

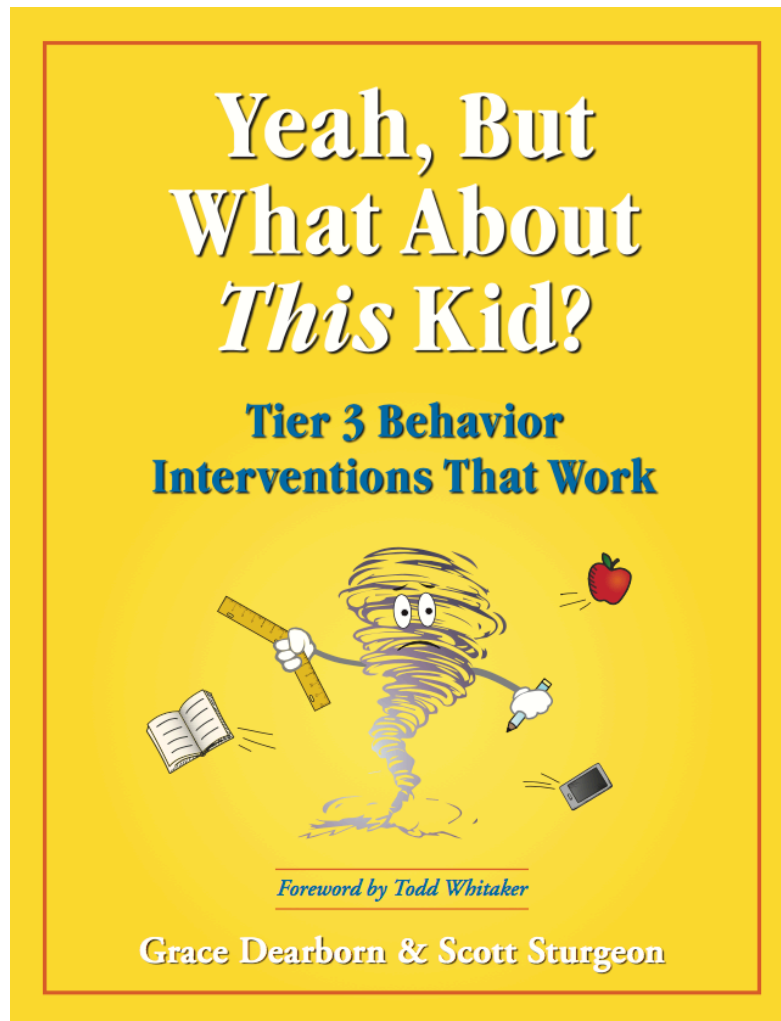


## Excerpt from “Yeah, But What About This Kid?”

Chapter 5: One-On-One Interventions

Pages 144-156, Swaddle Interventions

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*“Longtime habits are literally entrenched at the neural level...It’s much easier to start doing something new than to stop doing something habitual....”*

— ELLIOT BERKMAN, PROFESSOR OF  
PSYCHOLOGY AND NEUROSCIENCE

## Swaddling Interventions

When newborn babies get emotionally triggered or upset, they cannot calm themselves. Swaddling—snugly wrapping a baby in a blanket—is a common way to provide the security and warmth the baby needs to calm down. When used in combination with other interventions, such as bouncing and shushing and giving them something to suck on, swaddling is one of the most efficient and effective ways to calm an outraged infant. The beautiful thing about swaddling is that it’s firm but soft at the same time. It allows the infant to wiggle and push and fight and express their frustration, while still

holding them safely and softly within a clear boundary. This is why “swaddling” makes for an excellent metaphor for how to design an effective one-on-one intervention plan with students exhibiting Tier 3 behaviors. In a literal swaddle, the boundary is the blanket and the reinforcement comes from the tightness with which it’s wrapped around the infant. In a metaphorical swaddle, the boundary is a stated behavioral norm that the student needs to follow, and the reinforcement comes from the consequences and incentives attached to following it.

The goal of a “swaddle intervention” is to create a structured behavioral plan in which a student can struggle but still be held accountable, as they attempt to change their behavior. Just as a literal swaddle involves two people, a parent and a child, a swaddle intervention involves two people, a teacher and a student. A variation of the swaddle intervention, called the “village intervention,” includes multiple adults and is used when a swaddle intervention proves to be ineffective. The village intervention will be described later in this chapter.



### A Closer Look

Changing a chronic behavior begins with choosing and practicing a replacement behavior for a minimum of 30 days.

Swaddle intervention plans, although in some ways similar to IEPs and BIPs, are significantly different from these more traditional intervention plans in critical ways. The most important differences are that swaddle plans always focus on breaking only a single, discrete behavior over a long period of time—and the student will have some say in what the plan looks like. Also, everything in a swaddle plan will be observable and trackable. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a swaddle plan includes the teacher’s committing to their own behavioral changes as well.

In Appendix B, we have included some sample elementary and secondary swaddle interventions that were run successfully with real students. You also will find some blank planning guides and templates to help you to create your first swaddle intervention. But first, below are descriptions and explanations of the four phases.



### A Closer Look

Swaddle plans always focus on altering only a single, discrete behavior over a long period of time.

Effective behavioral boundaries are like a swaddling blanket in that they are simultaneously firm and flexible.



### Swaddle Phase 1: Pre-Planning

Before meeting with the student about the intervention, find out if they have an IEP, a 504 Plan, or any other support plan or services already in place. If so, know what each of these supports is and what accommodations, modifications, or resources it specifies. Next, rough out a possible plan of support that eventually will be suitable to share with the student. Decide on what accommodations you want to try, how you will track them, and what incentives you might offer to help the student to buy in. These are all just rough ideas, though. Nothing is written in stone at this point, as much of it will likely change once the student is brought into the conversation. Pre-planning will include:

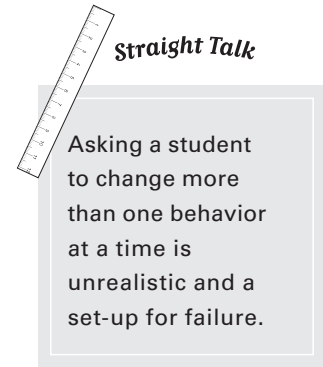
1. **Assume the best.** As discussed in Chapter 2, misbehavior can be perceived as disrespect and disinterest, or it can be perceived as a request for help. Choose to perceive it as a request for help. Consider what the Invisible Subtitle might be for the student. This is essential in setting the right tone for your interactions with the student and establishing a dynamic that's most likely to succeed.
2. **Choose a single focus.** The student might have demonstrated multiple behaviors that need changing, but asking them to change more than one at a time is unrealistic and a set-up for failure. Initially, limit your focus to only one of their unproductive behaviors, and let the others go. Choose a behavior that the student can realistically address, one that if addressed, will immediately provide them with a sense of accomplishment. For example, put their focus on coming quietly into class and sitting in their assigned seat, even if they still come in late and unprepared. Or focus on their removing themselves to a specific location in the classroom when they get upset, even if they still explode, grumble, and are disruptive all the way there and after they arrive.
  - ▲ **Be realistic.** You are not likely to see overnight change if you ask a blurter to stop calling out, a wanderer to stop getting up from their seat, or a volatile student to stop being explosive and confrontational. Your intervention plan has

to begin with a small, realistic “stepping-stone goal” that is totally achievable in the first day or week. Over a series of weeks, you move toward larger and larger goals, until you reach an acceptable new behavior. But in the beginning, start small. If the student can't taste success in the first few days, they will never really buy into the process.

- ▲ **Be concrete.** Make sure you choose something observable and trackable. Making the goal “Be respectful to adults,” or “Follow directions” is too vague. A more specific goal might be “Comply without verbal comment when asked to take out materials,” or “Move without speaking when asked to sit in a specific place.”

Here is a list of common behaviors that Tier 3 swaddle interventions might focus on:

- Not yelling at/threatening/intimidating peers.
  - Remaining in seat during direct instruction.
  - Remaining in seat during independent work.
  - Complying with simple requests, without arguing.
  - Staying in the classroom unless given permission to leave.
  - Not hitting/biting/pushing/touching others.
  - Raising hand to answer questions or ask for help, instead of blurting.
  - Not talking while the teacher is talking.
  - Staying silently on task for 10 minutes or more.
  - Entering room quietly and getting immediately to work.
3. **Create a preliminary plan.**
    - ▲ **Outline a rough plan.** Decide what accommodations can be made to help the student to reduce a negative behavior and practice a replacement behavior. Create short- and long-



term goals. Keep them specific and achievable. Decide on a series of possible incentives you might offer and how they'll be both earned and tracked. The most important thing is to have a series of stepping-stone goals that over time get more difficult, or require more from the student, until ultimately a replacement behavior has been established. The initial goal cannot be to achieve the replacement behavior. That's the ultimate goal. The student needs smaller, easier, stepping-stone goals to achieve on the way there.

- ▲ **Create a tracking system.** Think explicitly about how you want to track the student's progress and how they will be able to earn rewards. Will you have a chart on their desk where they self-track their successes and failures? Or will you have them track only successes? Or will you be tracking the information yourself? How can you make this simple and easy?
- ▲ **Create consequences.** Supporting a student in creating a replacement behavior does not mean that they are now free to misbehave without consequence. Support requires care and structure, but it also requires boundaries. It requires consequences for crossing those boundaries. However, the consequences you use during an intervention might be different from those you typically use, or you might apply them differently. For example, if an ongoing, disruptive, or unacceptable behavior usually results in your taking recess away or assigning detention, then during the intervention plan you might choose a different consequence. Or you might modify your use of the consequence by having the student work with you during recess, lunch, or after school. The focus of the "revised detention" would be to work with you on their intervention plan and practice their replacement behavior, instead of just having them sit in silence or complete academic work.
- ▲ **Choose incentives.** Decide on some incentives that might work to help motivate the student and reward them for their efforts. Make sure you have some ideas for both small and

large incentives, so you can stagger them and attach larger incentives to larger successes as time goes on. The first incentive should be attached to a simple, short-term goal. This is usually something that lasts less than a school day, and often less than a class period—and it should earn the student a small incentive on the first day, if possible. Incentives only work if students can taste them, and thus begin to internalize the connection between their choices and the fruits that follow.

- ▲ **You change, too.** Think about how you will support the student in following the plan and what you intend to do differently as part of that support. Remember: kids don't change until adults change first. For example, you might make one or more of the following commitments:

- I won't yell at you or raise my voice with you.
- I will use nonverbal signals to redirect your behavior or remind you to follow the intervention plan.
- I won't keep you in at recess or assign you to lunch detention.
- I will provide you with all necessary materials in class.
- I won't assign you homework.
- I will check in with you daily to champion your progress and set goals for the next day.
- I won't ignore you or your disruptive behavior.
- I will stay calm and kind when redirecting your behavior or giving you a consequence.
- I will always offer you an explicit choice to follow my instructions or receive a specific consequence, before giving you that consequence.



#### A Closer Look

Your intervention plan has to begin with a small, realistic "stepping-stone goal" that is totally achievable in the first day or week.

- I won't give up on you, or the plan, even when we have a bad day.
- I will remind you that bad days and small failures are all part of the process, and they don't mean that we aren't making progress.

### Swaddle Phase 2: Share the Plan

Once you have a rough plan worked out, meet privately with the student to share it. This meeting might also include another adult, such as the principal or a special-ed teacher, depending on the situation and your relationship with the student. Get the student's input and ultimately their commitment. This phase includes:

- ▲ **Share the plan with the student.** Start by expressing concern—for the student as a human being, rather than the student's performance or progress in school. Invite their feedback on the request (replacement behavior), the supports (accommodations that will help), the tracking system, the incentives, the consequences, and the ways in which you will change. Be open and ready to make reasonable alterations to any or all of these based on the student's input.
- ▲ **Commit to trying the plan for one week.** Be explicit with the student about how you will support them in following the plan for the first week, how you will be tracking it, how they earn their first reward, and what you will be doing differently that week, as well. Get them to commit to try. If you can't get them to acknowledge that they will try, then assume the best, read the Invisible Subtitle, and move forward. For example, to the student who remains silent or belligerently says things like, "You can do whatever you want, I don't care," you can respond with, "Even though you haven't said you're ready to try, I believe we can make this work. I care too much about you to let things continue the way they are. So we will start tomorrow. I'm looking forward to it."



#### A Closer Look

The consequences you use during an intervention might be different from those you typically use, or you might apply them differently.

- ▲ **Practice together.** If the student is not completely shut down, then practice or role-play some scenarios where they would need to follow the plan. Go through the motions with them, and try to get them to "play their part." Be sure you have created total clarity. If they are too resistant to role-play with you, then you can model for them the wrong way and right way to follow the plan. They might pretend to not watch or listen. That's okay. Trust that it's helping anyway.



#### Straight Talk

Kids don't change until adults change first.

### Swaddle Phase 3: Implementation

Put the plan into effect in real time in the classroom for one week.

- ▲ **Set the stage for success.** Catch the student at the beginning of class on Day 1 of the intervention to remind them of the plan. Tell them that you are on their side and excited to make a first attempt with them.
- ▲ **Debrief every day if possible.** The student needs ongoing feedback about how they are doing. After tracking their behavior as agreed, share and debrief with them daily, if possible, even if it's just a one-minute conversation at the end of the period (secondary) or after recess/lunch and again at the end of the day (elementary). Or, maybe provide a note that acknowledges successes and challenges, and optimistically sets the goal for the next day. Keep these conversations and/or communications light and positive!
- ▲ **Give rewards immediately.** As the student reaches the first stepping-stone goal, provide them with their first reward on the spot. If at all possible, make their first goal so simple that they could receive a small reward the first or second day.
- ▲ **Don't punish kids when they struggle.** Breaking a chronic behavior is tough. At first, you might see some real progress as the extra attention and the earning of small rewards gives the student a boost of motivation. But there will also be

**Bright Idea**

When running an intervention, debrief with the student daily, even if it's just a one-minute conversation.

bad days, or days when the newness has worn off, and the student needs to know that this is to be expected. They need to know that fluctuations in performance are normal, okay with you, and don't mean they have failed or that they can't get back on track. If they act out on a bad day and end up with a consequence, be sure to debrief later. Offer a clean slate and your renewed support. Alternately, kids might initially resist the intervention and end up in the office or even suspended from class—some do this multiple times in the first and second weeks. This does not mean the intervention isn't working. Again, it is incredibly difficult to change a habitual behavior. Some kids cannot do it immediately. Some need to feel the sting of the new consequences before they believe that you are serious about following the plan and holding them accountable, especially if you have not consistently held them accountable for the behavior in the past. FYI: Letting it be okay that a student fails sometimes does NOT mean letting them get away with disruptive behavior. It means holding them consistently accountable in a firm but gentle way, while simultaneously, encouraging them to work toward the replacement behavior. It means not getting upset, not blaming the student, and not giving up.

#### Swaddle Phase 4: Reflection, Revision, & Re-Commitment

- ▲ **Reflect and revise the plan.** After the first week, review with the student what progress has been made. Daily check-ins can be as small as just catching their eye and giving them a thumbs up for the day. But weekly debriefs should include a private sit-down to make alterations for greater success, discuss roadblocks to success, or celebrate existing successes. Ask the student how they think the plan is working. Be open to making revisions based on their feedback and/or your experience. Create clarity about how the plan will be implemented in the next week, especially

if any modifications are being made. If you make changes to the plan, then practice together again. Be sure that the student knows what you're asking them to do. Be sure that you understand what the student is asking you to do. Be clear about what changes you expect before they can earn rewards. Depending on how the first week went, you might make the plan easier or harder. Stay positive, even if the first week was rough. It's all part of the process.

- ▲ **Re-commit for another week.** Thank the student for their efforts, no matter how small. Without blame, share where you feel challenged. Speak from a place of care and kindness, and keep it brief. Just a few sentences. "This was a hard week for me. It was hard for me to see you struggle and also to hold you accountable when you went too far. But I know it was in your best interest, and I feel good about what we're trying to do together." Verbally commit to trying again the following week. Just as before, try to get a verbal or physical commitment from the student. If they resist, fall back on your positive assumptions about them and the process. You might say, "I know this week was hard for you. But I'm proud of the small success you had, and I'm looking forward to next week." Or, "I know it felt like nothing went better this week and our plan isn't working. But change is hard and takes time, and everybody learns at different speeds. I know we will get there. I'm looking forward to trying again next week."

**A Closer Look**

Stay positive, even if the first week was rough.

- ▲ **Plan for six weeks.** Chronic, inappropriate behaviors are often unconscious coping mechanisms that have developed over time in reaction to ongoing traumatic experiences or environments. Making a change, even one for the "better," involves giving up the behaviors that have served to self-protect and self-soothe. Consequently, the student most likely will go back to those behaviors, at least sometimes in



### Food for Thought

Making a change, even one for the “better,” involves giving up the behaviors that have served to self-protect and self-soothe.

the beginning, when self-soothing and protection are needed. That’s one reason why it takes time to change those behaviors, and why “backsliding” is so common. You won’t see a steady ascent to success. You will see peaks and valleys. Make peace with this. Commit to six weeks for this swaddle intervention, with weekly debriefs, daily check-ins, and ongoing revisions.

▲ **Consistently implement the plan.** This is often the hardest part of these types of interventions. It is time-consuming and exhausting to check in with the student daily and weekly for an entire month or more, champion their progress, reset when they backslide, stay on their side, change our own beliefs and reactions, and create space for them to fail—all as they make their first fledgling steps toward trying out a new behavior. On the other hand, without putting in the time—without consistent implementation—even an excellent plan will fail, no matter how well-crafted it is.

## Informal Swaddling

It is not always necessary to make the one-on-one swaddle intervention process as formal as the description above, or as demonstrated in the example plans provided in Appendix B. The concept of the swaddle intervention can be applied more informally, and it might even work better that way in some cases. Sometimes it might be enough just to meet with the student, discuss the problem, decide on a possible solution, and choose an incentive. Then, just go for it. In this informal plan, you don’t fill in any forms, but you monitor the student’s progress throughout each day and check in with them as you go along, adjusting when it seems necessary.



### A Closer Look

You won’t see a steady ascent to success. You will see peaks and valleys.

## From Grace

I was recently told by an elementary teacher that she had a 2nd-grade student who was constantly wiggling and wandering and flopping and invading other people’s spaces. It was extremely distracting, but not malicious. He wasn’t defiant or confrontational; he just had very low impulse control. Nonetheless, he was constantly getting in trouble for not listening, not following directions, not doing work, and disturbing others. She decided to try an informal, one-on-one swaddle intervention that was loosely based on an intervention she had heard me describe in my Conscious Classroom Management training.

She met with her student and told him they were going to work together to help him to become his best self, learn faster and better, and get in trouble less often. She put five sticky notes on the side of her white board. She created a new protocol: Every time he had to be told twice in a row to stop doing something, he would walk to the white board, remove a sticky note, place it on her filing cabinet instead, and then return to his work. If he had at least one sticky note remaining on the white board at the end of any day, then on that day he would receive a reward. She brought in a tube filled with small dinosaur toys that he coveted. When he won a reward, he could choose a dinosaur from the tube. This is how the plan played out: If he rolled around on the carpet, then she would give him a warning and tell him to sit up and pay attention. If he rolled around again in the next 10 minutes, then she would point to the board and he would walk over, move one sticky note, return to the carpet, and attempt to alter his behavior. By the third week of



### Bright Idea

Try a simple, informal version of a swaddle intervention. This is often enough to help a student create change.

the intervention, he was receiving a dinosaur almost every day, and his focus, behavior, and work all had dramatically improved.

I once had an 8th-grader who displayed many disruptive behaviors. One, which commonly occurred during whole-class discussions, was to blurt out whenever another student was answering a question. She would talk over the other student, screeching her own opinions about either the topic or about what an idiot the other student was. Her blurts often included profanity, as well. I met with her after school and told her we needed to find a less disruptive way for her to express herself during class. I showed her where I had placed a special binder at the back of the classroom for her to use. I told her that when she started blurting out, I would say her name once, to get her attention, and point to the binder. Then, her job was to stop talking, walk to the binder, write out whatever it was she wanted to say to the class—or to the other student, or to me—and then return silently to her desk. For every successful trip to the binder, I gave her a \$1 coupon for the student store. By the fourth week, she was earning multiple coupons every day—so I made it harder to earn them. Now, a \$1 coupon was earned only when she actually didn't blurt out at all, or started but stopped herself immediately. She learned to get up and write in the binder without my having to remind her. After another two weeks, I was able to remove the incentive and the intervention altogether. She kept her own notebook open during class discussions, so she could write or draw out her comments as class discussions took place.

Sometimes, informal swaddles are enough. Generally speaking, however, informal swaddles work best with two specific groups of kids. They work with Tier 2 kids who have been misidentified as

Tier 3, and they work with Tier 3 kids whose behaviors are chronic and disruptive, but not belligerent, confrontational, or volatile. With Tier 3 students who are also aggressive or explosive, a more formal intervention process generally works better.

