

Defining Minor vs. Major Student Behaviors



To support consistency in how student behaviors are addressed in your schools, articulate the difference between minor behaviors that should be managed in the classroom versus major behaviors that require a referral to the administrative office. It is important to operationally define each behavior to reduce vagueness, misinterpretation of behaviors, and inappropriate responses to student behavior. For example, whenever possible, add details to your definitions such as in the example below:

Example: Minor tardy¹

Ask yourselves prompting questions to determine the level of specificity needed, for example:

1. Is there a bell to note the start of class?
2. Does a student need to be in their seat at the bell, or can they be standing anywhere in the classroom?

Vague definition: student arrives late

Detailed definition: student arrives late to classroom (defined as through the doorway) after the bell

The table below offers an example matrix that can be adapted for your district/school.² We recommend adding operationalized descriptions specific to your setting, as in the example above.

| BEHAVIOR DEFINITION | MINOR | MAJOR |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Abusive Language/Inappropriate Language/Profanity</p> <p>Written or spoken language that is offensive, obscene, or vulgar; can include swearing, name-calling, or use of words in an inappropriate way</p> | <p>Student engages in low-intensity instance of inappropriate language (including on playground)</p> <p>Office referral at 2nd occurrence</p> | <p>Student engages in sustained or major use of inappropriate language</p> |
| <p>Arson</p> <p>Intentional and malicious burning of physical property</p> | <p>No minor version</p> | <p>Student plans and/or participates in malicious burning of property</p> |
| <p>Bomb Threat/False Alarm</p> <p>A message of possible explosive materials being on- campus, near campus, and/or pending explosion</p> | <p>No minor version</p> | <p>Student delivers a message of possible explosive materials being on- campus, near campus, and/or pending explosion</p> |

¹Adapted from Delaware Department of Education PBS/MTSS Technical Assistance Center (<http://www.delawarepbs.org/correcting-problem-behaviors/>)

²Behavior definitions adapted from PBISApps (<https://www.pbisapps.org/resource/referral-category-definitions>) and the Delaware Department of Education PBS/MTSS Technical Assistance Center (<http://www.delawarepbs.org/correcting-problem-behaviors/>)



| BEHAVIOR DEFINITION | MINOR | MAJOR |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Bullying</p> <p>Defaming or demeaning actions or remarks by a student, involving written, verbal, or electronic communication, or physical acts or gestures directed at another student that are hostile, intimidating, domineering, or threatening, and which are intended to or actually physically harm another student or damage the student's property, interfere with a student's educational opportunities, cause emotional distress to a student, create a hostile educational environment, and/or substantially disrupt the orderly operation of the school</p> | <p>No minor version</p> | <p>Student engages in any instance of bullying</p> |
| <p>Defiance</p> <p>A verbal or non-verbal refusal to comply with a reasonable request from school personnel, refusal to identify oneself when requested, or refusal to comply with disciplinary action</p> | <p>Student engages in brief or low-intensity failure to follow directions or talks back</p> <p>Office referral at 4th occurrence</p> | <p>Student engages in sustained refusal to follow directions or talking back</p> |
| <p>Disrespect</p> <p>Socially rude or dismissive communications/messages to peers or adults</p> | <p>Student delivers low-intensity, socially rude or dismissive messages to adults or students</p> <p>Office referral at 4th occurrence</p> | <p>Student delivers highly offensive and/or sustained socially rude or dismissive messages to adults or other students</p> |
| <p>Disruption</p> <p>Inappropriate behavior that produces interruption, distraction, friction, or disturbance which interferes with the effective functioning of the teacher, student, or class; includes loud talk/yelling, noise with materials; horseplay or roughhousing; and/or out-of-seat behavior</p> | <p>Student engages in low-intensity disruption</p> <p>Office referral at 4th occurrence</p> | <p>Student engages in sustained and/or severe disruption</p> |
| <p>Dress Code Violation</p> <p>Clothing that does not fit within the dress code guidelines practiced by the school/district</p> | <p>Student wears clothing that is near, but not within, the dress code guidelines defined by the school/district</p> | <p>Student wears clothing that does not fit within the dress code guidelines practiced by the school/district</p> |
| <p>Fighting</p> <p>Mutual aggressive, physically violent conflict between two or more people</p> | <p>No minor version</p> | <p>Student is involved in mutual participation in an incident involving physical violence</p> |



| BEHAVIOR DEFINITION | MINOR | MAJOR |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Forgery/Theft/Plagiarism</p> <p>Possession of, passing on, or responsible for removing someone else's property; signing a person's name without that person's permission; claiming someone else's work as their own</p> | No minor version | Student is involved by being in possession of, having passed on, or being responsible for removing someone else's property; or the student has signed a person's name without that person's permission, or claims someone else's work as their own |
| <p>Gang Affiliation Display</p> <p>Gestures, dress, and/or speech that displays affiliation with a gang</p> | No minor version | Student intentionally uses gesture, dress, and/or speech to display affiliation with a gang |
| <p>Harassment</p> <p>Actions or remarks, spoken or written, by students that defame or demean the dignity or self-esteem of individuals or groups on the basis of their grade, status, race, color etc.; or repeated actions or remarks which are hostile, intimidating, domineering, or threatening with the intent of physically hurting or demeaning another</p> | No minor version | Student engages in any form of harassment |
| <p>Inappropriate Display of Affection</p> <p>Inappropriate, consensual (as defined by school) verbal and/or physical gestures/contact, of a sexual nature to another student/adult</p> | <p>Student engages in consensual (as defined by school), minor, low-intensity display of affection (e.g., prolonged hugging or minor kissing)</p> <p>Office referral at 3rd occurrence</p> | Student engages in clearly inappropriate, consensual (as defined by school) verbal and/or physical gestures/contact, of a sexual nature to another student/adult |
| <p>Inappropriate Location/ Out of Bounds Area</p> <p>Being in an area that is outside of school boundaries (as defined by school)</p> | (School may define close-by areas that qualify only for a minor) | Student is in an area that is clearly outside of school boundaries |
| <p>Lying/Cheating</p> <p>Delivery of messages that are untrue and/or deliberately violate rules</p> | <p>Student engages in very minor instances of low-intensity "white" lies</p> <p>Office referral at 4th occurrence</p> | Student delivers message that is untrue and/or deliberately violates rules |
| <p>Physical Contact/Physical Aggression</p> <p>Intentionally touching another person, either with part of the body or with any instrument, thereby causing offense or alarm to the other person</p> | <p>Student engages in non-serious, but inappropriate physical contact, especially if done in play</p> <p>Office referral at 2nd occurrence</p> | Student engages in offensive, serious, inappropriate physical contact where physical injury may occur (e.g., hitting, punching, hitting with an object, kicking, hair pulling, scratching, etc.) or which causes emotional distress for another person |



| BEHAVIOR DEFINITION | MINOR | MAJOR |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Property Misuse/Damage/Vandalism An activity that results in destruction or disfigurement of property</p> | <p>Student engages in minor, low-intensity misuse of property that does not result in destruction or disfiguration</p> <p>Office referral at 3rd occurrence</p> | <p>Student participates in an activity that results in destruction or disfigurement of property</p> |
| <p>Tardy Arriving late to school and/or classroom</p> | <p>Student arrives in the classroom after the bell (or signal that class has started)</p> <p>Office referral at 4th occurrence</p> | <p>Student is late (as defined by the school) to class or the start of the school day (and Tardy is not considered a minor problem behavior in the school)</p> |
| <p>Technology Violation Inappropriate (as defined by school) use of cell phone, pager, music/video players, camera, and/or computer</p> | <p>Student engages in non-serious, but inappropriate (as defined by school) use of cell phone, pager, music/video players, camera, and/or computer</p> <p>Office referral at 4th occurrence</p> | <p>Student engages in sustained or highly inappropriate (as defined by school) use of cell phone, pager, music/video players, camera, and/or computer</p> |
| <p>Tuancy An unexcused absence for ½ day or more</p> | <p>Student receives one unexcused absence for ½ day or more</p> | <p>Student receives more than one unexcused absence for ½ day or more</p> |
| <p>Use/Possession of Alcohol Use or possession of alcohol</p> | <p>No minor version</p> | <p>Student is in possession of or is using alcohol</p> |
| <p>Use/Possession of Combustibles Possession of substances/objects readily capable of causing bodily harm and/or property damage (matches, lighters, firecrackers, gasoline, lighter fluid)</p> | <p>No minor version</p> | <p>Student is/was in possession of substances/objects readily capable of causing bodily harm and/or property damage (matches, lighters, firecrackers, gasoline, lighter fluid)</p> |
| <p>Use/Possession of Drugs Possession or use of illegal drugs/substances or imitations</p> | <p>No minor version</p> | <p>Student is in possession of or is using illegal drugs/substances or imitations</p> |
| <p>Use/Possession of Tobacco Possession or use of tobacco</p> | <p>No minor version</p> | <p>Student is in possession of or is using tobacco</p> |
| <p>Use/Possession of Weapons Possession of knives (> 6 in., < 6 in.) and guns (real or look alike), or other objects readily capable of causing bodily harm</p> | <p>No minor version</p> | <p>Student is in possession of knives (> 6 in., < 6 in.) and guns (real or look alike), or other objects readily capable of causing bodily harm</p> |