

To Determine “Can’t” vs. “Won’t”

Sometimes, what appears to be defiance is masking a student’s frustration or embarrassment in not being able to do the work.

- Focus on both antecedent events (before the problem behavior) and consequences (after the problem behavior) to see what the student may be trying to obtain or avoid.
- Ask...Is this a student who...
Can’t do it?...(lacks the skill), or
Won’t do it?...(chooses not to), or
Both (lacks the skills to do the work and to ask for help).

To find out:

- Ask the student to try, try again
- Slice back – take weights off – make it easier
- Check skill level
- Provide more opportunity for practice
- Provide more teaching and modeling
- Try teaching it a different way
- Add an incentive (reward)
- Collect specific data on students’ response
- If it is “Can’t” – determine with your team appropriate strategies and interventions to boost the skill level.
 - Double Dose
 - Intense remediation
 - Tutoring
 - Referral to Child Study Team
- If it is “Won’t” – try the following 3 strategies:

3 Strategies to Address “Won’t” Behaviors

1. Modify the environment

- Use preferred seating
- Investigate schedule changes
- Provide frequent breaks
- Alternate preferred & non-preferred tasks
- Embed choices
- Offer adult mentoring / check-ins
- Allow structured movement
- Provide cool-down space in the classroom
- Use secret signal – cuing system
- Conduct class meetings
- Develop and teach behavior processing routine
- Use CHAMPs (see Chapter 2 and Appendix E)

2. Modify the instruction

- Team meeting to discuss problem behavior and solutions
- School/Team
- Identify what they can handle in class and what behavior to send to office for referral
- Team/Staff
- Request trainings on Escalation cycle, themes of behavior, classroom management
- Teach more intensive behavior strategies
- Referral for counseling
- Social skills training
- Anger management training
- Communications / Friends group
- Second step for classroom on problem-solving & empathy training
- Self-monitoring training

Note: See also Environmental Modifications to Increase Student Success in Appendix E.

3. Modify the reinforcement for appropriate behavior

- Use 5:1 positive to negative comments
- Behavior contracts/ Independent Reward Systems
- Earned teacher time
- Computer time
- Free time
- Back and forth book
- Reinforcement survey (Appendix)
- Mystery motivator (Tough Kids Tool Box – See Resources)
- Class Reward
- Token Economy
- Time-earned in another classroom
- Opt out of some assignments
- Arrange for a student to have a check-in with one of the team staff daily or weekly