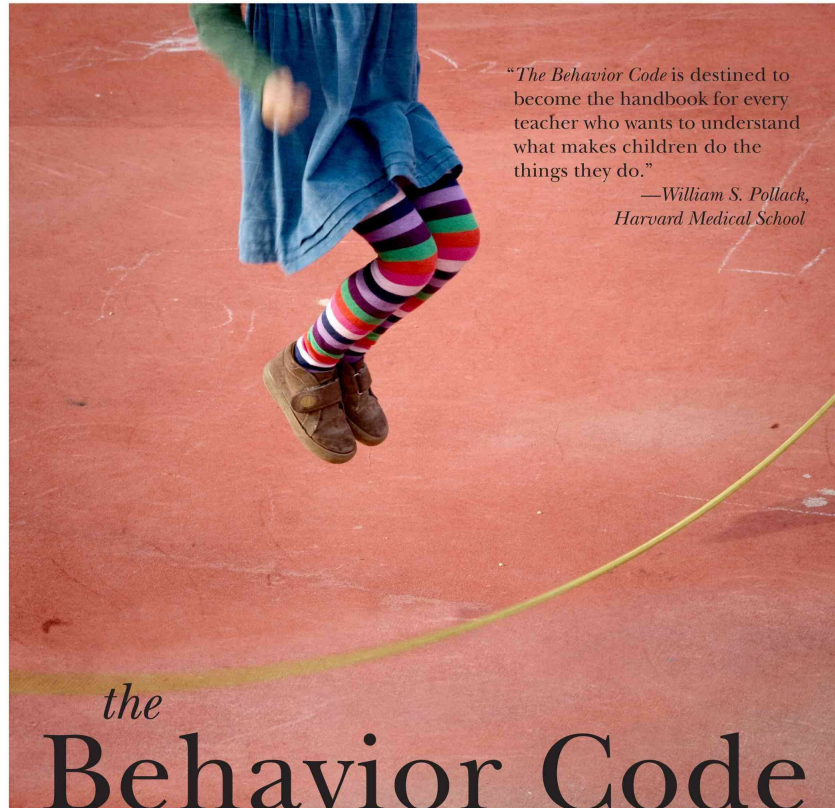


# Behavior Code Notes and Suggestions for Anxious Students



*"The Behavior Code is destined to become the handbook for every teacher who wants to understand what makes children do the things they do."*

*—William S. Pollack,  
Harvard Medical School*

## *the* Behavior Code

A Practical Guide to Understanding and  
Teaching the Most Challenging Students

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## *General Information*

- Students with anxiety are highly unpredictable. But understanding their triggers is helpful for adults so they can monitor their own response to triggering situations.
- Students with anxiety need accommodations. They also need direct instruction in learning flexible thinking, executive functioning, frustration tolerance, social skills, self-advocacy, positive thinking, self regulation (knowing when to recognize mild feelings and immediately self clam), and self-monitoring.
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is the most effective intervention for counselors and psychologists to implement

## ***General Strategies/Accommodations***

- Students with anxiety perform best with structure and consistency. Give previews of upcoming/later activities, particularly triggering activities. Tell the student the how, when, where, how long etc. The more info the better.
- Give choices to promote feelings of control.
- For transitions, give natural stopping points (e.g. at the end of the chapter, one more round, one more video) and give expectations for next activity (e.g., we will be sitting on the rug and using a 0 voice level).
- Never remove routine or demands. If removed, do only for a short period of time. Can be extremely difficult to reintroduce. When reintroduced, it needs to be done slowly and consistently to promote habituation.
- Traditional behavior plans for appropriate behavior do not work. Instead reward for the use of strategies that ease anxiety (calm down or self-regulation tools, asking for help, verbalizing feelings, etc.)
- Use visual timers to help the student manage and understand time of stressful activities. Can be found on apps and online. Many students think their triggering activities are much longer than they are because they are too young to understand time.
- Access to scales to help student identify emotions (zones

program) -- teachers should assist students by labeling the student's emotion and body clues throughout the day and doing regular feelings or body checks.

- Create positive power cards that fit in student's pocket and include a picture and a positive thought. " I can do it. It's going to be ok like always."
- **Writing strategies (often a triggering situation):** visuals instead of graphic organizers for idea development, word processing, frequently used word cards for spelling, encouraging to tap out word for spelling, checklist of writing weakness and corresponding strategies for visual help.
- **General academic strategies:** chunking large amounts of work and giving small amounts of work at a time, give choices, preview non- preferred work expected later in the day, limited/alternative assigned homework, encourage students to express their need to leave a stressful situation and ask for a break as a replacement for inappropriate behavior.

## *Break Strategies*

- For specific anxiety provoking situations consider giving a break before, during, and/or after. Breaks can include any activity, including play, as long as the breaks are not allowing the student to escape the anxiety provoking situation. Taking advantage of break time can happen but usually subsides after 2 weeks. It can also be advantageous, as the student is practicing asking for a break and taking a break and learning that breaks are positive. Breaks can be reduced thoughtfully only after 6 weeks of positive behavior.
- Anxiety reducing breaks in stressful situations should be provided early (scheduled if appropriate) and be non-contingent on behavior.
- Access to calming tools and strategies (break space, putty, puzzles, exercise, yoga, weighted blanket, music, headphones, blankets, stuffed animals or small figures). These ideally should be practiced once to twice a day. Have student simulate anxiety symptoms before practice (increased heart rate/heavy breathing/shaking).

***Interaction strategies (how you interact with student- just as important!)***

- Build a relationship immediately
- Provide regular check ins
- Check-in when any change in behavior is noticed
- Provide rewards and praise during unexpected times to build self esteem
- Provide leadership/helping roles when possible
- During inappropriate behavior: use concise language as too much language is anxiety provoking, make empowering statements to ensure student that they can handle the situation.