

# Moment to Moment

*A positive approach to managing classroom behavior*

Joey Mandel

*Foreword:*

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## Foreword

I first met Joey Mandel through my work as a clinical child psychologist. Joey was a concerned teacher and, as we consulted about a particular case, I made the point that the child would need “moment-to-moment support” in the classroom in order to develop social skills. I learned this concept from my mentor Dr. Debra Pepler, Scientific Co-Director of PREVNet (Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence). At the mention of moment-to-moment support, Joey’s eyes lit up. She intuitively understood that the classroom teacher is ideally placed to take advantage of the naturally occurring moments during day-to-day activities to nurture a child’s ability to interact with others and adapt successfully to classroom routines.

Thus began a long series of conversations with Joey, who was determined to more fully understand how children develop the complex set of motor, language, social, emotional, and cognitive skills that are necessary to thrive at school and, indeed, in life. As an experienced teacher, Joey clearly understood that a positive learning environment in the classroom had to start with a web of respectful, caring, and inclusive relationships among its members. She had already made the switch from “teaching the curriculum” to teaching individual children. Joey relentlessly pursued current research and theory in child development in order to enhance her understanding of why some children struggle socially and behaviorally. This understanding became the foundation for her comprehensive model of moment-to-moment support that is so beautifully described in this book.

Indeed, there are a number of children in every classroom who are not able to meet age-appropriate expectations for emotional and behavioral regulation, social interaction, or learning. Without relying on diagnostic labels, Joey focuses on addressing these children’s social skill deficits. Joey is deeply committed to the principle that children misbehave when they lack the skills to do better. This led her to become a true expert in “unpacking” a child’s problematic behavior to identify the underlying reasons. Joey has formulated a remarkable, scientifically based framework that enables teachers to carefully observe, reflect, identify, and address critical skill deficits. Moreover, Joey is an expert in communicating these ideas through detailed descriptions in simple, user-friendly language. Teachers can use Joey’s Class Survey to customize social-emotional learning goals for individual students while positively influencing the group dynamics of the class as a whole.

Perhaps most exciting, however, is Joey’s creativity in designing or adapting games and learning activities that target specific social skills. This book provides a very rich compendium of learning activities designed to promote growth across the wide domain of relevant social skills, while enhancing children’s feelings of enjoyment, belonging, and accomplishment. Written by an experienced

classroom teacher for other classroom teachers, they exhibit Joey's superb sense of what is both doable and effective in fostering social skill growth. Using Joey's detailed description of the games, before and after discussion points, and suggestions for the extra supports that some students will require, teachers can easily incorporate these activities into their everyday practice.

I was fortunate to watch these games in action a few years ago when Joey ran a summer camp program in her backyard. Two of my clients were participating, and I was deeply impressed to see how well they were able to apply their new skills in a small-group setting. What stayed with me was the joy and confidence I saw on the faces of children who had previously struggled to stay behaviorally regulated and who had shied away from peers. This is why Joey's games and activities are so important—they ensure that all children are included in safe, real-world, social learning opportunities that are relevant, growth-enhancing, and fun.

I am thrilled that Joey has shared her learning, formidable creativity, and dedication to social-emotional learning through writing this book. My greatest hope is that teachers will use the moment-to-moment framework and learning activities regularly throughout the school year. This will promote all children's social skills, and ultimately enhance their capacity for healthy relationships throughout their lives. We can offer our children no greater gift.

—Joanne Cummings, Ph.D., C.Psych  
Psychologist, Blue Balloon Health Services  
Director of Knowledge Mobilization, PREVNet

# Preface

About four years ago, I was given a book called *The Explosive Child* by Ross W. Greene that was for me the beginning of a paradigm shift in teaching and parenting. Dr. Greene writes that sometimes there is more going on than a child being disruptive and defiant. If we look a little deeper and seek to understand what is going on, and help the child explain him- or herself and the situation, then maybe we can come up with a plan that lets everyone move forward happily. His model of collaborative problem-solving can help get us through challenging moments and find solutions to difficult behavior.

Difficult behavior tells us that the child doesn't have the necessary skills to respond to a particular environment (Greene, 2005) and that if we, as teachers and parents, come in very quickly, very strictly, and in a harsh way, we escalate the problem so the child shuts down and becomes even more inflexible. So what are these skills and how do they affect behavior? I looked to Till Davy, who has done a significant amount of research on executive function disorders and the domains of development. Dr. Davy indicates that metaphors of the executive and regulatory functioning parts of the brain as "the CEO of the brain" or the "conductor of an orchestra" are misleading, as they lead us to believe that all that is required in order for a child's executive functioning to improve is that they "try harder" (Davy, 2011). In fact, the executive and regulatory functioning parts of the brain are a much more complex system of automatic guides that monitor, control, inhibit, prompt, guide, balance, cue, check, and correct our perceptions, our emotions, our thinking, our memory, and our actions.

So I had an understanding that behind behavior there are skills in various domains of development that influence a child's behavior; that, in reaction to difficult moments, I need to slow myself down and empathize with the child, find out how the child is struggling.

I loved this newfound information, but there were two problems. First, most of the children I work with are too young to know why they struggle. This lack of awareness of their triggers and their inability to articulate their problems are, in fact, among the things they struggle with! Secondly, as a teacher, I need a way not only to support the child in crisis situations or meltdowns, but also to help build those weak skills so the child will be less often in crisis. This is where I found a perfect fit with the work of Michelle Garcia Winner and her concept of Social Thinking®, the ability to think about the intentions, motives, and prior knowledge of others in a social situation. In my mind, Michelle Garcia Winner's greatest contribution is her examination of how people share space with others. Throughout this book, the verbal thinking cues and references to sharing social space are based in the social awareness and thinking strategies of Social Thinking.

Though the five domains of this book are not the same as Davy's five domains (this book does not have the executive function domain), the skill-based focus shares a similar foundation.

Social Thinking provides excellent vocabulary for many of the social-emotional skills this book addresses.

But it is not all about thinking. It is not enough for a child to think about a new way of acting and then for the child to be able to apply that thinking successfully in the moment. Remember, as adults we know the areas in which we struggle, and yet we ourselves are not always able to modify our own behavior, no matter how hard we try. Helping children achieve what we are telling them to do is the most difficult, yet crucial, final step. This process takes time and empathetic support in the moment, and needs to be detailed step-by-step for teachers.

And so emerged this book. Teachers need support, guidance, help, and tools to deal with their students' behavior issues day in and day out. It is not enough to tell a teacher to be kind to his/her class, work to the needs of the class, and make sure that all the children are nice to each other. In a class of thirty children, working together day in and day out, learning multiple different subjects at multiple ability levels, this is something that is very hard to achieve. What this book suggests is how you can find better insight, awareness, and empathy into the causes of these behaviors by understanding the behavior as a skill challenge, rather than misbehavior. It shows you concrete options for exactly what you can do in the moment to support your students in developing skills they will use for the rest of their lives.

—Joey Mandel

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