



# JONAH: A Positive Behavior Strategy

By Dr. Kathleen VanTol

## Module 8: Correction, Consequences, and Hope

“Instruction does much, but encouragement everything.”

*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

“So let’s not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up.”

*Holy Bible, New Living Translation, Galatians 6:9*

### JONAH: A Positive Behavior Strategy

The JONAH framework continues to guide this work, emphasizing that meaningful growth comes through **Just Opportunities, New Actions, and Hope**. Rooted in grace, accountability, and the conviction that every learner is capable of change, these principles call educators to respond to students with clarity, consistency, and compassion.

- **Just Opportunities.** Creating fair, predictable, and supportive conditions that provide structure, clear expectations, and opportunities to build trust.
- **New Actions.** Teaching, modeling, and reinforcing the skills and behaviors students need to replace problem behaviors with more effective alternatives.
- **Hope.** Choosing to remain committed to students even when progress is slow, behavior is challenging, and the work feels messy, trusting that growth remains possible.

In **Module 7**, the focus shifted from observation to understanding. Interpreting data, identifying patterns, and developing hypothesis statements are tools for clarifying the reasons that behaviors occurs. If an educator understands that behavior is purposeful, they can use these tools to choose appropriate Tier 3 strategies. In this way, forming a hypothesis became an expression of hope, grounded in the belief that understanding leads to wiser and more effective support.

**Module 8** builds on this foundation by addressing what happens when proactive supports and instructional strategies are not enough. This module focuses on how teachers respond in the moment to challenging behavior through calm correction, thoughtful consequences, and Tier 3 interventions. Emphasis is placed on teacher mindset, the role of consequences as learning tools rather than punishment, and the use of structured responses such as the [JONAH Response](#) and [JONAH Room](#). Throughout the module, [hope](#) remains central, not as optimism that ignores difficulty, but as the deliberate choice to guide students toward both regulation and accountability, while preserving dignity and trust.

## When Prevention isn't Enough

Module 8 acknowledges a difficult but important reality: even with strong proactive supports, effective instruction, and well-designed behavior plans, students may still engage in challenging behaviors. While earlier modules emphasized prevention, skill-building, and positive reinforcement, which are the foundation of effective behavior support, this module addresses what to do when those proactive strategies are not enough. It is essential to note that the practices discussed here, including those that may feel more like traditional “punishment,” should *always* be used thoughtfully, sparingly, and only after proactive approaches have been implemented with fidelity. The purpose of these strategies is to help reduce the likelihood of the behavior recurring, protect the learning environment, and guide the student toward more appropriate alternatives.

It is important to also keep in mind that the effectiveness of any [consequence](#) depends in large part on the attitude of the adult delivering it. A calm tone that affirms the student’s value and frames the misbehavior as a temporary setback helps ensure that the consequence supports learning instead of escalating conflict. In contrast, a frustrated or punitive stance can escalate the situation and damage trust. This is why teacher mindset is so important. When educators approach consequences with patience, compassion, and hope, they communicate, “I believe you can do better, and I am here to support you as you learn how.”

## Correction and Consequences



The No! button symbolizes “won’t do”, rather than a “can’t do”, problem.

Image: Ann H. (2024, April 12). *Red button on bright yellow background*. Pexels.com. (CC free to use)

Misbehavior offers important information for teachers. It signals that the student needs more support, direct teaching, or more reinforcement of appropriate behaviors. When misbehavior occurs, teachers can respond with both correction and consequences.

**Correction** refers to intentional responses that reduce the likelihood of the problem behavior happening again by helping the student learn and practice the skills they are missing. Effective correction interrupts the inappropriate behavior, clarifies expectations, and guides the student toward a more appropriate alternative. In other words, it redirects the student in the moment toward more desired behaviors.

Consequences, on the other hand, provide a structured response to misbehavior that makes the behavior less likely to be repeated. These consequences should be mildly unpleasant or inconvenient, enough that students are motivated to avoid them in the future, but still simple and realistic for teachers to be able to deliver consistently. Before assigning any consequence, it is essential to determine that the behavior is a “**won’t do**,” meaning the student is choosing not to follow expectations, rather than a “**can’t do**,” where the student lacks the necessary skill. When the misbehavior is the result of a “can’t do,” it is imperative that the skill deficit be addressed rather than punished.

For “won’t do” situations, several types of consequences may be appropriate. One common option is time owed, in which a student loses a small amount of time from a preferred activity such as recess or social time. A similar strategy is **time-out from reinforcement**, where the student is briefly removed from an activity or setting that provides positive attention or engagement. In some cases, restitution is an appropriate

consequence. Restitution requires the student to restore the environment affected by the behavior, such as cleaning up a mess they created. If the behavior continues, overcorrection may be used. **Overcorrection** involves having the student not only fix their own mess, but also help correct additional disruptions to reinforce responsibility and appropriate behavior. For example, a student who repeatedly throws materials may be required to clean the entire classroom, not just the area they disrupted.

**Positive practice** is another approach that allows students to redo a behavior the correct way. For example, a student who runs in the hallway may be asked to retrace their steps and then walk appropriately. Some teachers also use point systems, in which points accumulate with each misbehavior. When a student reaches a predetermined number of points, a planned consequence is applied, such as losing a few minutes of a preferred activity. A **work-out system** can be effective for students who engage in work avoidance when the issue is not a skill deficit. In this approach, access to preferred activities is delayed until the required assignment, or a portion of it, is completed. This helps ensure that students who attempt to escape academic tasks still complete their work and do not learn to rely on avoidance. Together, these strategies provide structured and predictable responses that support responsibility and teach more effective ways to meet expectations.

When a consequence involves temporarily preventing a student from accessing an activity, such as during time-out, time owed, or a work-out system, it is important to ensure that the setting remains neutral and uninteresting. The goal is to make removal from the activity less appealing than remaining engaged in the classroom, reducing the likelihood that the consequence is experienced as a reward.

However, some situations fall outside the scope of typical classroom consequences. When severe behaviors occur, such as running away, sustained aggression, self-injury, significant disruption, or property destruction, teachers may need immediate support. Schools should establish a **crisis team** that is trained to respond quickly and effectively, ensuring safety for everyone while helping the teacher regain instructional control.

When the crisis team intervenes, the goal is to act in a way that protects the student's dignity, minimizes reinforcement of the problem behavior, and allows the teacher to regain instructional control as quickly as possible. In some situations, this may require safely removing the student from the classroom and guiding them to a neutral, low-stimulus space such as the JONAH room, where they can regain regulation under supervision. Crisis team members may include, as appropriate, school leaders (such as the principal, vice-principal, or head of school), a behavior specialist, a counselor, a school nurse, and designated office or maintenance personnel.

If it becomes necessary to use physical [restraint](#) to keep students and staff safe, only individuals with current training and certification in evidence-based restraint procedures should implement these practices. Incorrect use of restraint has resulted in serious injury and even death, making proper training and ongoing certification essential. Schools should also have clear, objective criteria outlining when restraint may be used, helping ensure it is applied only when absolutely necessary. Importantly, restraint should be only one component of a comprehensive crisis management system. ([Bowler, 2022](#); [Cooper et al., 2020](#); [Parrish, 2025](#); [Gavoni et al., 2025](#); [Minahan & Rappaport, 2018](#); [Missouri Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support, 2018](#)).

Want to learn more? [Crisis Prevention](#), the [Mandt System](#), and [QBS](#) offer train-the-trainer options for schools.

## The JONAH Response

The concept of the JONAH Room and the JONAH Response Steps in this module are adapted directly from the QUICK Room and QUICK Response Strategies described by [Gavoni et al. \(2025\)](#). Their work emphasizes that when misbehavior occurs, even in classrooms built on strong proactive and relationship-centered practices, a student may still sometimes require a brief removal to a neutral, structured reset space with the goal of preventing reinforcement for problem behavior and facilitating the student's return to the classroom ready to learn.

The JONAH Room serves this same purpose within our framework: a neutral, minimally reinforcing space where students can reflect, regain regulation, and prepare to rejoin the learning environment. The JONAH Room is not a place for counseling, tutoring, or prolonged conversations. Instead, it functions as a space that encourages a behavioral reset, fully aligned with Tier 3 supports and the JONAH principles of Just Opportunities, New Actions, and Hope.

## JONAH Response Steps

- **Join Calmly**  
Crisis team members should enter the situation with a steady, neutral presence. This reflects the QUICK strategy’s emphasis on unconditional positive regard and calm demeanor.
- **Observe, Don’t Assume**  
Before reacting, team members should look at the ABCs. This mirrors the QUICK strategy’s “Questioning” step and encourages data-informed thinking rather than interpretation based on emotion.
- **Name the Need**  
It is important to try to identify the likely **function** so the team can avoid accidentally reinforcing the behavior (e.g., giving attention or escape). This corresponds to the QUICK strategy’s “Intermittent reinforcement awareness.”
- **Apply a New Action**  
Prompt, model, or teach the replacement behavior that serves the same function more appropriately. This reflects the QUICK strategy’s “Constructive” guidance.
- **Help Them Return**  
Keep support brief and focused so the student can re-engage with learning as soon as possible. This parallels the QUICK strategy’s “Keep it brief” and ensures the interaction does not provide reinforcement for the misbehavior.

The JONAH Response steps have been intentionally aligned with the QUICK Response Strategy described by [Gavoni et al. \(2025\)](#) because the two approaches complement one another in helpful ways. The QUICK framework provides a research-based foundation that ensures responses to challenging behavior are grounded in evidence-based best practice. Layering the JONAH Strategy framework onto this gives teachers a simple, memorable, hope-centered structure that fits with the JONAH worldview and instructional goals. This approach supports calm, clear, consistent, and compassionate responses, four qualities essential for effective Tier 3 intervention. By integrating the strengths of both systems, teachers are equipped with tools that are practical, ethically sound, and aligned with the overall focus of the JONAH strategy.

## The JONAH Room



A JONAH Room should have minimal distractions and a visible clock.

Image: Mclean, E. (2021, June 5). *Close-up photo of a black round analog wall clock.* Pexels.com. (CC free to use)

The JONAH Room should be a quiet space with minimal distractions and a supervising adult present at all times. The purpose of the space is to provide a brief, neutral reset environment. It is not a place for conversation, counseling, or engagement. Because of this, the room itself should be intentionally uninteresting, ensuring that the classroom remains the more desirable setting. Clear expectations should be posted on the wall in simple language, such as: Stay on task, Remain quiet, and Keep your head up. When a student enters the JONAH Room, the supervising adult should quickly review these expectations to ensure the student knows what is required.

The student should sign in upon arrival in the JONAH Room. This simple step not only marks the start of the session but also increases the likelihood that the student will comply with adult directions. The length of time assigned in the JONAH Room is determined by school policy, and students can reduce that time by consistently meeting expectations. After signing in, the adult should briefly review the expectations, explain that behavior will be monitored, and clarify that the student can begin earning their way out as soon as they demonstrate compliance with those expectations. A visual timer should be used so the student can easily track their progress.

Students must be calm and under instructional control before the timer is set. When a teacher has instructional control, the student is likely to follow the directions and meet behavioral expectations. Once they are ready to follow directions and meet behavioral expectations, they receive a timer and a point sheet. The point system should be simple,

predictable, and aligned with the student's developmental level. For example, a younger student assigned to the JONAH Room for 30 minutes may earn a point at five minute intervals for meeting expectations, with each point reducing their total time by 1 minute. Older students may earn points at longer intervals, such as every ten minutes, with corresponding reductions. Points should be marked by the student, providing immediate feedback and reinforcing responsibility for their own progress. The adult may remind the student that following expectations is how they earn their exit but should otherwise offer minimal attention to avoid inadvertently reinforcing misbehavior.

Because the JONAH Room is not meant to be a space for instruction or attention, the supervising adult should maintain a neutral demeanor and avoid engaging the student in conversation. If the student becomes disruptive or stops meeting expectations, the timer should be paused, but not reset, until the student returns to meeting expectations. Ensure that any assigned tasks involve work that can be completed independently, given the student's grade and skill level. This is not the place for tutoring or one-on-one attention. If appropriate, the student may also complete an [action plan](#) in which they reflect on their behavior, identify the impact it had on themselves and others, and consider more appropriate choices for the future.

Set up in this way, the expectations in the JONAH Room should align with the function of the behavior. For behavior maintained by attention, the JONAH Room reduces access to social interaction, making it a less reinforcing setting. For escape-maintained behavior, assuming the issue is a "won't do" rather than a "can't do," the student should be expected to continue working on the assignment or a similar task. Completion of the work becomes part of the criteria for exiting the JONAH Room, preventing the student from using misbehavior to avoid academic tasks.

When the student has met expectations and earned their return to class, the transition should be brief and neutral. The teacher should simply welcome the student back without revisiting or discussing the earlier misbehavior. If restitution is needed, such as cleaning up a mess, it should be completed promptly, and then the student should be guided to rejoin their regular classroom activities. The aim is to treat the incident as a momentary disruption rather than a defining event, reinforcing that the classroom is the place where learning and positive engagement occur. When used consistently and judiciously, the JONAH Room becomes an effective Tier 3 support, promoting both accountability and a safe, productive learning environment.

## Case Study: Elementary



Sometimes, a child has trouble transitioning between activities. For example, the switch from drawing to writing may be difficult.  
Image: Ogini, K. (2018, March 4). *Crop kid with wax crayons and paper*. Pexels.com. (CC free to use)

### The Incident

Monica, a second grader, becomes upset during a writing activity. When asked to switch from drawing to writing sentences, she refuses, throws several crayons across the room, and crawls under the table, crying loudly. Attempts to redirect her are ineffective and increase her distress, disrupting the class. Monica's writing skills are at grade level so this is not a "can't do" problem.

### Teacher Response (JONAH Response Steps)

- **Join Calmly:** The teacher approaches quietly, sits on the floor near her, and uses a steady voice.
- **Observe, Don't Assume:** The teacher notices this behavior often happens during writing tasks (possible escape function).
- **Name the Need:** The teacher avoids lecturing and simply says, "I see this got really hard. Let's take a break so you can get back on track."
- **Apply a New Action:** Monica is offered the option to walk with the behavior specialist to the JONAH Room. In the JONAH Room, she will be asked to write an Action Plan which includes identifying New Actions she could take instead of the disruptive behavior.
- **Help Them Return:** After completing time in the JONAH Room, Monica transitions back to class with support and resumes learning.

### In the JONAH Room

- Monica signs in and reviews the expectations: *stay quiet, head up, work calmly*.
- A visual timer is set for the first 5-minute interval.
- She begins earning points as soon as she meets expectations.
- She is still expected to complete a writing task, but it is a slightly different one from the one she was working on in class to ensure that it is at her independent level.
- She also completes a brief Action Plan with drawings showing what happened and what she could do instead such as “ask for help” or “use a break card.”

### Return to Class

The teacher welcomes her back with a simple, warm message: “Glad you’re back, Monica. Thanks for rejoining us.” No rehashing, no lecture. Monica quietly completes her restitution by picking up the crayons. She then returns to the writing center to complete the activity she was working on earlier.

### Case Study: Middle School



Some students struggle with peer disagreement. Frustration may lead to disruptive behavior.

Image: Miroshnichenko, T. (2020, September 15). *Students wearing protective goggles*. Pexels.com. (CC free to use)

### The Incident

During an 8th-grade science lab, Ethan grows frustrated when his group doesn’t choose his idea. He mutters complaints, refuses to participate, and eventually shoves a stack of lab materials onto the floor. His peers immediately react, and the disruption escalates.

### **Teacher Response (JONAH Response Steps)**

- **Join Calmly:** The teacher moves toward Ethan with a neutral expression and quiet presence.
- **Observe, Don't Assume:** The teacher recognizes this pattern. Ethan struggles with peer disagreement (likely attention and control functions).
- **Name the Need:** She avoids arguing and instead says, "Looks like you're overwhelmed. Let's step out to reset."
- **Apply a New Action:** Ethan is asked to walk to the JONAH Room with the paraeducator. In the JONAH Room, he will be asked to write an Action Plan which includes identifying New Actions he could take instead of the disruptive behavior.
- **Help Them Return:** The class continues the lab without additional attention directed at Ethan.

### **In the JONAH Room**

- Ethan signs in, reviews expectations, and is given a 10-minute timer interval.
- Because attention is often a maintaining variable, conversation is minimal.
- The lab make-up task follows him, but it's adapted so he can complete a summary of the procedure instead of full participation.
- During point-earning intervals, he demonstrates calm posture and quiet engagement.
- His Action Plan includes:
  - What he did
  - How it impacted his group
  - Three alternative actions (e.g., request a break, use a sentence starter to help him express disagreement respectfully, ask the teacher for mediation)

### **Return to Class**

The teacher greets Ethan briefly: "Thanks for coming back ready to work." He completes quick restitution by helping pick up the spilled lab materials. He rejoins his group using a teacher-provided script for entering respectfully ("I'm ready to join in again.").

## Case Study: High School



Some students struggle with timed assessments. This anxiety can lead to disruptive behavior.

Image: Kaboompics.com. (2020, December 20). *Portrait of a female student standing in front of a blackboard.* Pexels.com (CC free to use)

### The Incident

In Algebra II, Jasmine becomes visibly agitated when the teacher announces a timed quiz. She loudly says, “This is stupid! I can’t do this!” and then slams her notebook on the desk and walks out of the room. The behavior is disruptive and unsafe since she leaves the class without permission.

### Teacher Response (JONAH Response Steps)

- **Join Calmly:** The teacher contacts the office and the counselor quickly responds to intercept Jasmine. The counselor approaches her calmly, avoiding pursuing her in a way that could escalate the situation.
- **Observe, Don’t Assume:** This pattern has occurred before during timed tasks (escape function due to anxiety).
- **Name the Need:** When Jasmine is found in the hallway, the counselor says, “You seem overwhelmed right now. Let’s reset in the JONAH Room so you can return ready.”
- **Apply a New Action:** Jasmine willingly walks to the JONAH Room. In the JONAH Room, she will be asked to write an Action Plan which includes identifying New Actions she could take instead of the disruptive behavior.

- **Help Them Return:** The class continues the quiz without delay. When Jasmine has completed her JONAH Room requirements, the counselor helps her rejoin her classmates.

### **In the JONAH Room**

- Jasmine signs in and reviews expectations.
- She begins earning points in 10-minute intervals.
- The full quiz does not follow her; instead, she is given an untimed version of the same content that matches her instructional level (to avoid reinforcing escape while honoring a legitimate anxiety trigger).
- She completes an Action Plan, reflecting on:
  - What triggered the reaction
  - How leaving affected safety and instruction
  - Alternatives such as requesting an untimed version, asking for a break, or using calming strategies

### **Return to Class**

The teacher welcomes her briefly, “Good to see you back,” and hands her a follow-up plan for completing the quiz later in a quiet space. She rejoins her classmates with no public discussion and resumes learning. ([Bowler, 2022](#); [Cooper et al., 2020](#); [Parrish, 2025](#); [Gavoni et al., 2025](#); [Minahan & Rappaport, 2018](#); [Missouri Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support, 2018](#))

## Teacher Attitude



A teacher's calm presence can serve as an anchor for students in distress.

Image: Mart Productions. (2021, May 26). *A woman massaging her head*. Pexels.com (CC free to use)

While strategies like the JONAH Response Steps provide structured, effective ways to address challenging behaviors, their success depends heavily on the mindset and presence of the adults implementing them. Even the most well-designed intervention can lose its impact if delivered with frustration, sarcasm, or inconsistency. A confident and respectful attitude sets the emotional tone for effective interactions. When educators approach challenging moments with a genuine belief in a student's ability to make progress, they not only de-escalate behavior more effectively but also strengthen trust, reduce power struggles, and model the very regulation skills students are learning. In this way, teacher mindset becomes a foundational tool for successful classroom management and meaningful behavior change.

Teaching can be one of the most rewarding professions, but also one of the most emotionally demanding. Concerns about student behavior are a leading cause of stress and burnout, and many teachers consider leaving the profession when they feel they are managing constant disruptions without meaningful support. Often, this frustration builds in school systems that rely primarily on reactive strategies, such as reprimands, loss of

privileges, office referrals, parent calls, or suspensions, rather than proactive supports that teach and reinforce positive behavior.

When schools respond to problem behavior mainly through punishment, or choose to wait until a student is already in crisis before offering help, teachers can feel powerless and discouraged. The situation becomes especially problematic when schools also lack clear procedures for referring students to support teams or fail to assess the function of the behavior before intervening. Without that insight, interventions often address symptoms rather than causes, leaving teachers stuck in an exhausting cycle of reaction and frustration.

Managing attitude does not require ignoring emotions or minimizing the stress that challenging behavior can bring. Instead, it involves pausing before reacting, seeking collaboration with other members of the instructional team, and recognizing that a calm presence can serve as an anchor for students in distress. In moments of tension, a teacher's belief in a student's potential may be the very factor that helps the student begin to believe in themselves.

### The Impact of Teacher Attitude

A teacher's attitude toward students influences more than personal job satisfaction, it directly affects how students view themselves and how they are perceived by peers. Research by [White, Sherman, & Jones \(1996\)](#) indicates that teachers' perceptions can shape a student's social standing in the classroom, either increasing or reducing peer rejection. When teachers consistently view and treat students positively, even in the face of challenging behavior, peer responses often shift as well. Over time, warm and supportive teacher-student relationships have been linked to improved academic outcomes for all students, not only in the current year but across future school years.

Research consistently confirms that teacher expectations and attitudes carry significant weight. Students are highly perceptive. They form judgments about whether their teacher likes them, believes in them, and expects them to succeed. These perceptions shape students' own sense of identity and capability. When students believe their teacher sees them as capable, they begin to act capable. When they sense doubt or disapproval, their confidence and motivation often falter.

It is also important to recognize that some expectations and opinions formed about students may be unfounded. A student's behavior on a difficult day, a challenging home situation, or even a single misunderstanding can easily cloud an educator's perspective. Remaining open, curious, and willing to see each student anew each day allows educators to break the cycle of bias and nurture a culture of hope and growth.

Ultimately, a teacher's attitude can either become a mirror that reflects a student's struggles or a window that shows them what's possible. When educators choose the latter, they offer their students a powerful message: that they are more than their behavior and that growth is always within reach.



Teachers are like windows, showing students what is possible.

Image: Karadeniz, B. (2020, July 7). *Stunning sunflower field through rustic window frame*. Pexels.com (CC free to use)

## High Expectations Does Not Always Equal High Achievement

While maintaining high expectations is essential, it's important to remember that high expectations alone do not guarantee high achievement. Effective teaching requires a realistic understanding of each student's current abilities and the provision of appropriate supports and scaffolds that meet students where they are and help them take the next step forward. Students also benefit from meaningful feedback that acknowledges growth while providing clear direction for improvement. Without opportunities to practice skills at an appropriate level of difficulty, even well-intentioned encouragement may fall short.

Statements such as "I believe in you" or "You have great potential" are valuable only when paired with accessible learning experiences and supportive feedback that make success attainable. In fact, when teachers emphasize potential without providing the means to reach it, students may begin to fear failure. In an effort to protect their identity as capable learners, they may avoid taking risks or making mistakes, both of which are essential for learning. When expectations extend too far beyond a student's current abilities, frustration and loss of motivation often follow. Authentic hope develops not from unrealistic expectations, but from a teacher's ability to see students clearly, recognize progress, and provide the supports necessary for sustained and meaningful growth.

### Case Study: Brian

Ms. Johnson taught a fifth-grade student named Brian who struggled with reading comprehension. Wanting to boost his confidence, she frequently told him that she knew he was a smart and capable reader. However, Brian was regularly asked to read grade-level texts without support. As a result, he became anxious and began avoiding reading tasks altogether.

After some reflection, Ms. Johnson adjusted her approach. She selected texts that were slightly below grade level, incorporated guided reading sessions, and provided explicit instruction and practice. She also acknowledged each successful attempt, such as accurately summarizing a passage. Over time, Brian's reading skills improved, and his confidence grew alongside them. By setting high but attainable goals and providing scaffolded support, Ms. Johnson helped Brian experience meaningful success rather than pressure to meet expectations beyond his current skills.

### Case Study: Jessica

Mr. Daniels taught tenth-grade English and worked with a student named Jessica who frequently submitted essays late or not at all. In an effort to motivate her, he emphasized her potential and told her that he was sure she would earn an A on the essay due the following week. Jessica, who struggled with organization and writing fluency, felt overwhelmed by the expectation. She avoided seeking help and ultimately did not submit the assignment.

After recognizing this pattern, Mr. Daniels revised his approach. He broke the essay assignment into manageable steps, including brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and revising, and provided feedback at each stage. He also offered Jessica choices in essay topics that connected to her interests. With these supports in place, Jessica completed the assignment and demonstrated growth in both her writing skills and her confidence.

By aligning expectations with Jessica's current abilities and providing structured feedback and support, Mr. Daniels helped her build the competence and motivation that unrealistic expectations had previously undermined.

## Maintaining an Optimistic Outlook



Hopeful optimism allows teachers to see the possibilities for all students and remain grounded in present realities.  
Image: Righetto, D. (2022, August 15). *A woman in a black and white polka dot dress*. Pexels.com (CC free to use)

An optimistic outlook is not about ignoring difficulties or pretending that challenges do not exist. Instead, it reflects a deliberate choice to notice potential and possibility alongside real obstacles. A balanced, hopeful stance allows teachers to remain grounded in present realities while maintaining confidence that growth and change are possible for every student. Research shows that people who intentionally practice optimism experience improvements in mood, greater resilience during stress, and a stronger sense of agency in shaping their circumstances.

Optimism sustains engagement in problem solving and professional learning. It supports persistence, creativity, and collaboration when a student's behavior or academic progress appears stalled. In contrast, pessimism often amplifies problems and narrows perspective. When failure is expected, educators may be less likely to notice small gains or to keep trying new strategies.

### Case Study: Optimism

A teacher observes that Owen has difficulty getting started in the mornings and frequently argues during group work. Rather than concluding that Owen is simply disruptive, the teacher reframes the behavior as difficulties managing both transitions and peer interactions. In response, the teacher previews the daily schedule with Owen and assigns him a clear role during group activities. This perspective invites problem solving and creates space for improvement.

### Case Study: Pessimism

Another teacher observes similar behavior and concludes that Daniel is uninterested in school and unlikely to respond to support. This belief reduces the teacher's willingness to adjust instruction or provide additional supports and may unintentionally communicate low expectations to the student.

## Reaching “Hard to Like” Students

Optimism does not eliminate frustration, but it reframes it. Rather than viewing challenges as impossible to overcome, educators operating from an optimistic mindset recognize that success may require additional support and time. An optimistic stance also encourages perspective and patience. Instead of becoming overwhelmed by challenging behavior, optimistic teachers break problems into manageable parts and recognize that change takes time. Maintaining this kind of hope supports a positive classroom climate and models resilience and perseverance for students who need it most.

Research indicates that warm, supportive teacher–student relationships increase the likelihood that students at risk will seek help, accept feedback, and remain engaged in learning. A strong positive connection also empowers teachers, making praise more meaningful and feedback more effective. This mindset becomes especially important when working with students who are difficult to connect with. Certain behaviors can test patience and trigger strong emotional reactions, making it harder to remain curious and compassionate.

Central to this approach is the understanding that behavior is a form of communication. When educators shift their thinking from “This student is giving me a hard time” to “This student is having a hard time,” they create space for empathy, problem solving, and meaningful support. This shift is essential when working with students who are often described as “hard to like,” and it provides the foundation for a [strengths-based approach](#) that seeks potential and possibility rather than deficit.

## Taking a Strengths-Based Approach



Strengths often lie behind difficult behaviors. For example, curious students frequently test the classroom limits.  
Image: Shvets, A. (2022, February 24). *A boy staring at a plant while holding scissors*. Pexels.com (CC free to use)

A strengths-based approach shifts the focus from what students are doing wrong to what they are doing well. Instead of zeroing in on mistakes or misbehavior, teachers can look for reasons to celebrate students' abilities, interests, and positive qualities. Often, strengths and struggles are two sides of the same coin. The same traits that make a student challenging in one situation may be what helps them thrive in another. It's important to remember that some strengths don't always fit neatly into the routines and expectations of a classroom, yet they are still valuable traits that can be nurtured and redirected toward growth.

When we look more closely, we can often see the strength hiding beneath a behavior that appears difficult. Determination, for instance, may look like stubbornness, but it also shows a willingness to take on challenges and follow through, even when it's hard. Curiosity might lead a student to test limits or question rules, but it also fuels a love of learning and discovery. Courage can sometimes look like defiance, but it reflects confidence and a willingness to stand up for oneself or others. A student who naturally takes the lead in group settings may at times seem bossy, yet that student is also developing important leadership skills that can inspire their peers.

Other traits, such as passion and honesty, can be both powerful and challenging. A passionate student throws themselves fully into everything they do, sometimes with more energy than structure, but that same drive can make them a powerful advocate for others. Similarly, an honest student may speak bluntly, but everyone always knows where they stand with them. Integrity, too, can be tricky in a social setting. Students who value doing what's right above all else may seem inflexible, yet their consistency builds trust and

reliability. Logic and creativity also belong on this list of dual-edged strengths. Logical students prefer consistency and clarity, while creative ones think outside the box, sometimes in ways that surprise or even frustrate those around them.

Taking a strengths-based approach means looking beyond surface behavior to notice and name what a student does well. Even when students are not following instructions, they might be demonstrating something valuable. For example, a student who points out the teacher's mistakes may have a strong sense of honesty and attention to detail. A student who argues could be showing courage and conviction. When teachers begin to see behavior through this lens, focusing on what students can do and who they are becoming, it changes the dynamic in the classroom. Recognizing strengths can help build connection, respect, and hope.

### A Note of Encouragement: Holding on to Hope

As teachers, we are often reminded not to take behavior personally, yet teaching is one of the most personal professions there is. When we are ignored, we may feel insignificant. When we struggle, we may feel inadequate. When a student refuses our direction, it can feel like defiance. When we are accused, we may become defensive. When we are insulted, we may feel belittled. These reactions are deeply human and remind us that our work engages not only our minds, but also our hearts.

Still, we have a choice. We can choose to respond differently. When a student doesn't respond, we can give them time. When a student resists our plan, we can pause and look for another way forward. When a student says no, we can listen for what that response may be communicating. When misunderstandings or criticism arise, we can demonstrate truth through patience and consistency. And when harsh words come our way, we can look past them with curiosity and compassion.

This kind of response reflects the hope at the heart of the Jonah strategy. It is the belief that every student is capable of change, and that growth is always possible, even when it takes time and the path is messy. Hope doesn't ignore difficulty, but it allows teachers to look beyond the moment and trust that small steps can lead to meaningful change. Holding on to hope means we never give up on our students, or on ourselves. In doing so, we embody the grace, perseverance, and care that make our classrooms places where every learner can flourish. ([Bowler, 2022](#); [Cooper et al., 2020](#); [Parrish, 2025](#); [Gavoni et al., 2025](#); [Minahan & Rappaport, 2018](#))

## Conclusion: Living Out the JONAH Strategy

As this final module comes to a close, we return once more to the heart of the JONAH Strategy, a framework rooted in grace, accountability, and hope. Across each stage, the focus has been on how teachers can notice, understand, and respond to students in ways that promote learning, connection, and growth.

The work began with **Just Opportunities**, emphasizing clear expectations and strong instructional practices that build trust and create conditions for learning and student success. It continued with **New Actions**, highlighting the importance of explicitly teaching and modeling positive behaviors that help students move toward meaningful change. The journey concludes with **Hope**, the deliberate choice teachers make to walk alongside students even when progress is slow, behavior is challenging, and the work feels messy, trusting that growth remains possible.

The story of Jonah reminds educators that growth often unfolds through second chances. In classrooms, hope is seen in teachers who continue to show up, who look beyond behavior to see potential, and who choose optimism and encouragement over frustration. It is the steady belief that each day offers a fresh start and another opportunity for both students and teachers to learn, grow, and begin again. It is important to remember that even small interactions marked by patience, grace, and persistence can shape outcomes far beyond the classroom.

Ultimately, the JONAH Strategy is not simply a program or a set of practices. It is a daily commitment to respond to struggle with grace, to teach new actions with patience, and to hold onto hope when progress feels uncertain. Every student, like Jonah, is on a journey of learning and becoming. Every teacher who chooses to see beyond behavior to the learner within becomes part of that story. May this work continue with renewed faith, creativity, and courage, as classrooms are shaped into places where every student is known, supported, and guided toward growth.



Hold onto hope, even when progress feels uncertain.

Image: Sayles, B. (2021, August 1). *A letter board with message on a yellow surface*. Pexels.com (CC free to use)

## Choose and Use Challenge

This module has focused on what to do when proactive supports are not enough and how teacher mindset, calm responses, and structured consequences can turn difficult moments into learning opportunities. The goal of this challenge is to help you intentionally apply one of these ideas in your own classroom or setting.

**Step 1: Choose One Focus.** Select one of the following options to implement over the next one to two weeks. Choose the option that feels most relevant to your current students or classroom needs.

- **Option A: Practice a Calm, Hope-Centered Response**  
Identify one student whose behavior often triggers frustration or strong emotions. Commit to approaching at least one challenging interaction with that student using a calm tone, neutral language, and a focus on support rather than control. Pay attention to how your mindset influences the interaction.
- **Option B: Use Correction Before Consequences**  
During a moment of misbehavior, intentionally prioritize correction by briefly interrupting the behavior, clarifying expectations, and prompting or modeling a more appropriate alternative. Reflect on how this approach impacts the student's response compared to reacting with a consequence alone.
- **Option C: Apply a Structured Consequence with Care**  
Choose one consequence strategy discussed in this module, such as time owed, positive practice, restitution, or time-out from reinforcement. Use it intentionally with a

“won’t do” behavior, ensuring it is delivered calmly, consistently, and without added attention or emotion.

- **Option D: Reframe Behavior Through a Strengths-Based Lens**  
Select one student you find difficult to connect with. Make a deliberate effort to identify and name at least one strength you see in that student, especially during challenging moments. Consider how this reframing influences your expectations and responses.

**Step 2: Use the Strategy.** Implement your chosen strategy consistently across several days, keeping the focus narrow and manageable. The goal is not perfection, but intentional practice. As you use the strategy, notice:

- Your own emotional response before, during, and after the interaction
- How the student responds to your tone, language, and follow-through
- Whether the interaction feels more calm, clear, or productive

**Step 3: Reflect.** After using the strategy, take a few minutes to reflect on the experience. Consider the following questions:

- What did you notice about your mindset during this interaction?
- How did the student respond differently, if at all?
- What felt challenging about using this approach?
- What felt encouraging or hopeful?
- What is one small adjustment you would make next time?

**Step 4: Carry It Forward.** Choose one insight from this experience to carry into future interactions. Even small shifts in mindset or practice can have a lasting impact when used consistently. Remember, responding with hope does not mean ignoring difficulty. It means choosing to stay committed and walking along side every student, even when the work feels slow or messy.

## Glossary

**Action plan:** A brief reflection tool completed by a student following misbehavior. It guides the student to identify what happened, the impact of the behavior, and more appropriate alternative actions for the future.

**Can’t do behavior:** Misbehavior that occurs because a student lacks the necessary skills or knowledge to meet expectations. These situations require instruction and support rather than consequences.

**Consequence:** A structured response to misbehavior designed to reduce the likelihood that the behavior will occur again. Consequences should be mild, predictable, and delivered with a calm, respectful tone.

**Correction:** An intentional response that interrupts inappropriate behavior and redirects the student toward a more appropriate alternative. Correction focuses on teaching and practicing expected behaviors.

**Crisis team:** A designated group of trained school personnel who respond to severe behaviors that pose safety risks, such as aggression, self-injury, or elopement, as well as to medical emergencies.

**Function of behavior:** The reason a behavior occurs, often related to gaining attention, escaping a task, accessing a tangible item, or meeting a sensory or emotional need.

**Hope:** The deliberate choice educators make to continue supporting students even when progress is slow, behavior is challenging, and the work feels messy, trusting that growth remains possible.

**JONAH Response Steps:** A Tier 3 response process inspired by the QUICK strategy

- Join Calmly
- Observe, Don't Assume
- Name the Need
- Apply a New Action
- Help Them Return

**JONAH Room:** A neutral, minimally reinforcing space used for brief behavioral resets. Its purpose is to help students regain regulation and prepare to return to learning, not to provide counseling or instruction.

**Overcorrection:** A consequence in which a student not only corrects their own misbehavior but also restores the setting beyond the original situation.

**Positive practice:** A strategy that allows students to rehearse the correct behavior immediately after misbehavior, such as walking appropriately after running in the hallway.

**Restraint:** A physical intervention used only as a last resort to prevent serious harm. Restraint should be implemented only by trained personnel following clearly defined policies.

**Strengths-based approach:** A perspective that focuses on students' abilities, interests, and positive traits, viewing challenging behaviors as opportunities to identify and build on underlying strengths.

**Time owed:** A consequence in which a student repays instruction time lost due to misbehavior with a small amount of time taken from a preferred activity.

**Time-out from reinforcement:** A brief removal from access to reinforcing activities or attention, used to decrease problem behavior.

**Won't do behavior:** Misbehavior that occurs when a student has the skill to meet expectations but chooses not to. These situations may require consistent consequences for the misbehavior paired with reinforcement for the appropriate behavior.

**Work-out system:** A consequence used for work avoidance in which access to preferred activities is delayed until required work is completed, preventing escape from academic tasks.

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## Want to Learn More?

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