

Dear Producer,

About 10 percent of kids in school --approximately 9-13 million students -- struggle with mental health problems. Whether they're running out of a class, not doing their homework, disrupting others, or quietly being defiant, their behavior is often misread, misdiagnosed and poorly handled by teachers, parents and caregivers. The frustration level parents face can be overwhelming, and navigating school dynamics with teachers and administrators is equally tough.

In ***The Behavior Code***, Jessica Minahan and Nancy Rappaport, M.D. provide empathetic, flexible, practical, and more importantly effective strategies for preventing inappropriate behavior from the start in the classroom, and dealing with it once it's already happening.

In an interview, they can discuss:

- The four most challenging behavioral problems children exhibit in the K-8 classroom: anxiety, oppositional behavior, withdrawn behavior and sexualized behavior
- The best ways to intervene and support students who present these challenges, as well as how to provide support plans for parents and teachers tailored to the hardest to reach students
- From time-outs and countdowns, to punishments and medication—how some of the most mainstream approaches to curbing inappropriate behavior may not be the most effective ones, and how to determine what will work.
- Why children deemed “problematic” often fail in our school systems, bouncing back and forth between detention, suspension, and the impossible task of catching up after missing precious classroom time and how we can help.
- How children who behave inappropriately rarely master the skills they need to progress academically, and what we can do about it.
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With their combined clinical background and practice of effective interventions, Jessica Minahan and Nancy Rappaport, M.D. have researched the best practices for helping children that act out. **Nancy Rappaport** is an assistant professor of psychiatry at *Harvard Medical School* and *Director of School Programs at Cambridge Health Alliance*. **Jessica Minahan** is a board-certified behavior analyst and special educator who is currently employed in the Newton (Mass.) public school system as district-wide behavior analyst.

We are booking interviews with both authors for this April and look forward to speaking with you soon.

Thank you,
Nancy Rappaport, MD
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Questions for an interview with Jessica Minahan and/or Nancy Rappaport,
co-authors of *The Behavior Code*

About 10 percent of kids in school -- about 9-13 million students -- struggle with mental health problems. What are some of the “psychosocial stressors” these kids face? What is going on with this generation of children, are they under more stress than were previous generations?

The recent shortage of drugs to treat ADD has brought to public attention the fact that many, many children are on medications. Why is that?

You maintain that disruptive students may be referred for psychiatric medication too early. What are some of the other interventions parents could try before turning to medication?

Of the students with behavioral problems, what are the types of students that teachers most dread having in class? What are your suggestions for a parent of one of these kids?

Often teachers lower the academic bar with students who are explosive students in the hopes this will result in less inappropriate behavior. What are the other choices – can you explain?

Often people assume that children who talk or act in sexually provocative ways in school have been sexually abused or overexposed at home. You say this is not always the case. How do you begin a constructive conversation between school and parents about this kind of behavior?

In your book you write about a misunderstanding with Hannah, a kindergarten girl who screams at another student to get off a beanbag. The point you make is that often we make wrong assumptions about children’s behavior and that prevents us from effectively addressing the problem. How does staying curious help to find solutions?

You also describe Nelli, a student who bolts from the classroom, screams at her teachers, and is destructive. You say that her behavior is “counterintuitive” – what do you mean by that? How would you approach the situation?

Whether in fourth grade or as an adult, how is our behavior shaped by emotional drives? Why is knowing this helpful?

When a kid presents with oppositional or explosive behavior, school professionals or parents sometimes respond in ways that exacerbates the situation. Can you explain how oppositional kids may act in school? What might be going on with this kid and what are some effective interventions?

Can you give us some tips for children who are argumentative and have a “short fuse”?

Many people would argue that giving positive attention (what you call “random acts of kindness”) may reward or encourage argumentative oppositional kids to continue with their troublemaking behavior. What is your take on the best way to handle them?

Parents are familiar with the countdown approach to transitions (“We are leaving the playground in leave in three minutes, two minutes, one minute...”), but sometimes this doesn’t work and the kid still has a meltdown. What is a better idea?

As parents, we often grow tired of saying no all the time. Instead, you suggest “positive opposites.” What does that mean?

We all know that kids can have various stresses on their life (including violence in the neighborhood or chaos in the home) that can make their behavior difficult in school. While some people believe that there is only so much we can ask of schools, you challenge that schools can do a whole lot more. Like what?

So often, the individual behavioral plans schools create for these explosive students fail. Short of kicking the kid out of school, what can be done?

Why is it be useful for parents or educators to keep records of not only when a kid explodes but also what happens right before (earlier in his day and right before he explodes)?

Why is the “time-out” not all it is cracked up to be?

How can parents who are increasingly frustrated dealing with their child’s behavior regroup and find the energy to try new techniques which may help?

The Behavior Code: A Practical Guide to Understanding and Teaching the Most Challenging Students

What People Are Saying...

Teaching is an art, but it's one that can be improved with science. Based on what we have learned in the field of psychology, *The Behavior Code* gives teachers the tools to transform the behavior patterns of some of their most challenging students. By using this essential book, teachers—instead of punishing or writing off troubled students—can get them onto a path for success.

— **Geoffrey Canada, president and ceo, Harlem Children's Zone**

The Behavior Code is truly a godsend. Concisely written and easy to read, this book offers a framework for creating successful behavioral plans. I predict that once teachers and principals begin to apply the authors' approach for understanding and changing problematic behavior, they'll never look elsewhere for help again. Buy it, read it, use it, read it again and again—and pass it on!

— **William S. Pollack, associate clinical professor, Department of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School**

This book is an essential guide for teachers and school personnel who find themselves in daily contact with students presenting with difficult behaviors. The authors outline an intervention procedure that is easily implemented in a busy classroom with multiple demands. Too often, behavioral intervention plans require so much attention to detail that teachers soon decide to disengage. Not so with the FAIR plan. By providing clear instructions and helpful examples, the authors promote a plan that prevents inappropriate behaviors while reinforcing socially acceptable alternatives."

- **LeAdelle Phleps, professor of counseling/school psychology, University at Buffalo, SUNY**

The Behavior Code needs to be read by all teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents! The message is simple: our student's challenging behaviors will continue if we only use punishments or rewards. Our job as caregivers is to understand our students' dilemmas and teach them better coping strategies. The authors do not shy away from difficult topics, such as the students who say, "I don't care", or who demonstrate sexualized behavior. This book is complete with supportive advice for teachers dealing with the challenging student and worksheets for organizing one's own teaching around the FAIR Plan thoroughly described in the book. Waste no more time spinning your wheels with challenging students; allow yourself to be guided by the interventions articulated so well in the pages of this book.

- **Michelle Garcia Winner, founder, Social Thinking**

The Behavior Code is filled with wise and very concrete suggestions for K-6 educators and school counselors. This book insightfully illuminates the nature of anxious, oppositional, withdrawn, and overly sexualized behaviors. And it provides detailed, helpful suggestions that support school personnel anticipating and addressing these kind of challenging -- and often, overwhelming -- behaviors.

- **Jonathan Cohen, president, National School Climate Center, coauthor of "Educating Minds and Hearts Because the Three Rs Are Not Enough," and adjunct professor in psychology and education, Teachers College, Columbia University**

A practical guide that will help teachers understand and improve their students' behavior and reduce the stress on everyone. This book is useful for experienced teachers and a great introduction for the student teacher or new school consultant. I was especially impressed by the originality and creativity of the materials provided and the many sample recommendations.

-**Michael Jellinek, MD, chief of child psychiatry service, Massachusetts General Hospital, and professor of psychiatry and pediatrics, Harvard Medical School.**

Teacher and school mental health consultants will find this book a major resource; it's eminently instructive and practical in guiding their work with students who have emotional and/or behavioral problems. The very experienced authors combine functional behavioral analysis with an in-depth understanding about four common types of challenging students, and provide a wealth of strategies for optimally changing, teaching, and interacting with such children.

-Richard E. Mattison, MD, director of school consultation and professor of psychiatry, Stony Brook University School of Medicine

The Behavior Code presents a cogent, succinct, highly readable support system for teachers, behavior specialists, and site administrators. Authors Rappaport and Minahan employ the process of Antecedent/Behavior/Consequence data collection coupled with case studies to illustrate its practicality and application. The manual is highly useful for staff professional development related to student behavior support plans and behavior intervention plans, both of which support improved student learning.

-Leslie M. Codianna, associate superintendent of student support services, Monterey Peninsula Unified School District

About Jessica Minahan, M.Ed, BCBA

Jessica Minahan is a board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA) and special educator. She is also the co-author of *The Behavior Code: A Practical Guide to Understanding and Teaching the Most Challenging Students*, published by Harvard Education Press.

Since 2000 she has worked with students who exhibit challenging behavior in both their homes and schools. She specializes in training staff and creating behavior intervention plans for students who demonstrate explosive and unsafe behavior. She also works with students who demonstrate emotional and behavioral disabilities, anxiety disorders, high-functioning Autism and Asperger's syndrome. Her particular interest is to serve these students by combining behavioral interventions with a comprehensive knowledge of best practices for those with complex mental health profiles and learning needs.



Jessica is currently employed in the Newton, Massachusetts, public school system as a district-wide behavior analyst. She provides direct consulting for administrators, teachers and support staff. She also consults to an in-house, 45-day stabilization program for Newton K–12 public school students who are in crisis and require an alternative educational placement.

She holds a BS in Intensive Special Education from Boston University and a dual master's degree in Special Education and Elementary Education from Wheelock College. She has a certificate of graduate study (CGS) in teaching children with Autism from University of Albany and received her BCBA training from Northeastern University. She has been an instructor for the Severe Disabilities department at Lesley University and is a sought-after speaker on subjects ranging from effective interventions for students with anxiety to supporting hard-to-reach students in full-inclusion public school settings.

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