

# **CEP 832 - ABC Final Project**

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## **Meet Forgetful Sam**

Sam is a loving, creative, inattentive, disorganized, wandering fifth grade student that I have gotten the pleasure to meet and work with this school year. His kind, care free spirit and laid back attitude allow him to enjoy life, yet often times also hinder his academic abilities. My ABC project targeted behavior is the typical “undiagnosed” child with inattentiveness, lack of organization and impulsivity.

Sam forgets everything...and I mean everything daily, sometimes several times each day. From forgetting his backpack, losing pencils, to having no idea where his color-coded folders according to subject area, are located. He often appears as if he is out in his own little world, and frequently wanders around the classroom aimlessly. He is seldom paying attention during any whole group instruction and rarely ever is prepared with expected materials. He struggles with completing daily assignments and has returned homework only twice this entire school year.

Sam is a walker and leaves at the first bell. By the time all of the walkers have left and I am taking the rest of the students out to the bus, Sam has already returned to the classroom at least three to four times to get something he has forgotten. Sometimes it is his homework wadded up into a folded mess that he has forgotten, and sometimes it's a larger item such as his coat or backpack. If he doesn't return back to class to retrieve the forgotten item, I often find his backpack or coat lying in the middle of the classroom floor.

## **Problem Identification**

Initially when getting to know Sam I believed he was simply being defiant. Brophy defines defiance as laughing at inappropriate times, avoiding eye contact when being spoken to, and intentionally doing things they were asked not to do (pg. 327). The more I thought about it, and carefully observed Sam in our general education setting, he did not seem to fit any of these characteristics. I cannot determine just how much Sam can control his wandering around or lack of focus, as I firmly believe there is an underlying issue that hasn't been diagnosed at this time. It is very clear that something is crippling Sam and severely affecting his academic capabilities, but I still haven't found a specific intervention or strategy (after trying several) that works well for Sam. I need to create and implement a solid strategic intervention that would help prevent loss of instruction time for Sam and his classmates due to Sam's lack of focus and disrupting behaviors.

Too much valuable instruction time is being wasted if I am frequently having to stop and remind Sam to get back on task, return to his seat or get out the necessary materials. Upon seeking advice from our special education teacher and questioning whether or not Sam had ever been previously "staffed", I learned that Sam had a tragic experience when he was younger and now resides with his mother and older brother. The mom has to work a lot so Sam is often home alone with his older brother after school until bedtime. Our special education teacher shared with me that there have always been concerns about Sam's behavior and academic abilities, but previous teachers thought the tragic past was the reason for Sam's struggles. As Sam got older, the struggles seem to worsen. I have tried on several occasions to meet with mom via conferences, phone calls, etc. but all attempts have failed due to mom's work commitments. With all of the issues present that Sam is facing; I decided to focus my

project on Sam's inattentiveness and lack of organizational skills.

I am well aware of the fact that my professional stance in working with Sam at this time was most likely ineffective. I would become so frustrated because I felt like I was repeating myself over and over with absolutely no changes made in Sam's disruptive behaviors. Sam was also becoming easily frustrated as he felt like I was constantly hounding him, and he wasn't clear on what exactly he was doing wrong. I knew this was not an effective, healthy situation for either of us and I needed to come up with a solution.

I always strive to maintain a professional stance incorporating compassion into my teaching, yet at the same time remaining firm and clear of my expectations. I work really hard to build relationships with all of my students, and for some reason this is proving to be extremely difficult in Sam's case. It seemed the harder I would try, the more frustrated and overwhelmed Sam and I both would become. A personal goal of mine throughout this process on top of helping Sam, is helping myself to become more effective when working with specific struggling students who often times refuse help.

#### **\* Data Collection About the Challenging behavior**

Before creating and implementing a plan, I needed to collect some data to help determine when these behaviors were occurring, as well as how often. It was important for me to track what was prior to, and after the behavior occurrences as well to try and locate behavior triggers. For my data collection and recording of problematic behaviors, I used the frequency of behavior template offered on our class website to gather data on Sam as well as another classmate. This particular classmate sits closely to Sam, so I could observe both at each time, and displays "normal" behaviors of a typically developing fifth grade student.

The targeted behaviors for Sam include, how many times throughout the school day that he is out of his seat wandering or off task. While collecting my data, I observed Sam over a three

day span in all subject areas. Every time he was out of his seat (unless directed otherwise), wandered around the room or required a reminder to get back on task I recorded a check mark on the behavior frequency template. I would later use the data to develop and implement an intervention plan to help decrease the disruptive behaviors so Sam could focus more of his time on learning.

### **\* Data Analysis**

After carefully collecting and reviewing data it was evident that Sam required a strong intervention to help prevent disruptive behaviors in the classroom. One of the days, he was out of his seat a total of twenty-nine times when directed otherwise. Once, (the second day) when keeping tally marks for everytime Sam required a verbal reminder to get back on task or a reminder of classroom expectations, I lost count at seventeen tallies just for that one day. The results showed that the majority of the disrupting behaviors were occurring during math whole group instruction, and independent work time (silent reading, etc.) during math whole group Sam would have to be reminded several times to get out his math journal and reference books. Sometimes he would sit for half of the instruction, I would give him a reminder and he would reply with, "I do not have a pencil". Instead of taking initiative and asking for a pencil, he would just sit and do nothing.

During our literacy block, more specifically, independent reading time, is when the most of Sam's wandering occurrences would take place. During one of my observations Sam got out of his seat to get a drink, was on his way back to his seat when he all of a sudden began walking to the cubby area and back to the drinking fountain again. I asked him what he was doing and he responded with, "I was looking for my reading folder". Most of the time Sam spent wandering, he had no idea what his intentions were for getting out of his seat.

## **Plan Development and Implementation**

With creating and implementing a strategic plan, I kept one thing in mind; minimize the number of times Sam is up out of his seat wandering around, and increase the amount of time Sam was following along with whole group instruction focusing on his activities. Meeting these two objectives would provide more opportunities for Sam to be academically successful increasing his achievement abilities.

The first plan to put in place was the use of a home note program (Best, 29). I created a daily behavior plan that Sam and I would fill out together during each subject area. In the beginning we set a goal for the number of points Sam would strive to earn each day. There is a total of twelve points that Sam could earn daily, so we started with a goal of ten points. At the end of each day we have a check out conference discussing the number of points Sam has earned and why.

The daily behavior plan then goes home for mom to review, sign it and the plan is to be returned to school the following morning. I thought this particular strategy/plan was a valuable piece in encouraging a home school connection to help Sam be successful. I desperately wanted and needed mom's support on this adventure for Sam. Sam could earn money in his checkbook each Friday if he met his goal all week long.

Another critical piece to Sam's strategy/intervention plan was creating a home and back binder to increase the chances of homework or important notes getting to where they needed to be. Sam was infamous for losing his homework, which was handed out at the very end of the day, before ever leaving the classroom for home. Thus, the reason Sam has only handed in two homework assignments this entire school year so far. The binder remains under his chair all day long, so whenever something important needs to go home he can easily place it inside to get it home safely.

A visual schedule is placed on Sam's desk daily to help him prepare for upcoming subjects or unexpected events. Sam also has a visual check off list of the morning procedures and end of the day procedures to help make sure he is complying with all classroom expectations. The visuals are laminated so Sam can easily check them off with a dry erase marker as he goes, and the next morning we wipe them off for a clean start. The check off lists are mounted on the cupboard directly above Sam's cubby for easy accessibility.

The above pieces of the intervention/strategy plan incorporate my contributions to Sam's success; I needed to find a way for Sam to show ownership in his plan as well. Brophy recommends students learn how to self monitor their attention, so I thought it best to create some type of visual system to help Sam be aware of his disruptions. For this Sam and I used a post it note system. Sam began each morning with three bright-colored post it notes on his desk. Each time he got out of his seat (unless otherwise directed) or was found wandering around the classroom, he would owe me a post it note. If he used up all three before lunch, he could no longer get up out of his seat. After lunch, Sam would begin the afternoon with three new post it notes.

## **Plan Evaluation**

The home note/behavior plan was discussed with mom via telephone regarding what it was for and why her support was so important. Mom agreed to the plan, and for the first week it was coming home everyday. After that, it was coming back a couple of times a week if I was lucky. I made another phone call to mom and respectfully "pleaded" for her support explaining to her the analysis of the data I had collected regarding the wandering and lack of attention, mom

agreed to make sure the plan returned to school everyday, and also agreed to biweekly morning meetings before work to check on Sam's progress.

The home and back binder at first proved to be a valuable organizational tool for Sam, but because he frequently forgets his backpack, the binder is often left home as well. During a morning meeting mom and I came up with emailing all important notes to her whenever possible. A CEP 832 classmate also suggested safety pinning any important notes to Sam's shirt at the end of the day to ensure that note got home to mom. For all students in my classroom I offer working lunches during which students may eat lunch in the classroom and receive extra help on troublesome subject areas or concepts. I often utilize this time to help Sam complete homework tasks.

The daily visual schedules and laminated check off lists are my new best friend. Though they required little time and effort to make, they are proving to be very valuable in achieving Sam's success. The daily schedule is placed on Sam's desk for easy access, and the check off lists are helping Sam make sure he is following all expected behaviors. During the morning procedures it still may take Sam awhile to complete all tasks, (lunch count, morning task, etc.) but he is requiring less verbal reminders and absolutely loves checking off his list. At the end of the day Sam follows his list again checking off items when completed (chair up, mailbox items, backpack, etc.). One struggle with the end of the day procedures that I have noticed is the backpack. Sam puts on his backpack and checks it off of the list like he is supposed to. The problem occurs when he forgets to bring his backpack back to school the next day.

Lastly, the post it note system. The post it notes are used as a visual cue for Sam to self-monitor how many times he is getting out of his seat. The goal in mind is for Sam to realize he only has three, and eventually he will begin using them sparingly. So far the notes have been working great, but a consequence needs to be created and implemented for when all three post it notes are gone, and Sam is wandering. Maybe using a "break card" for Sam when he is feeling



overwhelmed would help alleviate any anxiety or impulsiveness to get up and wander?

## **Professional Stance**

At the end of the intervention implementation I found a new sense of hope as my faith in myself as an educator and my ability to help others was renewed. I found myself becoming more patient and understanding with Sam, as well as determined to separate Sam and his behaviors reminding myself that Sam cannot always control his impulsive urge to wander or become easily distracted. Sam and I have been able to build that teacher/student relationship throughout this process that I was seeking in the beginning of the year. I knew without that piece, helping Sam was going to be very difficult. Though I am very pleased with the results thus far, I am not naïve enough to think those frustrations will not appear again in the future. However, I am determined to maintain my calm, compassionate, with firm expectations professional stance by reminding myself to take deep breaths and utilize other important relaxation techniques (Brophy).

## References

§ Brophy, J. (1996). *Teaching Problem Students*. (1<sup>st</sup> ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

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