



The dePaul School
for Dyslexia

THE MORE THAN BEHAVIOR™ LETTERS

Translating Behavior into Emotion and Emotion into Strategy

September - November 2025

BACKGROUND

Children with ADHD, dyslexia, and related learning profiles often experience chronic misinterpretation of their behavior as willful or inattentive, rather than as expressions of cognitive and emotional struggle. The More Than Behavior™ Letter System was developed to address this gap by transforming self-reflective data into emotionally intelligent narratives that promote understanding between students, educators, and families.

Grounded in social-emotional learning and developmental neuropsychology, the system reframes behavior as communication, emphasizing emotional insight and collaborative strategy over compliance.

FRAMEWORK

Situated within the Happy Core™ developmental sequence — **Recognize → Regulate → Understand → Advocate** — the letter system represents the “Understand” phase. It integrates principles from **attachment and trauma theory (Bowlby; van der Kolk)**, **executive-function research (Barkley)**, and **social-emotional learning (CASEL)**. The approach assumes that when emotion is acknowledged and language is provided, self-regulation and collaboration follow naturally.

LETTER TYPES & APPLICATIONS

- **Dear Teacher**

- Introduces the learner's emotional and cognitive landscape in a concise, non-diagnostic format.
- Translates behaviors (e.g., avoidance, restlessness, perfectionism) into emotional or executive-function explanations.
- Applications:
 - Classroom introductions at the start of term.
 - 504/IEP context sheets or teacher transition portfolios.
 - SEL writing and reflection exercises that build empathy between students and teachers.

- **Dear Support Team**

- Expands upon Dear Teacher™ with accommodation and progress-monitoring language.
- Aligns emotional-behavioral insights with functional performance and trial/monitor recommendations.
- Applications:
 - Integration into 504/IEP documentation or counselor-led meetings.
 - Student-led advocacy during transition planning or annual reviews.

- **Dear Younger Me™**

- Facilitate reflective dialogue between current and past self to build self-compassion and resilience.
- Reframe past struggles through a strengths-based, neuroaffirming lens.
- Applications:
 - SEL or counseling programs on identity and transition.
 - Therapeutic writing and narrative-reframing exercises.
 - End-of-year or graduation reflection activities.
 - Support for transitions between school forms

LETTER TYPES & APPLICATIONS

- **Dear Me™**

- Facilitate intrapersonal dialogue that promotes self-compassion and cognitive reframing.
- Encourage metacognitive awareness of growth, resilience, and coping strategies.
- Applications:
 - Counseling or SEL lessons on identity and self-awareness.
 - "Letter to Self" closure activities in transition programs.
 - Personal reflection exercises to reduce shame and internalized stigma.

Dear Grown-Ups™

- Translate the child's behavior into emotional meaning to foster understanding among parents, caregivers, and teachers.
- Promote empathy, reduce corrective responses, and align adults around supportive strategies rather than discipline.
- Applications:
 - Parent-teacher conferences and 504/IEP team meetings.
 - Family therapy or coaching focused on shared perspective-taking.
 - Introductory SEL or psychoeducational materials for caregivers of neurodiverse children.

- **Dear Professor™ / Dear Advisor™**

- Adapt the empathy-translation framework for postsecondary education.
- Encourage self-advocacy, independence, and professional communication with faculty and support offices.
- Applications:
 - Disability-services onboarding materials.
 - College transition or first-year success programs.
 - Academic coaching and advisor-student goal-setting sessions.

- **Dear Parent**

- Reflects the child's emotional world at home, reframing behavioral escalation as stress communication.
- Models relational, non-blaming language to reduce shame and improve co-regulation.
- Applications:
 - Psychoeducational handouts for ADHD/dyslexia diagnosis disclosure.
 - Family coaching, therapy, or parent education workshops.
 - Bridge tool between clinical assessment and day-to-day parenting support.

STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

Using a guided questionnaire, students, parents, or educators identify strengths, stressors, and supports. Responses are mapped to seven domains—attention, energy, emotion, anxiety, social interaction, learning, and strengths. A structured narrative engine assembles these insights into a personalized letter following the architecture:

Identity → Inner World → What Helps → Strengths → Affirmation.

OUTCOMES

Across pilots, letters have improved teacher empathy, facilitated 504 planning, and provided families with language that humanizes neurodiverse experience. Students report greater clarity in explaining needs and reduced anxiety in new learning environments.

COMPLIMENTARY MATERIALS



WHY THE MORE THAN BEHAVIOR™ LETTERS MATTER

Bridging the Emotional–Cognitive Divide

- Traditional behavior documentation (e.g., progress notes, 504 data) captures what students do but not why.
- The More Than Behavior™ Letters translate observable behavior into emotional and neurocognitive language—providing educators and parents with insight into function, feeling, and need rather than symptom or compliance.
- This translation supports trauma-informed and neuroaffirming practice, aligning with current frameworks of social-emotional learning (CASEL, 2023) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Reframing Misinterpretation and Reducing Stigma

- Reducing Misinterpretation and Stigma Neurodivergent behaviors (inattention, avoidance, perfectionism, emotional intensity) are often misread as oppositional or lazy.
- By contextualizing these actions through the child's authentic voice, the letters interrupt cycles of misunderstanding and shame, promoting compassion-based responses.
- This reframing strengthens relational trust—an established predictor of academic persistence and emotional regulation (Pianta, 2016).

Developing Self-Awareness and Metacognition

- For students, writing or reading their own letter is a metacognitive act: they articulate internal states, identify triggers, and name strategies that help.
- Such guided self-reflection has been shown to improve executive-function performance and emotional resilience (Zelazo & Carlson, 2012).
- The process transforms passive support ("I get accommodations") into active insight ("Here's how I learn best").

WHY THE MORE THAN BEHAVIOR™ LETTERS MATTER -2-

Empathy as Intervention

- The letters operationalize empathy—not as sentiment but as a tool for change.
- When teachers and parents receive a child's story framed in accessible, emotionally coherent language, they shift from corrective to collaborative approaches.
- This is consistent with findings that empathy-informed teacher communication decreases disciplinary incidents and improves engagement (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Universal Design for Human Understanding

- Each letter type (Teacher, Parent, Me, Younger Me, Professor, Advisor) uses the same psychological architecture—Identity → Inner World → What Helps → Strengths → Affirmation—but adapts tone and complexity to developmental stage.
- This design ensures that the core empathy mechanism remains stable while language evolves from adult-mediated advocacy (elementary) to autonomous self-expression (college).

Practical Integration and Measurable Impact

- Letters integrate seamlessly into SEL, counseling, and transition curricula, requiring minimal facilitator training.
- Schools report improved teacher–student rapport, increased parent engagement, and reduced anxiety during transitions to new grades or settings.
- For therapists and ADHD coaches, the letters serve as low-threshold emotional entry points, helping families accept diagnoses and engage in intervention with less resistance.

WHY THE MORE THAN BEHAVIOR™ LETTERS MATTER -3-

A Scalable Model for Emotional Literacy

- By embedding narrative empathy in an automated yet personalized process, the More Than Behavior™ system combines the scalability of digital tools with the warmth of human understanding.
- This hybrid approach demonstrates how AI can support—not replace—therapeutic and educational relationships, creating consistent language for emotional truth across age, setting, and culture.

In essence, the *More Than Behavior™ Letters* are not simply communication tools—they represent a developmental model of emotional translation.

They help educators, parents, and students speak a shared language of behavior, emotion, and support, turning misunderstanding into collaboration and compliance systems into compassion systems.