



Questions for Families to Consider when Concerned about their Child's Behavior

Are you concerned about your child's behavior in school? This document is intended to assist families of children with disabilities that already have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in asking questions to learn more about their child's behavior in school. If you are concerned about your child's behavior, we recommend (a) using simple strategies to support your child's behavior at home (check out our brief on [PBIS at Home](#)¹ and a [family planning guide](#)² that will help you get there) and (b) talking with your child about what can help them at school.

The next step is contacting your child's teacher or another educator on their team to learn more about what's going on at school. Consider the following topics to guide your conversation.

- **Check-in:** Greet your child's teacher. Focus on your child's strengths, raise your concerns, and start with a general check in on your child's academic, behavioral, and IEP progress.
- **Ask about patterns:** Ask questions about times that are challenging for your child or patterns that may help explain why the behavior is happening.
- **Ask about data:** Ask to see data, or information, that may help you understand what's going on at school.
- **Ask about supports:** Ask what is in place to help your child consistently meet school expectations and that makes school work better for them.
- **Ask about evidence:** Ask if there is research or data that shows these supports are likely to work for your child.
- **Ask about staff support:** Ask if the teacher and other staff are getting what they need to be able to help your child.
- **Ask about ways to share your feedback:** Ask for ways that you can be involved and share feedback with the teacher and other staff as you know your child the best!

Finally, based on this conversation, look for chances to work together with your child's school to make school work better for them! The rest of this document shares some examples of questions you can ask your school that are organized by the level of behavior concern. In conclusion, a list of additional resources has been included for consideration.



- The first set (example 1) is meant for families of children with an IEP who have new concerns or behaviors that seem **minor** or are just starting.
- The second set (example 2) is meant for families of children with an IEP who have **ongoing** needs or who have not responded to the school's strategies for the initial concerns and might need more support (**moderate** concern).
- The third set (example 3) is meant for families of children with an IEP with more **chronic** or **significant** behavior issues or if a school has not responded to more minor concerns.

Example 1: New or Minor Concern

For families of children with new concerns or behaviors that seem minor or are just starting, begin a conversation to support your child's behavior. Consider the following example about D'wayne.

D'wayne is a student in 3rd grade. He has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that helps him with reading. He always loved to go to school and see his friends. He enjoys art, and there are lots of pictures on your refrigerator from his art projects. In the last month, you noticed that D'wayne has not wanted to go to school and complained that he does not like it anymore. His teacher informed you that he has not done some of his homework and is not filling in reading logs. You are concerned because this seems new to you, and you wonder if something is happening at school. You decide to call his teacher and find out what is going on.

Before asking the questions, it is often helpful to introduce yourself and why you are contacting the school. This will help set up a positive conversation. The following are some possible questions to ask:

- **Check-in:** "Hello Ms. Teacher. I'm really worried about D'wayne. He is not doing his homework and is not reading his books. He says he does not like school anymore. Can we talk about some of my concerns so we can help D'wayne?"
 - How has my child been doing academically at school?
 - How has my child been behaving at school?

If the educator identifies challenging behaviors and/or you have concerns, gather more information.

- **Ask about patterns:** Are you noticing any common patterns? For example, are there specific activities that are more challenging than others?



- **Ask about data:** Do we have any data to help me better understand what is going on? For example, have other teachers observed any changes? Or, are there other ways we could get more information to help us make better decisions about supports for his IEP?
- **Ask about supports:** Here are some strategies that I've found effective at home (share strategies). What works at school? What goals and supports are you considering for the IEP?
- **Ask about evidence:** How do we know if those supports will work? Do you know if they've been researched with kids like mine?
- **Ask about staff support:** How will other people who work with D'wayne be trained to help with those supports? What data will be collected to see if the supports are working?

It is often a good idea to end with thanking the school for all that they are doing and that you look forward to addressing any concerns and learning about how your child is doing. Remember, you are an important part of the team!

- **Wrap up:** "Thanks so much for talking with me. It looks like we have some similar concerns. Are there ways we can work together to better support D'wayne? I'm pleased that we all care about my child and meeting their behavioral needs. I would love to follow up with you in a week, or so we can share how well he is doing. Also, I would be interested in any data you are collecting to track his progress. I will share whatever I have. Let me know if I can help in any way."

Example 2: Ongoing or Moderate Concern

For families of children with ongoing needs or who have not responded to the school's strategies for the initial concerns and might need more support, continue the conversation about supporting your child's behavior. Consider the following example about Mickey.

Mickey is a student in high school. He has an IEP that helps with math (academics) and socializing with friends (behavior social skills). He likes some things about school, but he does not like eating in the cafeteria. All year you noticed that Mickey is not bringing lunch to school. You checked, and he is not buying lunch either. After lunch, he has math, and his grades are not good. When you ask him about math, he gets upset and changes the subject or slams his door. When you checked with his math teacher, you found out he is not turning in homework. Last week he was sent to the office after tearing up a math quiz and refusing to do it. You are concerned because this seems to be ongoing in an area he has struggled with. You don't think it's helpful that he is not eating lunch. You decide to call his special education teacher and find out what is going on.



Before asking the questions, it is often helpful to introduce yourself and why you are contacting the school. This will help set up a positive conversation. The following are some possible questions to ask:

- **Check-in:** “Hello Mr. Teacher. I’m really worried about Mickey. He is not doing his math homework and is getting bad grades. I know we have some goals on his IEP and I’m wondering how he is doing with them. He does not seem to be eating lunch at all of sitting with his friends during lunch. Can we talk about some of my concerns so we can help Mickey?”
 - How has my child been doing academically at school?
 - How has my child been behaving at school?
 - How are the goals progressing on his IEP for academics? For behavior?

When the educator identifies challenging behaviors and/or you have concerns, ask additional questions.

- **Ask about patterns:** Are you noticing any common patterns? For example, are there specific activities that are particularly challenging? Do you see any common events or circumstances before the behavior happens? How about after the behavior?
- **Ask about data:** Do we have any data to help me better understand what is going on? Have other teachers observed any changes? Or, are there other ways we could get more information to help us make better decisions about supports for his IEP? How are his goals progressing on his IEP?
- **Ask about supports:** Here are some strategies that I’ve found effective at home (share strategies). What works at school? What other goals and supports are you considering for the IEP?
- **Ask about evidence:** How do we know if those supports will work? Do you know if they’ve been researched with kids like mine?
- **Ask about staff support:** How will other people who support Mickey be trained to help with those supports? Will you continue to collect data to see if they are making an impact?

It is often a good idea to end with thanking the school for all that they are doing and that you look forward to addressing any concerns and learning about how your child is doing. Remember, you are an important part of the team!

- **Wrap up:** “Thanks so much for talking with me. It looks like we have some similar concerns. Are there ways we can work together to better support Mickey? I’m pleased that we all care about my child and meeting their behavioral needs. I would love to follow up with you in a week, or so



we can share how well he is doing. Also, I would be interested in any data you are collecting to track his progress. I will share whatever I have. Let me know if I can help in any way.”

Example 3: Chronic or Significant Concern

For families of children with more significant behavior issues or if a school has not responded to more minor concerns, engage in a more in-depth conversation about supporting your child’s behavior. Consider the following example about Maya.

Maya is a student in middle school. She has an IEP that helps with math (academics) and socializing with friends (behavior social skills). She has weekly social skills lessons with the school counselor. Her math class is in a separate special education class. Because of some aggressive behavior that occurred during passing time last year, she has a behavior support plan and a daily progress report. Lately, you noticed that her daily progress report shows that she is late for a few of her classes. She has even skipped math class. You have received more calls about her being sent to the office because she talks back to teachers. You are concerned because this seems to be occurring more frequently than in the past. You are worried about her skipping and wondering where she might be going to instead of class. You decide to call her special education teacher and find out what is going on.

Before asking the questions, it is often helpful to introduce yourself and why you are contacting the school. This will help set up a positive conversation. The following are some possible questions to ask (you might note that the questions are more direct and ask for more information than the previous questions):

- **Check-in:** “Hello Ms. Teacher. I’m really worried about Maya. She is not going to all of her classes. I know we have some goals on her IEP and a behavior support plan, but I’m wondering how she is doing. Can we talk about some of my concerns? ”
 - How has my child been doing academically at school?
 - How has my child been meeting behavioral expectations at school?
 - How are the goals progressing on his IEP for academics? For behavior?
 - How is his behavior support plan working?

When the educator identifies challenging behaviors and/or you have concerns, ask additional questions.

- **Ask about patterns:** If you have concerns, are the behaviors occurring more often than in the past? Are there certain times, areas, etc. where these behaviors are happening?



- **Ask about data:** If you have concerns, can you please be specific? Why do you have these concerns? How do you suggest we address them?
 - What data can we look at to help us decide if we need to change his IEP or behavior support plan?
 - Observation?
 - Behavior Rating Scales?
 - Interview with other educators?
 - Asking me for feedback?
 - Who will be collecting the data or participating in the assessments to identify or address any concerns?
 - General educator (my child's teacher/s)?
 - Special educator?
 - Paraprofessional?
 - School Counselor?
 - School Psychologist?
 - Me?
- **Ask about supports:** Do you think we need to change her IEP or behavior support plan? Should we collect more data?
 - If determined necessary, what kind of strategies can be used to address these concerns?
 - Do we need to do/or re-look at a functional behavior assessment (FBA)?
 - Do we need to develop/or revise his behavior support plan?
 - Add social skills lessons
 - Work with peers?
 - Consider additional/different accommodations and/or modifications?
 - Teach her self-regulation strategies?
 - Any other strategies?
- **Ask about evidence:** What kind of data will be used to **measure progress** on the behavior concerns?
 - How will you know if changes will need to be made to the IEP/behavior support plan and any other strategies after revisions have been made? What kind of data will you collect?
 - Observation?
 - Behavior Rating Scales?
 - Interview with other educators?



- Asking me for feedback?
 - How will you know if there are no longer any behavior concerns? What kind of data will you collect?
 - Observation?
 - Behavior Rating Scales?
 - Interview with other educators?
 - Asking me for feedback?
 - How will we fade any new supports if they are considered not needed any longer?
 - How long do you need to determine next steps before I reach out to you again? Do you prefer email or a phone call?
- **Ask about staff support**
 - How will other people who work with my child be trained to help with those supports?
 - What data will be collected to see if the supports are working

It is often a good idea to end with thanking the school for all that they are doing and that you look forward to addressing any concerns and learning about how your child is doing. Remember, you are an important part of the team!

- **Wrap up:** "Thanks so much for talking with me. It looks like we have some similar concerns. Are there ways we can work together to better support Maya? I'm pleased that we all care about my child and meeting their behavioral needs. I would love to follow up with you in a week, or so we can share how well he is doing. Also, I would be interested in any data you are collecting to track her progress. I will share whatever I have. Let me know if I can help in any way."



Additional Resources

1. **Supporting Families with PBIS at Home** - <https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-families-with-pbis-at-home>
2. **Family Plan for Positive Behavior at Home** - <https://www.pbis.org/resource/family-plan-for-positive-behavior-at-home>
3. **Enhancing Family-School Collaboration with Diverse Families** – <https://www.pbis.org/resource/enhancing-family-school-collaboration-with-diverse-families>
4. **Strengthening Family Participation in Addressing Behavior in an IEP** – <https://www.pbis.org/resource/strengthening-family-participation-in-addressing-behavior-in-an-iep>
5. **An Overview of Endrew F.: Implications for Student Behavior** - <https://www.pbis.org/resource/an-overview-of-endrew-f-implications-for-student-behavior>
6. **Supporting Students with Disabilities in the Classroom within a PBIS Framework** – <https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-students-with-disabilities-in-the-classroom-within-a-pbis-framework>
7. **Strategies for Setting Data-Driven Behavioral IEP Goals** - <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED604948>
8. **PBIS.org Families Topic** - <https://www.pbis.org/topics/family>
9. **PBIS.org Disability Topic** - <https://www.pbis.org/topics/disability>

This document was supported from funds provided by the Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports cooperative grant supported by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) of the U.S. Department of Education (H326S180001). Dr. Renee Bradley serves as the project officer. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, or enterprise mentioned in this document is intended or should be inferred.

Suggested Citation for this Publication

Kern, L., Simonsen, B., George, H. P., Robbie, K., & Putnam, B. (December, 2021). *Questions for Families to Consider when Concerned about their Child's Behavior*. Center on PBIS, University of Oregon. www.pbis.org