

# Parents Perception Toward Their Children With /Or At Risk Of Behavioral Problems

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doi: 10.19044/esj.2016.v12n8p225 [URL:http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/esj.2016.v12n8p225](http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/esj.2016.v12n8p225)

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## Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe parents' perceptions towards their children with /or at risk of behavioral problems. It included parents' insight about their children with problem behaviors, parents' perceptions of the strategies/or services they receive from the school, and about the support they receive from school personnel. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two parents who have children with challenging behaviors. The data were collected, transcribed, and analyzed in a three-week period. The findings section revealed the importance of collaboration between parents who have children with behavioral problems and schools.

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**Keywords:** Children with Behavioral Problems, Collaboration, Behavioral Intervention Strategies, Positive Behavior Support (PBS), Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)

## Introduction

Children with behavioral problems in a school setting are those whose behaviors interfere with their learning and the learning of others. They exhibit the following characteristics: behavioral problems that lower their academic performance, difficulty staying on task or following directions, becoming agitated when they encounter difficult tasks or are more likely to withdraw or be disruptive (Choate, 2004; Ghanizadeh, & Haghghi, 2010 ).

Reinke, Splett, Robeson and Offutt (2009) stated that children with behavioral problems who exhibit aggressive and destructive behaviors are at risk of academic failure, social rejection, and of delinquency in adulthood. Several; research studies demonstrated that children with behavioral problems are at risk of having conducted disorders, depression, anxiety, and anti-social behaviors. Due to the aggressive behaviors these students experience at school, they are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school, which affects their academic and social success (Harvey, Lewis-

Palmer, Horner & Sugai, 2003). Several studies in this area emphasized the role of early and intensive intervention for behavioral problems as the childhood behavioral problems are indicators of adolescent delinquency. If no serious interventions are considered for these students, they are more likely to withdraw from school, and later on in their adulthood, they will also become at risk of being criminals and ending up in jail(Reinke, Splett, Robeson, & Offutt, 2009).

## **I.**

### **Literatuer Review**

Teaching children with behavioral problems coping behavioral strategies enable them to express themselves peacefully and sets them up for academic and social success (Reinke et al., 2009; Harvey et al., 2003).

The success of implementing behavioral support plans, however, depends on the collaboration between schools' teachers and parents. Early intervention is critical because dealing with the problems at a very young age will help to reduce the issues, and make these children more included and accepted in society. The key success of the behavioral intervention strategies is the consistency of the way educators and parents deal with the problem behaviors that needs an active partnership between the school and home settings (Nelson, Benner, & Lane, 2004). Stuart (1998) implied that dealing with behavioral problems logically aligns with a theoretical behaviorism framework. Behaviorism theories have a significant effect on expanding the basic learning model. It includes modifying cognitive activities and variables to improve the prediction of human behaviors. Behavior intervention strategies have developed to cover a broad range of problem behaviors encountered either in clinics or counseling practices. To provide a conceptual model, educators should integrate learning principles with the research findings from all the psychology areas. Behavioral strategies are proactive rather than passive regarding presenting a critical stage of behavioral intervention therapy. It focuses on the subsequent actions of the target behaviors that are usually not clearly visible (Stuart, 1998).

### **Children with Behavioral Problems in School Settings**

Researchers stated that children with behavioral problems exhibited academic achievement deficit in a school setting, making them less likely to graduate and attend a postsecondary school. Moreover, the students' behavioral problems can increase as students move to upper levels Johnson & Hannon,2014). The prevalence of low academic achievement among students with behavioral problems ranges from 25% to 97%, which varies among subjects. The most common problem behaviors in school settings are stealing, violence, noncompliance, lying, and off task behaviors.

Other problem behaviors that interfere with academic and social success are conduct disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and disruptive behaviors, these problem behaviors create a stressful environment for other students, teachers in the classrooms ( Banks & Zions, 2009).

Students who experience externalizing behaviors such as aggression, delinquency and disruption are less likely to be academically and socially successful. On the other hand, students who exhibit internalizing behaviors such as withdrawal, somatic complaints, depression, anxiety, and social problems are more academically successful (Marlene de Cássia Trivellato Ferreira, & Marturano, 2002). Nelson et al., (2004) emphasized the role of the school team to help these students overcoming their problems by implementing behavioral strategies that reduce the intensity of problem behaviors and crime levels in adulthood (Nelson et al., 2004; Enner, Allor, & Mooney, 2008).

Several students who exhibit challenging behaviors need individualized interventions to reduce or eliminate problem behaviors and encourage more contradictory replacement of behaviors (Maag & Katsiyannis, 2006). The individualized intervention strategies are developed as a part of the process of behavior intervention plan (BIP) (Ingram, Lewis-Palmer, & Sugai, 2005). To ensure the suitability of the intervention planning, educators primarily gathered information about the problematic behavior via evidence-based practices such as functional behavior assessment. Functional behavioral assessment (FBA) provides teachers with an effective assessment process that can direct towards more targeted intervention planning (Maag et al., 2006). Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) is defined as an action plan that is based on understanding the function of the behavior. The action plan aims to change or manipulate the environmental events that trigger the child's behaviors. BIP includes behavioral strategies based on Postive Behavior Support (PBS) to promote positive behaviors and reduce inappropriate behaviors (Walker, Shea, and Bauer, 2007).

### **Children with Behavioral Problems at Home**

Children with/or at risk of behavioral problems Researcher demonstrated the effect of household chaos in child social-emotional and cognitive developments. The household chaos includes noise, lack of family routines or schedule, and crowds (Eater-Deckard et al., 2009). Researchers investigated possible factors related to the family structures and functioning that negatively affect the child's conduct problems and IQ. They stated that socioeconomic status, parent stress, and mental depression contributed significantly to child's emotional and behavioral development. Other factors include parents' education; home literacy environment such as books and reading to the children; stress such as the effect of stressful life events;

parent abuse such as rejection, hostility, and physical and sexual abuse; and house conditions such as unclean and unsafe environments.

Bowes, Maughan, Caspi, Moffitt, and Arseneault (2010) examined the effect of the environment on children's behavioral and emotional development. They stated that bullied children are at risk of behavioral and emotional problems. They also agreed that resilient children have better function physically, mentally, and emotionally. Bowes et al., (2010) discovered many factors that affect the child's resiliency such as family companionate and positive environment. Thus, parents play a significant role in the adjustment of children who experience bullying victimization in which these children are less likely to develop behavioral and emotional problems.

In fact, household chaos such as noise, lack of family routines or schedule, crowds, family adjustment, family stress is important factors that significantly affect the children's educational, behavioral, and emotional development (Coldwell & Dunn, 2006). It is necessary to consider these factors to provide support for parents to help and deal with their children efficiently and prevent or reduce behavioral problems by creating strong communication relation between home and school personnel (Bowes et al., 2010).

### **Collaboration between School Personnel and Parents**

Due to the critical role of parents in the child behavioral and emotional development, collaboration with trained school personnel is essential. Specialized educators at schools are the best sources for providing preventive intervention that positively reduces the child's disruptive behaviors, such as aggressive behavior, tantrums, and property destruction. Effective school intervention and parents' engagement in providing parents with strategies follow at home are critical to creating satisfactory social and school success. Ryan, Boxmeyer, & Lochman (2009) strongly supported parent involvement; however, they stated that many programs experience low parent engagement due to parent's frustration about their child's behavior that served as the primary factor of low participation. Ryan et al., (2009) accentuated that there is a strong relationship between parents' characteristics and involvement in their child's behavioral plan at school. Some parents tend to use harsh and inconsistent discipline procedures at home increasing behavioral problems such as aggression, disruptive behaviors, and social problems. Researchers stated that low-income family practices, such as harsh discipline, are responsible for 30% to 40% of child's behavioral problems in early childhood. Also, the effect of family low income and low-level education attributed significantly to the child behavioral and emotional problems (Watkins, Pittman., & Walsh, 2013; Reinke et al., 2009).

Jackson and Panyan (2002) emphasized the importance of ecological models that aim to change a child's environment, institutions, and individuals. Partnership in service delivery includes training parents on how to apply positive behavioral intervention at home environment and also guiding them to the appropriate resources such as public social services and mental health that are the primary goals of an ecological perspective. Jackson et al., (2002) stated that there are several strategies to help parents of young children reduce their child's aggressive and disruptive behaviors. Schools play a great role in modeling interventions, videotaping groups, and facilitating home nursing visits during pregnancy or post-delivery.

School personnel emphasize behavioral intervention that is based on PBS that is building behavior intervention plan focuses on reinforcements, encouragement, and errorless teaching. Errorless teaching aims to reduce the child's frustration by providing cognitive tasks that the student can do successfully (Curtis Van Horne, Robertson, & Karvonen, M. (2010). Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is a behavioral approach that helps the school to implement consistent rules; consequences, encouragement, and positive reinforcement. This approach focuses on reinforcing positive behaviors when they occur rather than punishing the child for inappropriate behaviors (Jackson et al., 2002).

The role of parents in their child behavioral intervention plan is essential in which that they learn and apply specific strategies, follow up with the behavioral strategies at home, and provide a positive and safe environment for their children (Curtis et al., 2010). Family involvement has several advantages including but not limited to: enhancing spontaneity, generalization, and maintenance of the intervention, increasing parent's self-efficacy, and ensuring the consistency of the intervention. These findings highlighted the importance of valuing family sociocultural environments and daily routines when planning effective interventions (Lovaas, & Smith, 1989).

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the importance of collaboration between parents who have children at with/or at risk of behavioral problems and school personnel. The overall goal is to understand the communication between parents and school personnel so that parents can better work with their children.

The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. 2. What are the parent perceptions about their child's behavior problems?
2. How does mother perceive the strategies the schools provide them to help work with their children's challenging behavior?
  1. what are parents' perceptions toward collaboration with school personnel

## **Methodology**

This study is related to constructionism epistemology theory in which meaning is not discovered but constructed. In this study, the collaboration between parents who have children with/or at risk of behavioral problems and school personnel follows the constructionism perspective in which the meaning is created when individuals engage with each other (Crotty, 2003). Parents and educators collaborate on finding solutions to help children with behavioral problems be academically and socially successful. I believe that behavioral strategies and the support needed for success are generated from an individual's social experience, engaging, and interacting with relevant or similar problem behaviors. I used case study research in which I explored and described two cases that enabled me to investigate a phenomenon within a real-life context and examine complex behavioral and social phenomenon with multiple variables of potential importance to understand the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

## **Participants' selection criteria and sampling method**

The target population of the study was parents who have children with behavioral problems. The research did not involve schools. However, local educators helped me to identify qualifying parents who met the criteria selection of this study . The parents participants were selected based on two fundamental criteria: a) the parents have a child in an early childhood education, and b) the child exhibits behavioral problems in school setting that interfere with their academic and social competences as reported by their teachers or school *personnel*. The first participant is Kayla, who is a Caucasian mother. Her son is named Joe, and he is 6 years old foster child, with the adoption process underway, but not completed. In this case, the child has only been in the home for six months. Kayla seemed serious about dealing with her son's problem behaviors and were seeking different therapists to help him and understand him better. The problematic behaviors Joe exhibited, as reported by the school psychologist and classroom teacher were hitting others, being out of his seat during instructional time, disruptive behaviors such as shouting and screaming in the class when things does not go his way.

The second participant was Sara, who is a Latina single mother. Her son's name is Mathew, and he is 7 years old natural born child who exhibits problem behaviors. The problematic behaviors Mathew exhibited, as reported by the school psychologist and classroom teacher were hitting others, spitting, being out of his seat during instructional time, playing with dangerous stuff such as climbing the stair, opening the emergency doors..etc)

Sara does not worry about dealing with her son’s problem behaviors ; as she stated, this is just a phase that he is going through and will disappear as he grows up. She has three other children and works full time.

**Setting**

The study was conducted in the Northern part of Colorado. The interview was at the Greeley Public Library in a place that was appropriate for the interview process.

**Data collection methods**

Data collection was conducted through qualitative case study procedures. In this form of data collection, I contacted the participants through the school’s administrators, and I scheduled the appointments by phone. I interviewed the parents at Greeley Public Library. During the interview, these steps were followed:

1. Explain to the parents’ nature and the purpose of the study.
2. Obtain parents’ permission to participate in the study through consent form.
3. The data were obtained through one face- to- face interview with each parent.
  - a. Ask each parent six demographic questions( see the table below)
  - b. Ask each parent seven semi-structured open-ended interview questions( see the table below)
  - d. During each meeting, I took notes in a research journal to ensure a holistic experience during each interview, and these notes included body language, facial expressions, or feeling (Creswell, 2007).

The interview took approximately 30- 60 minutes. The interview questions were provided to parents to read during the interview, and the responses were tape-recorded.

<b>Demographic questions:</b>	<b>Interview questions</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How many children do you have?</li> <li>2. What is your marital status?</li> <li>3. How long has your child been in special education?</li> <li>4. Which grade level?</li> <li>5. How old is your child?</li> <li>6. What is his or her primary disability?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tell me the story about your child' behavioral problems?</li> <li>2. What kind of challenging behavior does your child exhibit?</li> <li>3. What behavioral strategies your child’s teacher has suggested?</li> <li>4. Were the schools suggestions or recommendations helpful to you?</li> <li>5. What other strategies, other than these, are you conducting at home that help control the challenging behaviors?</li> <li>6. Tell me about a time when the school supported you with your child' problem behaviors?</li> <li>7. What role do you have in designing your child Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) that is used in the school?</li> </ol>

### **Validity and Reliability**

I maximized the trustworthiness through triangulation (Merriam, 2009) by using multiple data sources ( such as interview, observation, checking students records) and comprehensive peer checks in which the constructed categories and interpretation fairness were verified based on peers agreement. To achieve credibility and dependability of the study, I kept track of the processes through an audit trail (Merriam, 2009).

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis directly addressed my three research questions by describing, comparing, and contrasting parents' responses. I investigated the similarities and differences attempting to deduce common themes when they seemed to exist. The data was analyzed by transcribing the audiotapes of the parents' responses, and their perceptions of working with their children with challenging behaviors. The data was categorized based on the posed research questions as follows: parents' perceptions about their child's behavior problems, parents' perceptions of the strategies provided by schools to help work with their children's challenging behaviors, and parents' perceptions about receiving support from school personnel. Because the categories were organized according to the research questions, this is a form of the inferential process (Merriam, 2007).

### **Findings and Discussion**

Collaboration between parents and professionals is vital to success in designing and implementing strategies of intervention and providing support that helps reduce problem behaviors (Dunlap & Fox, 2007). The findings of this research demonstrated the importance of parent-professional partnership as an integral element of successful teaching practice and family well-being.

I constructed the findings based on the responses to the research questions posed for the study: parents' perceptions of their child's behavior problems and strategies that the school use with their children, and parents' perceptions about the support they receive from the school personnel. For the last category, three themes emerged based on the data: parent-professional partnerships and challenging behaviors, services and resources, and parents' involvement in designing and implementing behavioral strategies.

### **Parents' perceptions of their child's behavior problems**

Both parent participants brought up some similar descriptions of behavioral problems, such as out of seat behavior, inappropriate language, and not following directions which were consistent with Choate (2004) who described that children with behavioral problems as children who their behaviors interfere with their learning and the learning of others. In line with



Choate, the participants shared that their children exhibited behavioral problems that lower their academic performance, difficulty staying on task or following directions, becoming agitated when they encounter difficult tasks or are more likely to withdraw or be disruptive.

In addition to similarities, there were a lot of differences in their perceptions of their child's behavioral problems. Kayla viewed Joe's behaviors as serious problems needing to be addressed immediately. She stated that Jos' "primary disability is emotional. He has posttraumatic stress disorder, and he has an attachment disorder. The problem behaviors he exhibits are serious and should be immediately considered because it is going to be difficult to deal with as he grows up." On the other hand, Sara seemed to be in denial that Mathew has a problem. Sara felt that Mathew's behaviors were just a temporary phase and that he would eventually outgrow the problem behaviors. Sara specified, "We've just been having issues with him jumping around stuff. Not listening and all that stuff. So it's not so much that he can't hear you or anything like that. He's just not listening. The problem here was that he was opening the emergency door in school a lot to the point that he got sent home because he wouldn't listen on not opening the door. And I'm like, well that's a problem because at home when somebody knocks he runs away from the door. He never goes to the door, and it is opening the emergency door] proceeded for about a week and then he's been doing fine. He's been doing fine now. So I don't know if it was just a phase that he was going through or just because his friends were doing it." Dunlup et al., (2007) explained this phenomenon of denial in that parents might see some aspect of the behavioral problems as humiliating or evidence in bad parenting. Therefore, they deny the problem or giving it excuses.

Based on the obtained demographic information, a possible reason for this disparity in parental perception may be that Kayla's son is a foster child, with the adoption process underway, but not completed. In this case, the child has only been in the home for six months. However, Sara's son is a natural born child, and the parent may feel more protective and less objective about your child's behavior. This might be explained by that the mother does not have enough knowledge about this condition or she is under stress.

### **Parents' perceptions of the strategies provided by schools to help work with their children's challenging behavior**

The school personnel agreed to use behavioral intervention strategies such as timeout, positive reinforcements, response cost, behavioral contract, and ignorance of disruptive behaviors. Although Sara and Kayla expressed satisfaction with all of the above behavioral intervention strategies, with the approach of time out, there were some significant differences between the

two parents. Even in discussing satisfaction, Kayla related that she was not only satisfied with the strategies but also agreed with the teacher to use the same strategy for a specified behavior. She used a coupon system, which was applied for positive behavior support in which the child earns a coupon each time he exhibits positive behavior. After collecting a certain number of coupons, the child will be rewarded for choosing a prize in exchange for coupons earned, whereas Sara also expressed satisfaction about the strategy the school had been using such as response cost that is based on awarding the student a certain number of tokens with no conditions committed. Throughout the monitoring period, the student has to withdraw a token whenever he displays inappropriate behaviors (These behaviors would usually have been agreed upon in advance).

Both Kayla and Sara expressed satisfaction regarding these behavioral intervention developed by the school, however, they tended to focus more on punitive strategies (time out) as part of their instruction at home setting. In fact, Using punitive strategies does not comply with the research emphasis on using positive behavior support. Many research studies emphasized on using Positive Behavior Support (PBS) focuses on reinforcing positive behaviors when they occur rather than punishing the child for inappropriate behaviors which had a positive impact on the behavioral change and the child's emotional development (Jackson et al, 2002, Kushnir, & Sadeh, 2010, Lösel, & Stemmler, 2012, ).

### **Parents' perceptions about receiving support from school personnel**

Regarding the satisfaction about the strategies provided by the school personnel, Sara was passive about the strategies used by the school, and although she was satisfied with the strategies and interventions, these were all related to negative behavior; there was no mention of using any positive behavior support for approved behavior.

Parent-professional partnerships and challenging behaviors. There, in fact, were no similarities between Kayla's and Sara's insight about receiving support from school personnel. Again, Kayla was much more actively involved in collaboration and communication between parent and school, which is aligned with the Banks et al., (2009). They stated that early intervention is critical for dealing with the problems at a young age will help to reduce the issues, and make these children more included and accepted in society. Children with behavioral problems need support at home and school to increase their acceptance. The collaboration on implementing the behavioral strategies is the consistency, which requires an active partnership between the school and home. The key success of the behavioral intervention plan is the consistency in applying the strategies. Therefore, providing

parents with support is essential to help them implement the same strategies at home ( Banks et al., 2009).

Sara, however, didn't want to be involved. She stated that because she was a single parent with three children, she felt a lot of pressure. Also, she works full time and does not want to be perceived as a bad mother. Research indicates the importance of parental support and problems associated with the lack of this support. Eater-Deckard, et al. (2009) demonstrated the effect of household chaos in children's social-emotional and cognitive development. Household chaos includes noise, lack of family routines or schedule, crowds, and divorce. Researchers in this study investigated possible factors related to the family structures and functioning that negatively affect the child's conduct problems and IQ. They stated that socioeconomic status, parent stress, and mental depression contributed significantly to the child's emotional and behavioral development (Eater-Deckard, et al., 2009).

Services and resources is another type of support that both parents agree in receiving from the school is outside referral services (counseling groups, various therapists) to help their children improve. Kayla receives support from different therapists such as occupational therapy, psychologist, and pediatric chiropractor. Also, Sara received a suggestion from the school administrator to attend counseling sessions that were held in the child's school about how to deal with problem behaviors.

In terms of parent-professional partnerships and challenging behaviors, Parents' involvement in designing and implementing behavioral strategies. There certainly were no similarities between the parents' perceptions about being involved in designing and implementing behavioral strategies. Kayla was much more actively involved in collaboration and communication with the school; she stated that "Well, I'm going to have to be the primary person who designs that plan because I know my child better than anybody. And I know from the education standpoint that's my right as a parent, and they have to do that for me. They have to listen to what I have to say, and they have to listen to what the therapist has to say, and they have to go by whatever plan we put in place." This statement is supported in the literature by Dunlap et al., (2007). Researchers demonstrated the importance of parent involvement in the behavioral support process, the parents have unique knowledge about their children and have in-depth information about their children's histories and preferences. Most importantly, parents understand their children's behavioral patterns in various ecological contexts. This information can significantly contribute to the process of functional assessment and developing reasonable behavioral intervention strategies (Dunlap et al., 2007). In contrast, Sara revealed satisfaction about the strategies chosen by the school and did not seem interested in following

up with her kid's behaviors at school and she preferred to pick him up when she gets called from the school about him exhibiting outrageous behaviors. She stated that "Usually I pick him up when he has a bad day, I talk to him before we leave the school, so he knows I am talking about here (the school). Because by the time, especially with the kid's attention span, by the time we get home it's like, "What are you talking about?", So I do address the issue before we even leave the door. We get to the house, and we sit down, and we talk about it right away such as how was your day? And every so often during the day and whatever, "You didn't do very well, you got sent where? Why did you get sent for this?"

### **Conclusion:**

It has been recognized that the presence of problem behaviors can negatively affect the lives of children and their parents. Children with problem behaviors exhibit academic and social failure that tend to escalate as the child moves to higher-grade levels. Therefore, providing parents with the support that will help them deal with their children's problem behaviors is essential, especially at as early an age as possible. Collaboration between parents and school personnel in designing and implementing behavioral intervention strategies is a precious ingredient to promote a safe environment (Dunlap et al., 2007). This research revealed parents' perceptions of their child's behavior problems, parents' perceptions of the strategies provided by schools to help work with their children's challenging behavior, and parents' perceptions about receiving support from school personnel. Parents' responses were relatively consistent with the literature, which contributes in-depth understanding about the importance of collaboration between parents who have children with behavioral problems and schools. Based on parents' responses to the interview questions, I believe that the following recommendations will enhance successful collaborative parent-professional communication, commitment, equality, skills, trust, and respect. These are excellent suggestions to facilitate partnerships between parents and school personnel. It is recommended that partnerships should be highly structured, and written out to facilitate clarification and understanding which is aligned with Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, & Nelson et al., (2007).

Nevertheless, future research is needed to investigate teachers' perspectives about the importance of collaboration with parents who have children with behavioral problems. Moreover, examining the partnership in the context of an extensive eco-cultural system is critical to enhancing and build positive collaborative relationships.

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