



Key points:

- **Break down challenging behaviors child should monitor**
- **Display visual supports to help child engage in appropriate conduct**
- **Involve families in helping kids monitor their behaviors outside school**

Encourage children to monitor their own challenging behaviors

Most children with [autism](#) thrive on following rules. This is why engaging them in self-monitoring their own challenging behavior can often be very effective in improving their conduct.

Give kids the tools to be able to monitor their own behavior while also building in accountability so you can recognize when they need intervention and reinforcement.

"A lot of interventions in school settings are teacher-directed," said Jamie Salter, a special education program specialist at the [North Coastal Consortium for Special Education](#) in San Marcos, Calif. "But there is so much research showing that [when] kids are able to rate their own behavior, you see a faster trajectory of behavior change and more generalization across settings. This ultimately leads to a better quality of life and self-empowerment."

Salter and Katharine Croce, a program coordinator at [Bucks County \(Pa.\) Intermediate Unit #22](#), developed the [Self & Match System](#) to help kids contribute to their own behavioral intervention.

Consider these features of the Self & Match System and how you might implement them in your district:

- **Develop personalized self-monitoring sheet:** Bring together teachers, parents, related service providers, and, when possible, the child to discuss which challenging behaviors the kid needs to improve and how to phrase and illustrate his behavioral goals on his self-monitoring sheet, Salter said. Each question and visual representation on the sheet should serve as a reminder for the child of what is expected of him. So instead of asking, "Did I call out in class?", for example, the sheet should ask, "Did I use a quiet voice in the classroom?" and have a picture of a child holding his index finger to his mouth in the "Shh" gesture. Decide how often the child will rate his own behavior by circling "Yes" and "No" responses or happy and sad face symbols. Teachers will rate the child's conduct after he does.

Ensure everyone understands the point system. The child receives two points if he and his teacher agree on his appropriate behavior at a certain point during the day. But if the kid circles "No" in response to a question about his following directions, and the teacher agrees that the child failed to follow directions, the child only earns a point for being honest and matching his teacher's appraisal. "The student gets a point for being honest and reflecting on his behavior," Salter said. If the child circles "Yes" despite misbehaving, he receives no points.

- **Offer visual supports:** Hang charts on the wall to illustrate your expectations for the students, Salter said. For example, briefly explain or depict in pictures what following directions and what not following directions looks like. "Students with autism thrive on having very clear rules and structures," she said. Also develop social narratives for children so they can learn and follow the steps involved in, for example, being respectful, such as raising their hand and waiting for the teacher to call on them before speaking in class, said Croce.

- **Select reinforcers:** Involve children in choosing their rewards for meeting their point goals, Croce said. A child may want to tell a joke in front of the classroom, read a favorite book for a short period, or take a brief walk outside the classroom.

"Make the reward motivating for the child," she said. "If the student does really well with a question and shows an improvement in behavior, you can change and monitor another behavior. We can make it more challenging for students based on their success."

You can also change the level of success you expect the child to achieve, Croce said. For example, you may start with a certain level of success as a goal so the student feels motivated to come to school, then gradually raise the criteria for him to earn rewards.

"We start with baby steps, then systematically raise the bar," Salter said.

- **Collaborate with parents:** Encourage families to support their child as she monitors her own behavior at home and in the community to help her generalize appropriate conduct across various settings, Croce said.

"We try to use similar language whenever possible," she said. "Students thrive on having clear expectations in so many settings. We had a kiddo who was at a restaurant and saw another kid acting out. He told his mom, 'That kid needs to go Self & Match.'"

Salter and Croce spoke about these issues at the 42nd Annual Convention of the [Association for Behavior Analysis International](#).

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