

Research to Practice: PEAK Parent Center is pleased to offer this “Research to Practice” article to family members and educators of children with disabilities. It is crucial for family members to be aware of current research that is proven to help educate their children. PEAK suggests that you print this out and pass it on to one of your child’s teachers. (See Part 1 in the Fall 2003 SPEAKout)

Positive Behavior Support in Practice - Part 2

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In the last issue of SpeakOUT, an overview of Positive Behavior Support (PBS) was provided, as well as a description of the assumptions that underlie this approach to effectively intervene with children and youth who have difficult or challenging behavior. In this issue two additional dimensions of PBS are addressed: 1) the *levels* of support within a PBS framework; and, 2) suggested resources for parents and service providers to learn more about PBS.

Positive Behavior Support is a values-driven approach to address the needs of children and youth who engage in difficult or challenging behavior (Bambara & Knoster, 1998). Effective behavior support for individual children or youth in schools is most successful when comprehensive levels of support are available at *all* levels of the school’s “systems.” The levels of Positive Behavior Support within a school include school-wide systems, classroom setting systems, non-classroom setting systems (e.g., restrooms, hallways, playgrounds, etc.) and individual student systems. Although it is common for school professionals and parents to become focused narrowly on the challenging behaviors of a small number of students in a school, it is recommended that school professionals and parents who seek to adopt PBS begin their efforts at the level of the school as a whole system; and then assess and implement promising practices at the levels of classroom, as well as non-classroom, systems as well. Supports for individual students become much more effective if there are sound, proactive, positive, and consistent disciplinary systems in place at *all* levels of the school prior to development of a plan for an individual student.

School-wide Positive Behavior Support

The process of adopting school-wide PBS begins with careful review of the discipline system in place with subsequent modification of the system as indicated. In addition to those aspects of a school’s mission related to academic achievement, the promotion of social competence, and the maintenance of a safe learning and teaching environment; school professionals are confronted with an escalating rate of disruptive problem behavior (U.S. Surgeon General, 2000). In response to disruption, school personnel often respond by using aversive and exclusionary consequences. Although aversive consequences can be effective with students who are relatively successful at school, they are less successful for students with the most serious problem behavior. The ability to address problem behaviors successfully requires an emphasis on proactive approaches in which expected, socially acceptable behaviors are taught directly, practiced in the natural environment, and followed by positive reinforcement (Horner & Sugai, 2002).

It is estimated that comprehensive adoption of all levels of PBS requires between three and five years of effort including creation of a leadership team; ongoing training for all personnel; and creation, as well as ongoing monitoring, or multiple forms of data. Research to date suggests a number of quality indicators for effective school-wide systems including the selection of a small number of school rules or behavioral expectations stated in the positive; explicit instruction for students during which positive examples of behavioral expectations are modeled; public posting of the rules across settings within the school environment, and, frequent rewards for student adherence to those rules.

Classroom Setting Systems

A second level of Positive Behavior Support is at the level of the classroom. A similar set of quality indicators for effective rules and behavioral expectations apply to classroom rules as apply at the school-wide level (e.g., behavioral expectations are specified and taught explicitly). An additional important indicator of an effective classroom level system includes attention to the degree of “match” between curriculum and instruction with student abilities. The foundation for effective behavior support at the classroom level is high quality curriculum that is relevant to the lives of the students, as well as instruction that is characterized by variety and differentiated to meet the needs of *all* learners. The full range of strategies to meet the needs of learners who are diverse includes both the use of scaffolding and Universal Design for Learning (www.cast.org) to promote a high rate of student success. Another indicator of effective behavior support at the classroom level is efficient and orderly transitions between activities.

Non-classroom Setting Systems

The third level of the “system” within schools consists of those settings (i.e., particular times or places) during which no formal

instruction is underway but supervision is emphasized. Examples include hallways, the cafeteria, restroom, stairwells, and playgrounds. An important indicator of effective behavior support in these settings is reflected in the role people play in providing supervision. Behavior support in non-classroom settings requires that supervision be “active”; adults move, scan, interact with, and coach students to engage in appropriate behavior and pro-social interaction with peers.

In schools with effective behavior support in non-classroom settings, *all* school personnel rotate through the role of providing active supervision. An additional indicator of effective behavior support in non-classroom settings includes attention to physical or architectural features of the building that prohibit supervised settings or clear traffic patterns. Attention to scheduling may also impact the effectiveness of behavior support in non-classroom settings; limits must be set regarding the appropriate number of students in non-classroom spaces at the same time.

Individual Student Systems

The last level of support within a school whose personnel adopt PBS is support for individual students whose difficult or challenging behaviors persist despite high quality pro-active interventions and supports at all three levels of the school’s “systems.” This level of support is reserved for those students whose difficult or challenging behaviors are chronic, whose behavior interferes with their learning and/or that of peers, and who are excluded frequently from instruction.

The foundation of effective behavior support at the level of the individual student is skillful *Functional Behavior Assessment* and intervention. As articulated in the first part of the series, Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) is based on the belief that behavior *is* communication and meets a need for the student. Functional Behavior Assessment is the process of determining which need or function(s) the difficult or challenging behavior serves for an individual student. Although there are multiple models in use nationally whose proponents interpret behavior in light of up to nine different functions, there is general agreement that some students behave the way they do to escape or avoid people or settings they find unpleasant (e.g., “round robin” reading for a student who is embarrassed about his or her fluency in reading so tantrums to be excluded from reading group), or to gain access to objects or events they desire such as attention from adults or peers. Functional behavior assessment is “hypothesis driven,” meaning that team members make their best judgment on what function(s) a particular student’s behavior serves, and then brainstorm a range of pro-social and otherwise acceptable ways for the student to have that need met. Unlike more traditional forms of behavior “management,” proponents of PBS suggest that replacement behaviors be promoted that meet the hypothesized function (i.e., intervention must be matched to the underlying needs of individual students) for long-term success in service provision. An example for a student who is perceived to be seeking attention might include teaching the replacement behavior of asking politely for a classroom “job” to help the student access needed attention as a way to reduce his or her persistent interruption of teacher directions.

Resources

Multiple sources of information regarding the philosophy and practice of PBS are available. Many of the quality indicators described above are drawn from the federally funded “OSEP Center on Positive Behavior Support” at the University of Oregon. The center is supported by a grant from the Office of Special Education Programs and other agencies. The center has an extensive website (www.pbis.org) with detailed information on all levels of support within PBS systems, newsletters devoted to specific topics of interest within the topic of PBS, information on the relationship between PBS and federal law, and a range of self-assessments for school professionals to complete and use as the foundation for goal setting and school improvement plans to implement PBS. (These final resources are accessed by clicking on the word “tools” on the sidebar of the www.pbis.org home page.) Additional electronic resources for PBS are identified in the box that accompanies this text.

The third and final installment of information regarding PBS will be found in the next issue of SpeakOUT. In the final section, a range of suggested dimensions for development of a multi-component support plan for individual students will be addressed.

Resources for Information on Positive Behavior Support

Website Address	Audience	Description of Website Content
www.pbis.org	School professionals and parents; all content available in Spanish and English.	A comprehensive collection of resources for educators and family members is available. In addition to the newsletters and “tools” for planning school improvement efforts at all “levels of support, the site also contains research in support of PBS.
www.beachcenter.org	School professionals and parents.	This site is affiliated with a technical assistance center on PBS and includes an extremely useful document to guide the input of family members in PBS plan development titled – <i>Tips for educators: Incorporating PBS into the IEP.</i>
www.challengingbehavior.org	School professionals, especially those who serve young children and their families.	This site is affiliated with the “Center for evidence-based practice: Young children with challenging behavior.” Click on <i>resources</i> to obtain a research synthesis on effective procedures for early intervention service providers.
http://csefel.uiuc.edu	School professionals, especially those who serve young children and their families; all content available in Spanish and English.	This site contains a set of 5 modules that include facilitators’ guides on a variety of topics including teaching strategies to promote social and emotional development in young children.
www.cde.state.co.us	School professionals and parents.	This site is especially helpful for CO residents. It contains information regarding tools for conducting Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA). To access the information, complete each of the following steps: 1) On the sidebar go to “Special/gifted/Pre-K,” 2) then go to “Exceptional services unit,” 3) then go to “Topic index,” and, 4) then go to “Guidelines for functional behavior assessment.”

References

- Bambara, L. M., & Knoster, T. (1998). Designing positive behavior support plans. *Innovations – Research to Practice Series*. Washington, DC. American Association on Mental Retardation.
- Horner, R., & Sugai, G. (2002). *School-wide positive behavior support: Implementers’ blueprint and self-assessment*. Eugene, OR: University of Oregon, OSEP Center on Positive Behavior Support.
- U.S. Surgeon General (2000). *Executive summary youth violence: A report of the surgeon general*. Washington, DC: Public Health Service. (<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/youthviolence/summary.htm>)