

Bagging Behavior Charts:

A Practical Toolkit for Creating Connection-Based Classrooms

*This toolkit brings together four ready-to-use resources designed to help educators move beyond behavior charts and toward practices that truly support regulation, connection, and belonging. Inside, you'll find **four** main sections, each is described below.*

1. "IS THIS A BEHAVIOR CHART?" - A QUICK GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

A simple, at-a-glance decision tool that helps you quickly determine whether a strategy is a behavior chart. This guide walks you through four key questions—public visibility, one-size-fits-all design, symbolic systems, and shame-based impacts—to help you decide when to bag it and when you're safely in the zone of connection-based support.

2. BEHAVIOR CHART SWAP SHEET: INSTEAD OF THIS → TRY THIS

A practical comparison chart that shows the most common behavior chart practices and what to use instead. Each "swap" offers a concrete replacement grounded in co-regulation, timely feedback, and community-building—plus a brief explanation of why the alternative works better for young nervous systems.

3. THE 4 BIG STRESSOR DOMAINS

A clear, teacher-friendly breakdown of the four stressor areas—biological, emotional, cognitive, and social—that often drive behavior. For each domain, you'll find guiding questions and simple support strategies to use right away. This tool helps shift the focus from correcting behavior to understanding what's underneath it.

4. FAMILY GUIDE: WHY OUR SCHOOL DOESN'T USE BEHAVIOR CHARTS

A warm, accessible explanation for families outlining why behavior charts aren't used in our classrooms—and what we do instead. This guide reassures caregivers, strengthens home-school alignment, and frames our approach around belonging, safety, and real skill-building.

IS THIS A BEHAVIOR CHART? A QUICK GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

Use this simple flow to decide whether a strategy belongs in the “bag it” category.

1. IS IT PUBLIC?

- Can other students see it?
- Can they hear it (ex: “I like how Pam is sitting”)?
- Is any child’s internal state or “behavior level” visible to the group?

If YES → It’s a behavior chart. Bag it.

2. IS IT ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL?

- Is every student expected to respond to the same system?
- Does it assume all kids regulate the same way?
- Is it part of a group reward, classwide target, or universal clip/cube/star system?

If YES → It’s a behavior chart. Bag it.

3. IS IT HIGHLY SYMBOLIC?

- Does it rely on colors, tokens, points, paws, stars, unicorn clips, etc.?
- Does a child have to interpret symbolism (ex: red = bad, yellow = warning)
- Does it require delayed gratification?

If YES → It’s a behavior chart. Bag it.

4. DOES IT SHIFT BEHAVIOR THROUGH SHAME, COMPARISON, OR COMPETITION?

- Are children rewarded or recognized publicly?
- Are non-named children implicitly “wrong” or “off track”?
- Does it create division in the classroom?

If YES → It's a behavior chart. Bag it.

**IF YOU MAKE IT TO THE END WITH ALL NO'S...
Great! You likely have a connection-based, skill-building,
co-regulation strategy — not a chart.**



BEHAVIOR CHART SWAP SHEET: INSTEAD OF THIS → TRY THIS

IF YOU'RE USING THIS...	TRY THIS INSTEAD...	WHY THIS WORKS BETTER
PUBLIC CLIP CHARTS, COLOR LEVELS, SYMBOL SYSTEMS	Private, quiet check-ins ("How's your body feeling right now?")	Respects nervous systems, avoids shame, improves accuracy of feedback.
"I LIKE HOW SAM IS SITTING" (PUBLIC PRAISE)	Positive Descriptive Affirmations that connect behavior to community ("You helped our group transition smoothly.")	Avoids comparison, builds belonging.
TOKEN ECONOMIES: STARS, PAWS, POINTS	Immediate, logical feedback paired with co-regulation	Young children cannot delay gratification; logic teaches meaning.
CLASSWIDE REWARD SYSTEMS	Classwide stressor reduction plan (noise, transitions, spacing, pace)	Behavior improves when stressors decrease — not when rewards increase.
BEHAVIOR CHARTS TO TRACK ESCALATION	<u>Lifelines</u> or regulation menus ("When I feel ____, I can try ____")	Gives actual tools instead of tracking behavior.
CALLING KIDS TO THE DESK TO "FIX BEHAVIOR"	Side-by-side emotion coaching	Kids learn regulation through connection, not correction.

IF YOU'RE USING THIS...	TRY THIS INSTEAD...	WHY THIS WORKS BETTER
POSTING LEVELS OF BEHAVIOR	Predictable routines + visual schedules	Supports clarity without ranking or shaming.
SYMBOLIC COLOR CODING OF EMOTIONS	Real photos or simple emotion icons + co-exploration	Avoids cognitive overload; supports language and awareness.
WHOLE-CLASS "GOOD BEHAVIOR" ANNOUNCEMENTS	Community acknowledgments ("We all worked together to clean up quickly!")	Builds unity rather than comparison.
EXPECTING SELF-REGULATION DURING ESCALATION	<u>Co-regulation</u> first, teaching second	Skills can only be taught in the "green zone."

THE 4 BIG STRESSOR DOMAINS:

Before labeling behavior as defiance, ask: What stressor might be driving this?

1. BIOLOGICAL STRESSORS

Signals from the body that overwhelm the nervous system.

Ask:

- Is the student hungry? tired? too hot? cold? overstimulated?
- Are there sensory challenges (noise, lights, textures)?
- Is their body telling them something they can't yet communicate?

What helps: movement breaks, sensory supports, hydration, environmental adjustments.

2. EMOTIONAL STRESSORS

Big feelings or emotional overload.

Ask:

- Did something upsetting happen before school?
- Are they feeling shame, fear, anxiety, or frustration?
- Do they need connection, not correction?

What helps: movement breaks, sensory supports, hydration, environmental adjustments.

3. COGNITIVE STRESSORS

Tasks that exceed a child's current capacity.

Ask:

- Is the work too hard, too abstract, or too language-heavy?
- Is there too much multi-step direction?
- Are expectations unclear?

What helps: breaking tasks down, visual supports, modeling, offering choices.

4. SOCIAL STRESSORS

Interactions that create tension or overwhelm.

Ask:

- Are peers too close, too loud, or too unpredictable?
- Is the student unsure of what others want or expect?
- Is the classroom community supportive or comparative?

What helps: peer pairing, structured group roles, reducing competitive dynamics, emphasizing belonging.

A short, family-friendly explainer you can email, post, or send home.

Dear Families,

You may notice that our classrooms do **not** use behavior charts, clip charts, color systems, or public reward boards. We want to share why — and what we do instead.

1. Behavior charts publicly display a child's struggles.

Even when the intention is positive, charts make children's behavior visible to others. This often leads to embarrassment and comparison, not learning.

2. Young children cannot understand symbolic color systems.

Systems like "green/yellow/red" or earning points require abstract thinking and delayed gratification — skills children develop much later.

3. Behavior charts do not teach self-regulation.

Moving a clip doesn't explain what the child is feeling or what to do about it. Kids need adults to guide them through big emotions, not rank them publicly.

4. Our goal is belonging, not compliance.

We focus on connection, co-regulation, and understanding behavior as communication. These approaches build the real skills children need: awareness, regulation, and relationship.

So What Do We Do Instead?

We use strategies that honor the whole child:

- private check-ins
- co-regulation and calming tools
- routines and visual supports
- reducing classroom stressors
- teaching emotional language
- offering immediate, logical feedback

These practices help children feel safe, understood, and connected — the foundation of real learning.