Module Summary

In this module, teachers will:
- Develop an operational definition of student misbehavior.
- Explore reasons why teachers sometimes fail to respond to misbehavior effectively.
- Diagnose possible causes of student misbehavior, and plan interventions that address those causes.

Module activities:
In this module, teachers learn how to identify root causes of a misbehavior by identifying when it occurs and considering the function it may serve for a student. They then learn how to identify responses and interventions that address the causes of misbehavior they identified.

Key Takeaways

Essential knowledge:
Misbehavior is any behavior that interferes with the learning or well-being of either the student him or herself, or someone else. In order for any response to misbehavior to be effective, it must address the underlying cause. One way to begin identifying causes of a given misbehavior is to consider the function it serves for a student. For example, a student might commit a behavior in order to…
- Escape boredom
- Obtain attention
- Avoid a task
- Escape embarrassment or save face
- Express frustration
- Distance him or herself from a teacher he or she perceives as uncaring

The function of a behavior is closely linked to its cause. Some common causes of student misbehavior are:
- Unclear directions
- Unclear rules or expectations
- Problems in the teacher-student relationship
- Low investment, motivation, or engagement

Essential skill:
In order for any response to misbehavior to be effective, it must address the behavior’s underlying cause. Punishments that are disconnected from the root cause of the misbehavior may result in temporary compliance, but fail to fix the problem in the long term. For example, if a student is acting out because he is bored and not challenged, then assigning him detention is unlikely to prevent the problem from happening in the future. In fact, simply assigning punishments without seeking to understand the student (or his or her behavior) may foster resentment and ultimately damage the teacher-student relationship.

Essential mindset:
Teachers have a huge effect on student behavior. In fact, students may sometimes choose not to follow the rules of a teacher that they perceive to be uncaring or disrespectful. For this reason, when teachers work to understand the causes of a student’s misbehavior, they should consider their own actions toward (and interactions with) the student. Misbehavior almost always serves a function for a student. Understanding this function can help teachers develop interventions that will meet the student’s needs (for peer/adult attention, for academic support, etc.) while also helping him or her to behave in more positive and productive ways.
The Skill in Action

Teachers who have internalized the skills of this module will constantly seek to understand why a student is misbehaving. In addition, the teacher will consider ways in which he or she may be (unintentionally) contributing to the misbehavior.

Teachers who have not internalized the skills of this module may have blame students for their misbehavior (e.g. "Patrick just doesn’t care."). In these cases, the teacher may be more focused on giving the students punishments for the misbehavior than in trying to understand its causes.

The resource that accompanies this module walks teachers through the process of identifying when a misbehavior occurs, its possible functions and causes, and aligned interventions.

Questions for Discussion

The following is a list of suggested questions for engaging in a reflective dialogue with the teacher, either before or after he or she attempts to implement the skill.

- How would you define misbehavior?
- Why is it important to understand the causes of a misbehavior?
- In what ways can teachers contribute to student misbehavior?
- Based on the information from the module, can you identify any common causes for some of the misbehaviors you see in your own classroom?
- Think of a student who has posed behavior challenges for you. What possible causes may underlie his or her behavior? Based on these causes, what interventions make the most sense?
- What additional help might you need in identifying causes and aligned responses to misbehavior? Would it be helpful to observe or videotape your classroom?

Coaching Moves

Situation: A student continues to commit the same misbehavior, despite the teacher’s various attempts to address it.

Ask:
- When does the behavior most often occur?
- What function does the behavior serve for the student?
- How does your response to the misbehavior address its cause(s) and/or function(s)?
- How does this behavior affect other students in the class?

Suggest:
- Use the Diagnosing Causes of Misbehavior Resource (attached at the end of this guide) to identify possible causes and aligned interventions.
- Choose an intervention to apply for a given period of time, observe how the student responds, then adjust.

Standards

InTASC: (3a) – The teacher collaborates with learners, families, and colleagues to build a safe, positive learning climate of openness, mutual respect, support, and inquiry.