

Disruptive children benefit from tailored classroom intervention

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Young children with disruptive behaviors have fewer opportunities to learn in school than their focused peers, and are at risk for lower levels of academic achievement. These children often have high maintenance temperaments, characterized by high physical activity, low ability to persist at tasks, and negative reactions to even minor situations.

A new study in the journal *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* finds that kindergartners and first graders with high maintenance temperaments showed less [disruptive behavior](#) and more active engagement and on-task behavior in the classroom, thanks to a program that helps teachers, parents, and students recognize and adapt to individual differences.

Led by researchers at NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, the study builds upon recent findings that the same program generally improves the behavior and academic skills of children and helps shy students be more engaged in their classwork.

"Behavior issues in early elementary school have long-term implications, so early intervention is needed to support children at risk for academic problems," said Sandee McClowry, the study's senior author and a professor of applied psychology at NYU Steinhardt.

"High maintenance" is one of four temperaments identified in INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament, an intervention designed by McClowry to help teachers and parents match environmental demands to a child's nature. The program provides a framework for appreciating and supporting differences in the personalities of children, rather than trying to change them. Participants in the program learn to recognize four temperaments: shy, social and eager to try, industrious, and high maintenance.

In the current study, the researchers evaluated whether INSIGHTS supports the behavior and [academic skills](#) of children in urban, low-income schools, and whether the relationship between teachers and their students made an impact. Prior research demonstrates that, regardless of a child's temperament, a warm and supportive teacher-child relationship in early elementary school is associated with fewer problem behaviors and greater classroom engagement.

Participants included 435 kindergartners and first graders and their parents across 22 elementary schools. Half of the schools were randomized to use INSIGHTS, while the other half, which served as the control group, participated in a supplemental after-school reading program.

Over 10 weeks, teachers and parents in the INSIGHTS program learned how to recognize differences in children and support them in ways that are specific to their individual temperaments. During the same time period, children participated in INSIGHTS classroom activities, using puppets, flashcards, workbooks, and videotapes to help them solve daily dilemmas and understand how individuals differ in their reactions to life events.

The researchers observed moderate improvements among children with high maintenance temperaments who participated in INSIGHTS, including reductions in disruptive behaviors and off-task behaviors, as well as increases in behavioral engagement.

"Given the links between behavioral engagement in early schooling and positive academic development, our findings are promising for helping children with high maintenance temperaments succeed academically," said McClowry.

Interestingly, the quality of the relationship between a teacher and child played a critical role in the children's behaviors. An analysis suggests that the effects of INSIGHTS in reducing disruptive behaviors and off-task behaviors for children with high-maintenance temperaments were partially mediated through improvements in the quality of teacher-child relationships. The researchers did not observe the same effect of the teacher-child relationship on behavioral engagement.

"By reducing the disruptive behaviors of [children](#) with high maintenance

temperaments, teachers can create classrooms more conducive to learning - which benefits both students and teachers," said Meghan McCormick, a doctoral student in NYU Steinhardt's psychology and social intervention program and the study's lead author.

Provided by New York University

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