student. She knows the expectations in the classroom and has begun to understand the idea of apology, using kind words, and following directions. The student has also become much friendlier with the teachers and students. When she says something that is inappropriate I tell her that we don't talk like that in our classroom or at Sycamore (our school) and she apologizes. She does not always apologize immediately and I don't MAKE her apologize but after a few minutes she will come up to me or another adult and apologize for what she said. I'm hoping this inappropriate language will diminish soon. If not, it will be our next behavior to focus on.

In looking back at all the hard work, sweat, tears, and frustration that has been put into the interventions with this student I have found many things to critique. I would have to say that one thing I did well was to keep the parents informed about what was happening. I spoke to parents on a daily basis about how her day was and behaviors that were witnessed. I also made sure I started to document what time these tantrums were occurring and what we saw during these times. It was

difficult to find a specific time these would occur or an antecedent that provoked these behaviors. Another part that I thought went well was the fact that I did not allow myself to make it MY responsibility alone to make adjustments. I allowed a team approach to happen so that I was looking at the best possible solution to incorporate. So many times I found that I was looking at more extensive interventions that would take up much more time and energy. Simply having other members of the team provide ideas to me made it that much easier for me to see the simplicity in the problem.

If I could back and redo parts of this intervention process I would have made sure I was more consistent from the start. I found myself giving too many chances and allowing things to get too far before really stepping in to stop the problem. I also think that any little improvement, no matter how minuscule, in my eyes was a huge feat and would slack off on my expectations a bit. In the end this would backfire on me and I could not figure out why. As I stated earlier, I would also improve on my communication skills with my staff regarding this situation. I would come up with ideas at home and then I wouldn't share the ideas with my staff the next day. Instead, I would be in the middle of a situation with the student and do/say what I had thought of the night before and it was all new and foreign to my staff who was also involved. Fortunately I work with some amazing women who are forgiving, understanding, and flexible so when this happened, it wasn't a huge issue. We seemed to get through just fine, but it could have been made easier had I been a better communicator.

At this point in the school year with all the challenges I have faced, I have to admit that my "stance" has changed a bit in some areas but not in others. On the outside, my "stance" probably seems confident, serious, and determined. I have worked really hard on not letting my frustrations get in the way of how I deal with the situation at hand. In the beginning of the year I had difficulty with my emotions getting the best of me and I think that was evident to the student. My voice was probably a big indicator that I was frustrated as well. I knew that the fewer words I used the better for the situation but struggled to stick with that when I was in the middle of dealing with a tantrum. I have learned to ignore and not respond to behaviors verbally when they occur. Instead, I am able to give a look as a reminder or to point to the 1, 2, 3 chart as a reminder so the student knows what will come next. This has seemed to help me as well as the student to know that there are no warnings and I will not argue through the problem. I am pleased to say that my attitude toward this student and the behaviors she exhibits is much more pleasant. I do not allow myself to become frustrated with the situation and I know that keeping my own emotions in check only makes the whole situation run smoother.

Overall, I am really satisfied with the way this case study has turned out. At the start of the school year I knew I had a "project" on my hands with this student and I was anticipating all the adjustments and interventions that would be necessary. This case study was a great way for me to be proactive in making the adjustments to this student' and other students behavior plans.

#### COURSE FEEDBACK:

This course opened my eyes to the many challenges educators face in the general education classroom. When I compared the characteristics we read about in this course to the characteristics I see in my

classroom on a daily basis it seemed so common. I felt like every time I posted in the discussions about working with children with specific characteristics I was able to relate them to a specific student and felt like I had a solid plan of dealing with these children. It was difficult for me to read EVERY part of the assignments but I tried my best to read the parts I felt were most related to our assignments and my practice at work. I did appreciate the way this course was set up by each module. I liked having 4 weeks in which each week was specific to certain tasks. I wish all classes would be broken up this way. I also loved that we had a case study as a final project. This provided a great opportunity for me to really work on the challenging behaviors in my classroom. I cannot come up with any changes I would make to this course. I know it seems too easy to say that but it really was a well broken up course. There was ample time allowed for getting assignments done. The only thing I struggled with was the amount of reading. I'm not sure if there is a way to lighten the reading load or not but that would be my one suggestion.

Thank you for a great course that I feel has been very beneficial to me. This is only 1 of 4 courses I have taken so far but it is the most useful one I have had. I appreciate being able to really use the knowledge I have learned in my daily work.