

Difficult Student Behaviour and Savvy Ways to deal with it

Think about the video clip of Jonah. Work through the 'Behavioural Analysis' below and keenly discuss the questions with your group. And, there's a surprise! You don't need butcher's paper, or a reluctant note taker, nor choose a reluctant speaker to feedback your ideas. Instead, enjoy the interaction with one another and use it as a chance to exchange ideas. Have fun and let's share our thoughts in a while! Use the time to make inroads into something refreshing and restorative.



Jonah's scenario

Jonah Takalua is a 13 year old student in year 8 at Summer Heights High School. He, and most of his family, is of Tongan descent.

Jonah arrived in Australia when he was 3 years old. He is the second youngest of five children and is raised by his father, 'Rocky' (his mother died when he was 7 and he never talks about her). His older adopted brother Avnish Goyani plays a big role in raising Jonah too. Avnish is thoughtful and is a good influence on his brothers – in fact he is a steadying life-line. Jonah lives with his family plus, two cousins and an aunt. The family struggles financially. The house is too small and too many people live in it. Jonah shares a room with two of his brothers. Life is tough and volatile for this family although 'Rocky' tries his best. 'Rocky' has no formal education, is frustrated by Jonah's performance at school, and as much as he loves Jonah, deals with him through physical intimidation and confrontation.

Jonah has attended three schools over the past eighteen months and his behaviour has continued to deteriorate. He was expelled from the two previous schools for defiance; setting fire to a student's locker and defacing the principal's car by spray-painting a penis on it. Summer Heights High is seen as his last chance, and teachers are doing their best to sort out his difficult behaviours; disengagement from learning, loads of annoying bravado and awfully disruptive behaviours in class.

Clearly, Jonah struggles to connect with school and has fallen well behind his peer group academically. He currently has a reading age of 8 years. It is assumed he has a significant learning difficulty. He is desperately humiliated by it.

Jonah claims to have a girlfriend called Amanda. He repeatedly states that he "lives for breakdancing" and wants to do it professionally when he gets older. He tells everyone he's one of the best breakdancers in the school. In truth, it appears he is a beginner breakdancer. Jonah's close friends believe he is "full of shit" about Amanda. They've never seen her and argue over her existence. They also wonder just how good he is at breakdancing.

Beyond the serious academic issues, Jonah also faces racial and cultural tensions. He is very sensitive to this and highly reactive to it.

His one bright spot at school is his relationship with his special education teacher, Jan Palmer – he says she is the only teacher who 'likes' him. Jen runs a remedial reading course at what's called, 'Gumnut Cottage'.

1. Behavioural analysis: let's look at the ABC's for Jonah

The antecedents

When does this difficult behaviour start?

What 'SPECIFIC factors' seem to trigger it?

Where? Is it more noticeable in the yard, the classroom, with 'SPECIFIC' teachers or classes?

What are the more 'GENERAL influences' in his life that probably maintain the tricky behaviour? For example, do you think the behaviour is carried to school from home? Is it influenced by what's happening at home? What is happening at home? What do you know?

The behaviour

What exactly is the behaviour? Describe it using as many adjectives as you can. Avoid general terms as non-compliant, violent, immature, etc.

Is the behaviour becoming more or less frequent?

What does he say?

What does he do?

How much of this behaviour needs to matter, in other words, what could be overlooked or *tactically ignored*?

Is it a behaviour worth tackling head on, or might a clever change to routine or a creative 'circuit-breaker', minimise the problem?

The consequences

What usually happens following his behaviour?

Is the time it takes for Jonah to 'calm down' improving?

Does he understand the impact he has on others?

What is his response when he listens to others who were affected?

Does he show remorse or awareness that he has caused unwelcome disruption?

What approaches have had some success?

2. Let's borrow from POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT PRINCIPLES (PBSP), and create a HYPOTHESIS about Jonah's behaviour

Good PBSP links;

www.learningplace.com.au

www.pbis.org/school/primary

www.fp.education.tas.gov.au/positivebehaviour/

www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/downloads/calmerclassrooms.pdf

<http://www.emstac.org/registered/topics/posbehavior/tenprin.htm>

<http://education.qld.gov.au/student-services/behaviour/swpbs/index.html> <http://161.7.16.14/PDF/MBI/SchoolPosBehaviorSupport.pdf>

What are the likely motivations behind the behaviour? What's driving it?

What do you think Jonah is seeking? In other words, what might he be trying to **get**, or **get away from**?

What tells you this?

What is the quality of the Johan's relationship with the staff members in question?

Have you considered social issues, social miscuing, depression, tiredness, abuse, anxiousness, over-excitability, inflexibility, learning difficulties or obsessional drives?

Is the environment genuinely comfortable, safe and functional for him?

3. PLANNING

What initiatives/ interventions might encourage steadier emotion/ behaviour from Jonah?
Prioritise the top 5?

What might be done interrupt the 'usual sequence of events' that lead to the 'usual problem behaviour'?

Do we need to be working with Jonah's Dad? How do we involve him? How often? Can we rely on him, or do we need to educate and lead him? How can we support him?

How might the quality of the student's relationship with the staff member he is experiencing difficulty with be improved? Does it need to be improved?

What else could we (should we) do, either publically or privately, to support Jonah?

Have we reviewed past assessments and documentation that might help? Would a new assessment be helpful?

And, what's an effective way to collect data so we can work out whether the interventions are paying off?

AN IDEAL PROCESS for ANALYSING STUDENT BEHAVIOUR

Work through the questions contained within this 'Analysis'.

Actually write your responses. Commit your thoughts to paper. The process crystallizes ideas.

Share your thoughts and ideas with a trusted colleague, a suitable resource person and/ or your line manager.

Invite them to observe the student and your interactions with them as well. Get them to answer these very same questions. Compare their responses with yours. This provides scope for rich discussion, the generation of new ideas, and new levels of realistic interventions. We must never underestimate the collective wisdom of colleagues, and the impetus it can provide.



Every educator, especially those at the coal face, needs time, input and safe, on-going opportunities to explore and firm up new ideas, new approaches and the skills that go with them.

They don't just happen!

Just as we offer students constant training and support to increase their proficiencies, teachers desperately require the same opportunities.

'Difficult Student Behaviour and Savvy Ways to deal with it' is available as a gift from –

<http://www.marklemessurier.com.au/> and <http://www.hansberryec.com.au/>

This training package includes the PowerPoint, notes, handouts, links and references.