Interventions for Swearing

James E. Gilliam
Laura Stough
Kathleen Fad
University of Texas at Austin

Swearing is a problem behavior that is occurring more frequently in schools. Behavioral interventions for swearing are necessary for several reasons. First, most teachers are not knowledgeable about techniques that are effective in reducing swearing, and the techniques that they naturally use are not effective. Second, swearing is often contagious. When one student begins to swear, other children are likely to join in. Third, swearing is a disruptive behavior; it distracts students and teachers from their work. Fourth, swearing frequently precedes or is accompanied by physical aggression. The fear of aggression causes teachers and students to be imtimidated and coerced by the swearer. Fifth, swearing by students is considered antisocial or deviant and is usually punished by persons in authority, either at school, at home, or in the community. Swearing in the presence of authority figures is considered antisocial or deviant and usually is consequated negatively. To summarize, interventions are needed that teachers can use to teach students how to control or reduce their swearing so that they do not get punished.

Research related to swearing has focused on adults and is esoteric. Relatively little research has been done on children's swearing in school. What literature is available describes operant techniques that are used to consequate swearing. The techniques presented in this chapter are based on the premise that students need to learn about their swearing and develop strategies for managing it.

WHY DO CHILDREN SWEAR?

Some children use swearing as a means of getting attention. It definitely gets them noticed by peers and adults even if it results in negative consequences. Some children swear for the shock value that most swearing produces. Most adults will respond to an 8-year-old's shout of "You motherfucker!" with alarm, anger, or even guilt. Adults tend to feel embarrassed and uncomfortable when children swear, and this often gives the child a feeling of importance over adults. Some children swear as an act of rebellion against their parents. In home environments where swearing is strictly taboo, using swearing is a way to defy parental authority.

Children tend to model adults. They hear adults use inappropriate language and assume that one way to be just like "grown-ups" is to talk like them. Children also use swearing as a means to win peer approval. Some may think it "tough" or "macho" to swear and in order to be an accepted member of one's peer group they must act tough and swear. Young children may swear if they become fascinated with body functions and enjoy talking about them. As children grow older, sexual awareness emerges and they turn to

talking about the body organs and sex acts. For others, swearing acts as a release of anger, frustration, tension, even excitement (Schaefer & Millman, 1981). All of us at one time or another have let out a good "Damn it," or worse when we are frustrated.

WHAT IS SWEARING?

According to Cohen (1978), swearing can be classified into three major categories: (a) speech that involves disrespect for something that is considered sacred or holy, such as the name of God; (b) speech reflecting the wish to harm someone (e.g., "Damn you"); and (c) obscenity, which is disparaging reference to sexual organs or acts or to elimination topics (e.g., "Screw you"). For the purpose of this chapter, all language of the type described above will be referred to simply as swearing.

Most teachers will agree that swearing is one form of acting-out behavior. It not only disrupts the normal routine of the classroom; to a greater or lesser extent, an element of physical or personal assault is present in practically every form of swearing.

Most interventions teachers use in response to swearing have limited effectiveness. Some teachers attempt to ignore swearing in the hope that if it doesn't get any attention, it will not continue. This would be a sound strategy if swearing were maintained only by a teacher's attention. However, peers often provide excessive attention by way of approval of this type of behavior. Also, most teachers find that ignoring a disruptive behavior such as swearing usually results in escalation of the behavior, at least initially. Alternatively, reprimanding a child with a lecture on improper language is usually ineffective, or at best may produce a short-term reduction in the behavior. Often the attention received in the process of the reprimand will actually strengthen the swearing it was supposed to suppress (Walker, 1979). Consequently, the classroom routine becomes disrupted, the teacher finds it difficult to teach and becomes frustrated, and the child usually ends up in the principal's office; in short, everyone involved loses out in one way or another.

This chapter is intended to help teachers deal with swearing in the classroom, especially those who work with elementary-age populations in classrooms for children who are considered deviant, behavior problems, or emotionally disturbed. Some of the activities discussed can be modified for use with older students. Regular classroom teachers experiencing swearing problems with individual children or small groups rather than entire classes should find some of these activities useful also.

Recent literature has shown that the most successful classroom intervention strategies are those based upon systematic behavioral procedures. Presently the most widely used approaches in dealing with disruptive, acting-out behaviors such as swearing are those based on learning or behavior theory. This is primarily because intervention programs based on behavior theory have been shown to be effective through extensive research and practice. Also, such approaches emphasize the "teaching–learning" process by which children's acquisition of appropriate behaviors is a learning process guided by the teacher. And finally, behavior modification is easy to understand as well as practical for the classroom teacher (Alberto & Troutman, 1986).

Morgan and Jenson (1988) feel that most offenses attributed to children with behavior problems are normal behaviors — normal in that at one time or another all children lie, cheat, act aggressively, or use bad language. What makes these behaviors deviant is that they are exhibited in the wrong places, at the wrong times, in the presence of the wrong people and most importantly, to an inappropriate degree. These deviant or maladaptive behaviors have been learned in the same way that appropriate, prosocial behaviors are learned. Whether a child learns appropriate or inappropriate behavior depends largely on the type of consequences, either positive or negative, that are supplied contingently for each.

ACTIVITY NO. 1: Baseline Data

Objective: Teachers will determine which swearwords are used in the classroom, the frequency of their use, and the particular students who use them.

WORDS USED

Student's Name	Fuck you, Screw you	Shit, Turd	Mother Fucker	Damn, Goddamn	Ass, Asshole, Jackass	Bitch, Bastard	Piss, Pissed Off	Cock, Pussy

FIGURE 1. Log of particular swearwords used and frequencies by student. Construct a log to record each student's use of particular swearwords.

From several theoretical constructs of behavioral theory, Morgan and Jenson (1988) draw some pertinent conclusions: (a) Most inappropriate behavior is learned just like appropriate behavior. (b) A relationship exists between the behavior a child exhibits and the environment; this relationship can be described as well as predicted if various components of the environment are known. (c) Deviant behavior can be changed through the use of appropriate reinforcement techniques. (d) Looking for causes of deviant behavior is counterproductive, since the original cause of a given behavior is unlikely to be what is maintaining the behavior at the present time. Intervention based on behavior theory is primarily concerned with the "what" of behavior, rather than the "how" or "why." The underlying causal factors are largely ignored because the emphasis is on assisting a child in modifying his behavior to increase the probability of his success and acceptance in his environment.

Behavioral interventions start out by defining the behavior to be changed in an objective manner so that direct measurement of the behavior can be obtained. Measuring the behavior and obtaining baseline data are essential for three reasons. First, it helps the teacher to determine if a problem actually exists. Second, gathering baseline data aids the teacher in identifying any environmental stimuli that may be supporting or maintaining the inappropriate behavior (for example peer attention) and what environmental stimuli are likely to produce a desired change. Third, the baseline data provide a standard against which to evaluate treatment and measure future behavior or progress (Alberto & Troutman, 1986). The first three activities presented in this chapter describe techniques for obtaining baseline data. Activity 1 involves recording the frequency of certain swearwords (see Figure 1). Activities 2 and 3 encourage students to generate their most popular swearwords. NOTE: Teachers are cautioned that some of these activities may be controversial. Consent should be solicited and acquired from the students' parents before conducting some of the activities. Permission and consent should also be obtained from the appropriate school administrators.

ACTIVITY NO. 2:
"Cussing Up a Storm"

Objective

Students will become familiar with swearwords and terms commonly used

by participating in a "brainstorming" session of swearing.

Procedure

1. Have children sit in a circle or semicircle facing the chalkboard. Teacher may want to use a posterboard instead of chalkboard to list words.

2. Start the discussion by calling attention to the fact that swearing is a common problem among students as well as adults. Point out that there are many words people use as swearwords, and what one person may consider a bad or dirty word another may not. So, in order that everyone will know what is a swearword and what isn't, students will have a "brainstorm" session to come up with as many words as possible that are known to be swearwords.

3. Tell students that everyone will have a chance to give at least one swearword or term. Ask them to think of words that they have used before or may have heard other people using. To keep things orderly so that everyone doesn't call out at the same time, have students raise their hands before speaking. The teacher may want to begin the session so that any students who feel uncomfortable swearing in front of the teacher will understand that it is quite acceptable in this activity.

4. As words and terms are called out, the teacher can list them on the board or poster. Encourage students to think of all different types of swearwords and their variations (ass, asshole, jackass, up your ass, etc.). Make sure that everyone gives their input and contributes something to the list.

5. When it is felt that most words and terms have been listed, the teacher can end the session by complimenting students for thinking very hard and coming up with so many words. The teacher needs to be prepared to deal with kids who are silly, agitated, etc. Some students may need to be removed if their behavior is too disruptive.

6. The teacher must remain calm, and nonchalant when the swearwords are said. The teacher *must* demonstrate that he or she is not affected by the students' swearing.

Evaluation

1. Ask students if there were any new swearwords they learned that they didn't know before.

2. Ask students to describe how they felt about swearing openly in front of the teacher.

3. Ask students why it is important to know which words are swearwords and which are not.

4. Ask if certain words bothered them or made them feel particularly uncomfortable.

Materials

Posterboard.

ACTIVITY NO. 3
"What's Number One?"

Objective

Students will determine the most "popular" swearwords by ranking choices in a class poll.

Procedures

1. Begin this activity with a review of some of the words on the list from Activity No. 2. Ask students if they think certain words are used more than other words. Ask for reasons why some words are used more than others.

2. Tell students that to find out which swearwords are used more often the class will take part in a poll to find the most "popular" swearwords.

3. Pass out 3 × 5 cards to students. Ask them to write down their two favorite "cuss" words or words they hear most often in order of preference. Collect all cards and tally the results.

4. Rank choices on the board according to class votes. For example if "shit" got the most votes, put a #1 by it, "damn" #2, etc. Ask those students who put "shit" as #1 to tell why it was their first choice. Ask questions such as:

   a. Do they use it themselves most often or hear others use it most often?
   b. Do they know what it means?

c. Under what circumstances do they use the word, etc.? Ask similar questions for some of the top choices in the poll.

Evaluation

1. The teacher can explain to students that she or her did a similar ranking on swearwords in the class a couple of weeks ago (Baseline Data, Activity #1) by marking down every time a swearword was used.

2. Using information obtained from baseline data, compare the teacher's ranking with that of students.

3. Discuss any discrepancies between the two ranks and reasons for the differences.

Note. Even though using data from Activity #1, there is no need to mention names of students and who "cussed" most frequently. Just use the frequency count of particular words.

Materials

3 × 5 index cards.
Data from Activity #1.

After gathering data, the next step in an intervention program is to identify potential reinforcers and arrange consequences. Reinforcers are defined by their effects on the behaviors they follow and not on the basis of how we think they should function. For example, positive reinforcement is any stimulus that acts to strengthen the behavior it follows; negative reinforcement is any stimulus that, by its removal, strengthens or increases the behavior it follows. Punishment, on the other hand, is any stimulus that decreases the behavior it follows. Different children as well as different adults do not find the same things reinforcing. For some children, a teacher's attention is a powerful reinforcer. Others find tangibles such as food, money, or tokens very reinforcing. Many children prefer activities or privileges as reinforcers such as extra free time or helping the teacher. Once reinforcers have been identified, they must be consistently applied to the desired behavior. Maintain-

ing a record of reinforcement will help to determine if the strength or frequency of the behavior has increased. And once inappropriate behavior is reduced and the desired behavior is achieved, fading reinforcement to natural levels can begin. Doing so allows the behavior to be exhibited at an appropriate level with a normal level of social reinforcement.

A variety of behavior management techniques have been used in dealing with acting-out behaviors such as swearing, and research shows positive results in decreasing such undesirable behaviors. A frequently used procedure is **time-out,** in which a child is temporarily removed from a *reinforcing situation* following the occurrence of an inappropriate behavior. Time-out is a form of punishment and its purpose is to decrease the occurrence of behaviors to which it is applied. In classrooms where it is used, the time-out period usually lasts from 5 to 15 minutes, although the shortest effective length of time is desirable. The most important aspect of time-out is removal from a reinforcing environment not the length of time. Lahey, McNees, and McNees (1973) used time-out procedures to reduce swearing in a 10-year-old retarded student. Josephs (1968) also obtained successful results by using time-out to control swearing and temper outbursts in the classroom.

Response cost is another strategy that can produce positive results in decreasing acting-out behaviors. Response cost involves the removal of previously awarded or earned reinforcers for the purpose of reducing problematic behavior. In the application of response cost, reinforcers are removed whenever instances of undesirable behavior occur. Iwata and Bailey (1974), McLaughlin and Malaby (1972) and Sulzbacher and Houser (1968) have demonstrated the effectiveness of response cost in reducing such behaviors as out-of-seat behavior and inappropriate language and gestures.

Token systems involve reinforcement in the form of tokens (points, chips, checks, etc.) for exhibiting appropriate behavior. Tokens are later exchanged for food, toys, activities, and privileges. In one

classroom run on a token system Epstein, Repp, and Cullinan (1978) introduced a DRL schedule (differential reinforcement of low rates of responding) to reduce high rates of obscenity. A DRL schedule rewards children for making fewer than a specified number of undesirable responses within a given time limit. Advantages of DRL schedules are that they reward reduction of inappropriate behavior rather than punish its continued occurrence and can be used for a wide range of target behaviors.

Negative practice, sometimes called "instructed repetition," involves encouraging a person who exhibits an undesirable behavior to repeatedly perform the behavior, the intent being that the behavior should stop because the fatigue that accumulates by its repetition makes doing it painful or aversive (Blackman & Silberman, 1971). However, forcing a child to perform a behavior can produce unpleasant consequences for both teacher and student (Lahey, McNees, & McNees, 1973). Similar to negative practice is **satiation,** which involves presenting a reinforcing stimulus at such a high rate that its reinforcing properties are lost. Activity 4 illustrates this technique. Activity 4 is a "swear-down," during which students may swear so frequently that the swearwords lose their reinforcing quality. The intent of this activity is to remove the reinforcing properties of swearwords by causing the students to say them.

ACTIVITY NO. 4
"Get It Out of Your System" Swear-down

Objective

Students will become desensitized to the shock value of swearwords by repeatedly swearing with other classmates.

Procedure

1. Divide the class in half. Form two lines so that each student has a partner facing him across the line. Ask the students to think of their two favorite "cuss" words.

2. Tell them that for the next few minutes they are going to "cuss" the person across from them, using their first word and that word only. They can't use complete sentences such as "You are a . . ." When the signal to go is given, they must look the person directly across from them straight in the eye and start repeating their swearword. They should use a normal tone of voice, and no shouting, but they can't stop until the signal is given. A whistle or bell can be used to start and stop the activity.

3. Set up a tape recorder out of sight of the students and record the swearing.

4. After 5 minutes or so, blow the whistle to signal the students to stop. Now tell them to use another swearword and do exactly the same as before. Blow the whistle and begin.

5. After a few minutes you will find that the students will start to laugh because it sounds so ridiculous. After 10 minutes or so of this activity, the teacher can decide to stop it if the students are getting tired or too silly.

6. Lead a discussion on the activity. Ask questions such as the following:

a. Why did you start laughing?
b. Why do you think it sounded so funny to say the "cuss" word so often?
c. What did it sound like to hear everyone swearing at the same time?
d. Think about the word you used. Did you like the sound of the word?
e. Does the word you said still seem as strong, harsh, mean, and so forth?
f. Did the words used by others bother you or did they lose their power?

Evaluation

1. After discussion, play back the tape for the students.

2. Have each student make a list of feelings produced by the repetitive swearing (tired, angry, bored, silly, etc.).

3. List different things people felt on the chalkboard for all to see and compare.

Materials

Tape recorder.
Cassette tape.
Whistle.

WHY DO I SWEAR?

Circle YES or NO before each of the following statements:

Yes No 1. Because everyone does.
Yes No 2. Because my best friends do.
Yes No 3. When I'm angry.
Yes No 4. When I don't like someone.
Yes No 5. When I can't do anything right.
Yes No 6. Because it makes me feel important or grown-up.
Yes No 7. Because my friends will think I'm "tough."
Yes No 8. When I can't think of anything else to say.
Yes No 9. When I don't want to do certain things.
Yes No 10. I don't really know why.

FIGURE 2. "Why do I swear" activity questions.

If children are to learn that swearing is an inappropriate behavior, they must know which words most people consider inappropriate as well as how often they are used and what they sound like when they do swear. Once children are aware of the words, they need to know why people swear and the effect swearing has on others' feelings and emotions. Activity 5 identifies reasons and situations that cause people to swear and Activity 6 identifies and discusses feelings and emotions generated from swearwords.

ACTIVITY NO. 5
Why Do I Swear?

Objectives

Students will become aware of different reasons and situations that cause people to swear.

Procedures

1. Pass out the questionnaire in Figure 2. Instruct students to read each sentence, think about what it says, and answer Yes or No to each statement. For students who may have difficulty reading the sentences, the teacher can read each one aloud and have them circle Yes or No as it pertains to them.

2. After all students have had a chance to complete the questionnaire, begin a discussion by pointing out that we hear people swearing all the time, but just because two people use the same words it doesn't mean they are swearing for the same reasons. Give several examples such as "Bobby might swear when someone takes his pencil that he needs for math, but Kathy might swear because she wants Susan to think she's very grownup."

3. Write each statement on the board. Beginning with Statement No. 1, read each one and ask students to raise their hands if they circled Yes to that particular statement. Tally results on the board so that all can see which reasons are most often the cause for swearing.

4. Beginning with the reason most often cited for swearing, ask children to give examples or situations in which they ended up swearing. For example if No. 3. "When I'm angry" was cited by most students, ask several to tell about times when they got angry and "cussed" at someone ("when my sister took my skates"; "when I lost my lunch money"; etc.).

5. Read each statement and discuss why swearing is used in that situation. Examples: for No. 8, you might want to bring up the point that a person may swear if he doesn't know a better way to express his feelings or doesn't know the right words to say. For No. 5, point out that frustration is feeling that we can't do anything right. For Nos. 1, 2, and 7, you might want to talk about the importance of impressing friends, or doing things just because our friends do.

Evaluation

1. In their own words, have students write two or three statements different from those listed on the questionnaire that may be reasons people swear.

2. Read them aloud or list on the board.

Materials

Questionnaire.

ACTIVITY NO. 6
Dealing with Feelings

Objective

Students will identify and discuss feelings and emotions generated from swear words and their use.

Procedure

1. Begin the activity by asking students questions such as the following:

   a. How do you feel when someone "cusses at you" ("angry"; "I feel like crying"; "It makes me want to hit them"; etc.)

   b. How do you feel when you hear a "cuss" word? (embarrassed, silly, nervous, afraid, etc.)

   c. Do you feel different when you call someone a name than you do when someone calls you a name?

   d. Is it easier to call someone a bad name than to accept being called one?

   e. Does it make you feel good to "tell someone off?"

2. Discuss with students how powerful words can be and how important it is to choose the right words when you want to convey a strong feeling to someone. Ask them, "What hurts people more, hitting someone in the stomach or calling them a dirty name?" Most students will say "hitting them in the stomach." Explain that swearing at someone and calling them bad names can hurt people very deeply. It can hurt someone just as much as a punch in the stomach. Then ask them again to think about times when people have called them names and whether or not they felt very hurt.

3. Ask students if they enjoy being "cussed at." If not, then remind them that swearwords produce a lot of emotions, some of which can be very painful. Tell them: "Remember, you shouldn't use them to call other people names if you don't like it yourself. After all, the person you swear at might get the same feelings you do."

Evaluation

Say several swearwords and ask students to write down the emotions they feel when they hear each one.

Peer attention and approval is a powerful reinforcer for most children. Using peers to bring about changes in students' behavior can be a powerful strategy in reducing undesirable behavior. It is a major factor in the maintenance of many deviant behaviors, and lack of it will often cause the rate of such behaviors to diminish. Studies by Mosier and Vaal (1970) and Lovitt, Lovitt, Eaton and Kirkwood (1973) have demonstrated the effects of using peer attention to decrease name-calling and other inappropriate language in elementary school children.

Modeling is a teaching technique that classroom teachers often use to teach certain skills and behaviors. A desired skill or behavior is demonstrated or modeled by the teacher, who then usually has the students practice it. Use of modeling procedures to strengthen desirable behaviors and inhibit undesirable ones has repeatedly been documented in research studies (Goldstein & Glick, 1987). Activities 7, 8, and 9 are innovative approaches to modeling. Activity 7 stresses the meanings of swearwords and suggests alternatives. Activities 8 and 9 identify times and places in which swearing is inappropriate and help make up nonsense words to replace swearwords.

ACTIVITY NO. 7
What Are You Really Trying to Say?

Objectives

1. Students will become aware of meanings and origins of swearwords.

2. Students will use more exact words when trying to convey a strong feeling.

Procedure

1. Ask a student to give you the definition of the word *bitch*. Most students will say it's a "cuss" word.

2. Ask the same student to look up the word in the dictionary. What does the dictionary say? (Definition: the female of the dog; an immoral woman; a spiteful, domineering woman; to complain, or a complaint.)

3. Begin a discussion on the meaning of swearwords by pointing out to students that in everyday conversation you wouldn't think of using a word if you didn't know what it meant, yet people use swearwords all the time without knowing what they mean. Also, explain that swearwords, like other words in our language, can have several meanings, some of which aren't considered "vulgar" or "bad." Sometimes it depends on how you use the word whether people consider it a "cuss" word.

4. Say: "Let's go back to the word *bitch*. What are you really trying to say when you call someone a bitch?" Are you calling that person a female dog? Lots of people have dogs for pets. They're lovable animals and they are our friends. If you call someone a bitch, are you telling her that she is your friend and she is nice like dogs? Or are you telling her that she is being mean and spiteful? That's why it's important to think about a word and what it means before you use it. Instead of calling her a bitch, tell her he is being mean or hateful. It's important to use exactly the right word so the person will know what you mean.

5. Another example to use: *ass*. Ask a student to look up the word *ass* (Definition: "a hardy gregarious mammal smaller than a horse with long ears: a donkey"; "a stupid, obstinate person"; "buttocks".) Ask: "When you call a person an ass, what are you really trying to tell him?" "Are you saying he's an animal, or a part of the body, or a stupid, stubborn person?" Continue with several examples.

6. Assign one word to each student and have them look up the definition or definitions of their word. Tell them to also look at the origin of the word if listed in the dictionary.

Evaluation

1. Ask each student to stand up and read all definitions listed of the words they looked up.

2. Then ask each student to name a word or words they could use in place of the swearword that conveys a more precise and exact meaning that they want to get across.

Materials

Dictionaries.

ACTIVITY NO. 8*
Don't Say That Here!

Objective

Students will be able to identify times, places, and situations in which swearing is considered inappropriate.

Procedures

1. Read the following to the students.

"Tony and Mark sat next to each other in class one day. Tony was working hard on his math when Mark turned to him and said, 'Let's stop all this work and go in the game corner to play checkers.' Tony didn't like being interrupted and said to Mark, 'Get away from me, you ass! I'm busy.' Mark didn't like being called an ass, so he called Tony a bastard. Back and forth they went until their name calling became so loud that their teacher heard them. 'We don't say things like that in class!' she said. 'You two go right to the principal's office.' Then Mark said to Tony, 'I guess we're really in trouble this time!' and off they went to the office."

2. Begin the discussion by asking students if school is an appropriate place to use swearwords. Continue with such question as the following:

   a. Was math class the right time for Mark and Tony to start calling each other names?

   b. What happened when they used inappropriate language?

   c. Do you think they might have offended or disrupted other students in the class?

d. Did the boys have to use swear-words in this situation?

e. What could they have said to each other instead of swearing?

3. Next, read the following:

"One day after school, Bobby went out to the garage to fix the wheel on his bike. He had to work all by himself because no one was home that afternoon to help him. After an hour of hard work, Bobby was ready to put the fixed wheel back on but when he put it back in place, something was wrong. The wheel wouldn't turn. Bobby got mad because he felt like he had done all that work for nothing. 'Darn it,' he said, 'What's the matter with this wheel?' Then he took the hammer and struck the wheel very hard. The wheel became very bent and it made Bobby angrier to see what had happened. 'Shoot,' he said, 'Look what I've done now!' "

4. Discuss Bobby's reaction to the situation he was in. Ask questions such as the following:

a. What kinds of things did Bobby say and do when the wheel wouldn't turn?

b. Do you think the language he used was inappropriate? Why or why not?

c. Was anyone around to hear him? Did his language offend anyone?

d. What were the consequences of his anger when the wheel wouldn't turn?

e. In which situation, Mark or Tony in math class, or Bobby alone in the garage, was it the most inappropriate to swear? Why?

5. Point out to the students that there are certain times, places, and situations in which swearing would be considered very inappropriate. For example, at school, in the middle of class, in the cafeteria, and at gym would all be inappropriate times and places to swear. But there might be other times that swearing would not be considered so inappropriate depending on the reason. It would also depend on the particular

word you chose. Remind the students that some words convey stronger feelings than others.

6. Discuss with the students that in Bobby's situation he was alone with no one to help or hear him and got very frustrated with his problem. Swearing in that case may have let out some of that frustration. Also, Bobby's words were not strong ones and he wasn't disturbing or offending anyone else. So perhaps in his case, swearing would not be as inappropriate as it would in the classroom with Tony and Mark.

7. On the chalkboard make two columns, one for places and situations where swearing would be most inappropriate, and the other for places and situations where a little swearing might be allowed. Ask each student to name a place or situation in which someone swears and list it in the proper column to which it would apply. Prompt such responses as: church, library, at the dinner table, in front of my parents' friends (all very inappropriate) and others such as: in my backyard, in my room, when I stub my toe and yell "Darn" (not very inappropriate).

Evaluation

1. Divide the board and divide the class into two teams, having them stand in line at the front of the room.

2. Designate Team A to be the ones who will give situations and places where swearing is very inappropriate. Team B will give places and situations in which swearing is not considered to be as inappropriate.

3. The object of the game is to see who can get all its members seated first.

4. Begin by asking the first person on Team A to name the place or situation he's supposed to, and do the same with the first member of Team B. Continue down the line. Each person who answers correctly can sit down. If an incorrect answer is given, that person must go to the end of his team's line. The first team who gets all members sitting wins and may be rewarded with a privilege such as first to lunch or out to recess.

ACTIVITY NO. 9
"Dinglebuff and Smoodgeball"

Objective

Students will make up ten nonsense words to use as alternatives to swearing.

Procedure

1. Begin with a review of how strong emotions and situations can produce swearing. In particular, remind students that one reason people swear is that they can't think of other words to use.

2. Call attention to the fact that sometimes people say "shoot" or "shucks" instead of "shit" and they say "darn" for "damn." These are alternative words to use instead of swearwords and people usually don't consider them inappropriate.

3. Tell students, "If you get a strong urge to swear and you can't think of a better word to use, why not make up a word to use instead of that swearword. People might give you funny looks but you'll be the only one who knows what you really mean! For example, suppose someone cuts in front of you in the lunch line and you get so mad you want to call them a bastard, but instead, you call them a 'dinglebuff.' What do you think they will do or say?"

4. Discuss possible answers, such as "they'll laugh"; "they'll ask you to repeat what you said"; "they might give you your place in line back." Emphasize that because they didn't use a swearword they will be less likely to start a fight, or get in trouble with the teacher, or get themselves called a dirty name.

5. Ask each student to make up ten words that she or he would use instead of using a swearword.

Evaluation

Present a situation to each child and have them respond using one or two of their new "swear" words in the situation. Examples:

1. Someone tears several pages out of your notebook.
2. Someone tells a lie about you.
3. Someone trips you.
4. Someone breaks your last pencil.

5. Someone grabs the ball away from you at recess.

A final technique that seems to have a lot of potential for changing behavior is **role-playing.** Role-playing calls for students to step outside the accustomed "roles" they play in life, with their usual patterns of behavior and take on the role and patterns of another person. Since the students' own behavior is not at issue, they do not have to defend themselves or worry about appearing foolish. Role-playing allows students to see themselves as others see them and perhaps obtain a clearer understanding of how their behavior affects other people. With this awareness, they may be able to change their behavior and improve the nature of their social interactions and feelings about themselves. Activities 10 and 11 present role-play strategies.

ACTIVITY NO. 10:*
Marvin, the Problem Solver

Objective

Students will respond to name calling and swearing by ignoring, changing the subject, or using some other constructive means appropriate to the situation.

Procedures

1. Begin by telling the following short story:

Marvin, the Problem Solver

Everybody at ＿＿＿＿＿ School liked Marvin. It was easy to see why. Marvin was kind to everyone and was very smart about staying out of trouble. In fact, Marvin was so smart about staying out of trouble that he was asked to be the "Problem-Solving Super" of the whole school. Marvin had his own office with purple carpeting, a big desk, and his own secretary! Anyone in the school could go to Marvin's office to talk about a problem and Marvin was always helpful.

One day John came running into Marvin's office with tears in his eyes. "Marvin," said John, "that big bully Billy just called me a name on the playground and I feel bad!"

"What did you do when Billy called you a name?" asked Marvin.

"Why, I started to cry and then came to your office," replied John.

"You were smart not to say anything back, John. Listen very carefully and I will tell you my magical secret that helps people stay out of trouble:

> If ever you are called a name
> Just keep this in mind —
> Ignore that name and walk away
> Or say something that is kind.

John thought about this poem for quite a while, then left Marvin's office to go back to the playground. There stood big bully Billy and when he saw John he called him another name. John remembered the poem:

> If ever you are called a name
> Just keep this in mind —
> Ignore that name and walk away
> Or say something that is kind.

Instead of crying, John said to Billy, "Billy, you are a good baseball player; would you like to show me how you bat so well?" Billy was so pleased with John's nice comment that he said, "Sure pal, let's go out to the baseball field."

2. Write the poem on the board and teach it to students. Have them practice several times to make sure everyone knows the words.

3. Discuss appropriate ways of responding to teasing. Prompt such responses as the following: One could ignore the teasing; one could walk away from the person doing the teasing; one could try to change the subject by talking about something else; one could show concern by something like, "Oh, I'm sorry you feel that way"; one could say something nice to the person.

4. Review steps to think about when responding to name calling such as (a) choosing an appropriate acceptable way of responding; (b) then doing what you have chosen.

Note: Teachers may want to teach certain children a specific way to respond rather than giving them alternatives to choose from. For example, the teacher could

teach to respond to name calling by walking way or ignoring. This is recommended for young children and for older children with a strongly conditioned response to name calling.

Evaluation

1. Ask students to repeat the poem.

2. Instruct each student to select a specific way to respond to name calling. Call each student by name and say, "Pretend that I just called you _____ How would you respond appropriately?" See if students use the ways described above.

ACTIVITY NO. 11*
Role Playing

Objectives

Students will respond appropriately to conflict situations with nonaggressive words through the use of role-play.

Procedure

1. Begin by reading the following story:

"One morning, Engelbert brought 24 oatmeal cookies, his favorite kind, to school for his birthday treat. He put the cookies on the file cabinet as the teacher had told him to do. As he was about to return to his seat, he noticed a classmate, Corky, leaving the room. Engelbert knew that Corky would try to eat all of the oatmeal cookies, so he hid them in the file cabinet. Engelbert then left the room to go to the playground. When he left, Corky came back to the room and sniffed out the cookies. By the time Engelbert came back, Corky had eaten all 24 oatmeal cookies!

"Needless to say, Engelbert was very angry. But Engelbert knew how to handle his anger; he knew that hitting or calling Corky names would not get his cookies back and would get him in trouble with the teacher. So he said to Corky, 'Because you ate my oatmeal cookies, Corky, I have no dessert to serve for my birthday treat. This makes me angry.' "

"Then Corky felt very bad that he had eaten the oatmeal cookies. He said, 'I'm sorry, Engelbert. It was very selfish of me.'

Corky felt so bad that he went to the cafeteria and bought 24 cookies to give to Engelbert!"

2. Begin a discussion by asking: "How did Engelbert express his anger?" Continue with such questions as the following:

a. Why do you think Engelbert's way of expressing anger was the best way?

b. What are some things that make us angry?

c. Sometimes when we get angry, we have to stop a minute and think clearly about the right way to express anger. Why should we stop to think about the right way to handle our anger?

3. Explain to students that when angry the best way to express anger is not by swearing but by telling the person how you feel, what he has done, and how what he has done affects you. Is this what Engelbert did in the story? What did he say? Review the story with students.

4. Tell the students, "Now it's time to act out Engelbert's story to help us understand how to respond to situations that make us angry." The teacher should play the part of Engelbert the first time to model the appropriate behavior. Choose a student to play Corky. Have another student read the narrative as "Engelbert" and "Corky" act out their parts.

5. Next, choose three other students to play the parts of Engelbert, Corky, and the narrator. Encourage students in the classroom to volunteer other appropriate responses that might be used in Engelbert's and Corky's story.

Evaluation

Set up role-playing situations to permit practice of appropriate behavior. Write each of the following on index cards and have pupils draw one card.

Examples:

a. Student discovers that another has taken his or her crayons without asking.

b. Student is interrupted by another during discussion.

c. Student discovers that another student has lost his paint set.

d. Student accidentally knocks another over during movement activity.

e. Student sticks his foot into the aisle to trip another as he walks by.

f. Student steals another's lunch money.

g. Student cuts in line in front of another.

h. Student takes a toy from another who had been playing with it.

i. Student throws food at another during lunch.

Usually teachers use combinations of the above strategies in the classroom to deal with deviant behaviors. Positive social reinforcement or token reinforcement is often applied in conjunction with either time-out or cost contingency. Many teachers use teacher praise, tokens, and cost response to change the behavior of deviant children.

As a general rule, a combination of both positive reinforcement and mild punishment techniques will be required to effectively change the behavior of moderately to severely deviant and disruptive children (children who spend less than 50% of the time engaged in appropriate behavior). For children who exhibit mild to moderately deviant and disruptive behavior (children who engage in appropriate behavior more than 50% of the time) usually only positive reinforcement, either social or nonsocial, is required to bring about changes in behavior (Walker, 1979). However, these are only general guidelines. Each child's behavior will have to be considered individually for the purposes of designing different strategies. Teachers can also decide which behaviors are mild, moderate, or severe. Teachers can be powerful agents of social change, and the quality of their interactions with children and the kinds of feedback they provide regarding appropriate and inappropriate

behavior are instrumental in shaping what is learned.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The major goal of the activities presented in this chapter is to decrease swearing in the classroom. The following objectives should also be accomplished:

1. Students will become aware of swearing as an antisocial behavior considered to be deviant and inappropriate to use as a means of expressing feelings.

2. Students will be able to identify cause and effect of swearing.

3. Students will learn definitions and origins of certain swearwords.

4. Students will learn to express feelings, frustration, and so forth with more appropriate words instead of swearing.

5. Students will increase interaction skills with peers and adults as a result of learning to express feelings more appropriately.

6. Students will increase self-control by learning to ignore, walk away from, and generally become less impulsive when others use swearwords.

7. Students will increase school performance owing to lessened disruption and keeping out of trouble as a result of a decrease in swearing.

8. Students will enhance self-concept as a result of an increase in self-control, interaction skills, and school performance.

Students participating in these activities will be developing prosocial behaviors and skills that will help them interact more effectively with people. These positive interactions, combined with a reduction of an antisocial behavior (swearing), should give students more positive feelings about themselves, their relationships with people, and their attitudes toward school. Swearing is a serious problem in many classrooms and current interventions have not been proven successful. These activities represent an innovative approach to decreasing a disruptive, antisocial behavior that may interfere with students' interpersonal relationships and acceptance in school.

* **Note:** Activities 8, 10, and 11 are reprinted with permission from Thomas M. Stephens, *Social Skills in the Classroom.* Columbus, OH: Cedars Press, 1978.

REFERENCES

Alberto, P. A., & Troutman, A. C. (1986). *Applied behavior analysis for teachers.* Columbus, OH: Merrill.

Blackham, G. J., & Silberman, A. (1971). *Modification of child behavior.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Cohen, S. S. (1978, June). Four letter words. *Westchester Magazine*, p. 65.

Epstein, M. H., Repp, A. C., & Cullinan, D. (1978). Decreasing obscene language of behaviorally disordered children through use of a DRL schedule. *Psychology in the Schools, 15*(3), 419–423.

Goldstein, A. P., & Glick, B. (1987). *Aggression replacement training.* Champaign, IL: Research Press.

Iwata, B. A., & Bailey, J. S. (1974). Reward vs. cost token systems: An analysis of the effects on students and teachers. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 7,* 567–576.

Josephs, E. (1968). Helping Billy control his temper. *Educational Technology Monographs, 1*(2), 9–10.

Lahey, B. B., McNees, M. P., & McNees, M. C. (1973). Control of an obscene "verbal-tic" through time-out in an elementary school classroom. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 6,* 101–104.

Lovitt, T. C., Lovitt, A. O., Eaton, M. D., & Kirkwood, M. (1973). The deceleration of inappropriate comments by a natural "consequence." *Journal of School Psychology, 1*(2), 148–150.

McLaughlin, T., & Malaby, J. (1972). Reducing and measuring inappropriate verbalizations in a token classroom. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Analysis, 5,* 329–333.

Morgan, D. P., & Jenson, W. R. (1988). *Teaching behaviorally disordered students.* Columbus, OH: Merrill.

Mosier, D., & Vaal, J. J., Jr. (1970). The manipulation of one child's behavior by another child in a school adjustment classroom. *School Applications of Learning Theory, 2,* 25–27.

Schaefer, C. E., & Millman, H. L. (1981). *How to help children with common problems.* New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Stephens, T. M. (1978). *Social skills in the classroom.* Columbus, OH: Cedars Press.

Sulzbacher, S. I., & Houser, J. E. (1968). A tactic to eliminate disruptive behaviors in the classroom: Group contingent consequences. *American Journal of Mental Deficiencies, 1*, 182–187.

Walker, H. M. (1979). *The acting-out child: Coping with classroom disruption.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.