

DEFINING PROBLEM BEHAVIORS

Purpose: To provide clear definitions of problem behaviors and consistency in the identification of, and in response to, problem behavior. Two categories or levels of problem behavior are identified; Major, or Office-Handled behaviors, and Minor, or Staff-Handled behaviors. Most, but not all, problem behavior categories have both a Major and a Minor level.

Tips and Guidelines:

- Define Major as “Office-Handled” behavior; Minor as “Staff-Handled” behavior
- Look at the definition examples provided in this section of the manual
- If you are planning to use SWIS as your data gathering system, refer to the SWIS definition categories and stay as close to these category labels as possible (you can use your own definition, but the category labels like “fighting / physical aggression” are constant in the SWIS system)
- Explore the SWIS web-site (www.swis.org) and log-in to the demonstration site (username: EBS; Password: EBS)
- Most categories of behavior have a Major and a Minor level, but not all do. You can decide if a certain behavior category in your school is *always* office-handled or if there is a milder version of the behavior that would be staff-handled
- Defining behaviors is difficult because you will discover ‘grey’ areas and you will have differences in tolerance and values among your staff
 - Do your best to get staff input regarding problem behavior definitions
 - Work out staff differences as best you can (e.g. What is a swear?), but ultimately try to find something that all can live with
 - Know that defining problem behavior is an on-going process that has an outcome of getting people closer and closer to the ‘same page’
- When defining Majors, think about those behaviors that IF they happen, they should ALWAYS be handled through the office discipline system
- PRESCHOOLS typically do not have the same ‘office’ referral process as other education levels – refer to preschool examples for definitions and problem behavior response flowcharts that are more applicable to early education systems
- When differentiating Minors from Majors, consider the following variables:
 - Frequency or repeated minor (how many Minors within what length of time would constitute a Major)
 - Duration (e.g. ‘sustained loud noise’)
 - Intensity (sometimes the intensity of the behavior determines the level)
 - Intent (sometimes the child’s intention is a factor in determining level)
 - Injury / Safety (sometimes the result of a minor is severe, requiring a different level of response)
- PRACTICE definitions through role plays in staff meetings. Practice recognition of Major vs. Minor and what to do in response (including providing the data)