

Positive Behavior Support: Principles Related to Behavior Intervention Plans

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“Positive Behavior Support” is a conceptual approach that is rapidly changing how we approach problem behavior. By focusing on the following approaches and key concepts, even behaviors that have been occurring for a long time can be changed. These concepts are radically different from reduction approaches that simply try to either punish the student for the behavior, or reward the student if s/he stops the problem behavior. The “Positive Behavior Support” approach is data-driven, based on carefully looking at the context of the behavior to understand why the behavior is occurring. This is followed by implementing an individualized behavior plan, not just to eliminate problem behavior, but to teach the student new skills and change environments and interactions to support a wide range of positive behaviors. The following outline describes what needs to be considered, when developing a behavior plan based on an understanding of the function of the behavior, i.e. a functional behavior assessment.

- **Positive Behavioral Support Principle:** *Behavior serves a purpose for the student. All behaviors, including problem behavior, allow the student to get a need met (i.e., behavior serves a function). Although all functions are legitimate and desirable, the method or form of the behavior may require alteration.*
 - **Key Concept:** This behavior has worked in the past, or is currently working to either, 1) get something the student desires, or 2) avoid or protest something the student wishes to remove.
 - **Requirement:** A behavior plan must identify the function of the problem behavior in order to develop a plan that teaches an alternative replacement behavior that serves the same function.
 - **Method:** Observing the student in the problem situation and interviewing others who are frequently present when the problem occurs is required. Focusing on the student’s facial expression and the response of others often yields cues as to what the function of the behavior may be.
 - **Examples of functions of behavior:**
 1. Billy throws his work on the floor because it is hard work for him and his face shows anger and frustration. **His actions are a protest.**
 2. Jane giggles and disrupts peers around her because she enjoys the attention and reactions she gets and her face shows pleasure and excitement. **Her actions are to get social attention**, even when that attention from peers is one of displeasure and disapproval.

3. Renee uses profanity not related to what is going on around her. Her face shows pleasure and excitement and she uses these words as a method of starting a conversation, e.g., her peers immediately tell her not to use these words and start conversing with her about the use of appropriate language. **Her actions are to get social interactions started.**

☐ **Positive Behavioral Support Principle:** *Behavior is related to the context/environment in which it occurs.*

- **Key Concept:** Something is either present in the environment, or NOT present in the environment which increases the likelihood the problem behavior will occur.
 - **Requirement:** The behavior plan must identify what environmental features support the problem behavior in order to know what environmental changes will remove the student's need to use the problem behavior to achieve something desired.
 - **Method:** Observing the student in the problem situation and interviewing others who are frequently present when the problem occurs is required. Focusing on everything going on around the student, the nature of the instruction, interactions with and around the student, and the work output required by the curriculum is necessary to understand why the student uses this problem behavior.
 - **Examples of context/environment impact on problem behavior:**
 1. Billy has NOT YET received support to complete difficult work. He only throws math or reading worksheets that appear long and hard to him.
 2. Jane has NOT YET received direct instruction on how to appropriately make and keep friends. Her peers reinforce her behavior inadvertently by their strong responses. Her peers have neither learned how to reinforce her for appropriate behavior, nor learned how to change their loud expressions of disapproval in response to Jane's behavior.
 3. Renee has NOT YET received instruction on how to initiate social conversation without the use of her attention-getting swear words. Her peers have not learned how to direct Renee to use the alternative method of attention-seeking rather than correcting her for attempting to get their attention.

☐ **Positive Behavioral Support Principle:** *There are two strands to a complete behavior plan.*

- **Key Concept:** Changing behavior requires addressing both the environmental features (removing the need for use of problem behavior to get needs met) AND developing a replacement behavior (teaching a functionally-equivalent behavior that student can use to get that same need met in an acceptable way).

- **Requirement:** A complete behavior plan must address both strands: make environmental changes that support acceptable behavior, AND specify how to teach or elicit functionally equivalent acceptable behavior.
- **Method:** Writing an effective two strand plan requires a collaborative team that includes plan implementers and other important, supportive people in the student's life such as family members, any agency personnel (e.g., social workers, mental health providers, probation officers) and of course the student if his/her participation is possible.
- **Examples of two strand, complete approaches:**
 1. Billy's teacher will alter his assignments so that hard work will not appear overwhelming to him (remove need to protest). Billy will be taught an acceptable protest for work that appears difficult, such as calling the teacher over and telling her the work appears long and hard (functionally-equivalent alternative behavior).
 2. Jane will receive instruction on how to make and keep friends and her peers will receive instruction in how to calmly redirect her to use appropriate interactions to achieve their brief expressions of approval (remove need to get social attention in maladaptive ways). Jane will learn brief interactions during work periods that result in social approval from her peers, yet do not disrupt others (get social attention with functionally-equivalent alternative behavior).
 3. Renee's teachers will provide collaborative learning opportunities that allow Renee to be in sustained social interactions with her peers (removes need to use swear words to start a social interaction). Renee will be taught specific social interaction initiation techniques and her peers will be taught how to prompt her to use these techniques (functionally equivalent ways of starting a social dialogue).

□ **Positive Behavioral Principle:** *New behavior must get a pay-off as big or bigger than the problem behavior.*

- **Key Concept:** To achieve maintenance of a new behavior, it must be reinforced. Reinforcement is actions we take, privileges or tangibles we give, that the student really wants to get, and therefore he/she does the behavior again and again to get that reinforcement.
- **Requirement:** The behavior plan must specify reinforcement for the new functionally equivalent behavior. The behavior plan may also wish to specify general reinforcement for positive behaviors as well. Often a general lack of reinforcement available for following class rules will increase a wide range of problem behaviors. When reinforcement is given to all students for a wide range of positive behaviors dramatically decreases in problem behaviors occurs.

- **Method:** Find out what the student typically seeks in the environment. Ask the student and observe him/her in the situation or have the student complete a “reinforcement survey” of things s/he would want to earn. Does she like computer games? Adults to praise her work? Opportunities to be first in line? Make access to the reinforcer you discover contingent on performing the desired behavior.
- **Examples of Reinforcement of Replacement Behavior:**
 1. Billy’s teacher will praise his use of the new form of protest behavior his behavior plan suggests, i.e., calling her over to tell the teacher the work looks hard. (**Efficacy evidence:** Billy’s classroom and home behavior shows he is really pleased by any positive attention from adults.) She will also send home daily report cards describing his use of the new behavior and Billy’s parents will amply praise his new skill at home.
 2. Jane’s circle of friends will meet daily for 5 minutes at recess to praise Jane for her quiet, quick checking in with them during a work period that does not disrupt work. Jane and her friends will all receive points toward lunch with the teacher for their teamwork and support of each other. (**Efficacy evidence:** Jane and her friends chose this reinforcer at the beginning of the intervention, telling the teacher how much they wanted the opportunity to be in the “lunch crew” they had observed other students earning).
 3. Renee’s friends will award her “friendly talking” points and a “high five” gestural acknowledgement each time she tries to start a conversation using the language scripts she has been taught. The teacher will allow Renee to choose from a menu of tangible and activity reinforcers for every 10 points earned. (**Efficacy evidence:** Renee loves the high fives from adults and peers and says she wants to earn the variety of reinforcers on the list).

☐ **Positive Behavioral Principle:** Implementers need to know how to handle problem behavior if it occurs again.

- **Key Concept:** The behavior plan must specify reactive strategies ranging from:
 - 1) **Beginning stage:** Prompting the alternative replacement behavior;
 - 2) **Mid-behavior stage:** The problem behavior is fully present and now requires staff to handle the behavior safely through an individualized, careful deescalating of the behavior. This might include specific techniques, calming words, presenting of choices, distraction, and redirection. Each technique will likely be unique to the student. What has worked in the past is important to discuss. Some staff deescalate the student better than others and this should be considered.
 - 3) **Problem-solving/Debriefing stage:** Debriefing with the student is to review what happened, practice the alternative behavior again, and plan what to do next.
 - 4.) **Required consequences stage:** Clearly written consequences or other team determined actions because of the behavior are important, e.g., school and district disciplinary required actions; calling parents; notifying probation department; attendance at special seminars, detention, and so forth.

- **Requirement:** All implementers must be clear on specifically how to handle behavior to assure safety of all and that the intervention matches the stage of escalation.
- **Method:** The behavior team will need to discuss what has worked in the past to alter the problem behavior, and what interventions are required at all four stages of problem behavior.
- **Example of reactive strategies:**
Billy's Behavior Support Plan includes the four stages of reactive strategies as follows:
 1. **Beginning behavior Stage:** Use gestures Billy has been taught that are cues to Billy to use the alternative protest, i.e., call them over to protest hard work. Follow the "Stop and Think" gestural system taught to teachers and students at this school.
 2. **Mid-behavior Stage:** Increase proximity to Billy, point to the work on the floor, use calm voice requiring work to be replaced on desk, wait patiently for compliance and praise in accordance with the teacher training on "One Minute Skill Building." If Billy is too agitated to work, invite him to take a "Time Away" in a specified classroom area. Praise his return when he is ready to work.
 3. **Debriefing Stage:** Ask Billy why he chose the old form of protest rather than his new alternative. Have Billy help fill out the daily report card communicating the poor choice he made and what Billy and the teacher will do next time to help assure the new behavior to protest is selected.
 4. **Consequences Stage:** If the behavior escalates to loud swearing, Billy will be sent to the counselor to complete a written process, "My Inappropriate Behavior," which may or may not result in a suspension or other school disciplinary procedures given by the Vice Principal for the disruptive behavior.

□ **Positive Behavioral Principle:** *On-going communication needs to be between all important stakeholders in the student's life.*

- **Key Concept:** The behavior plan must specify who communicates with whom, how frequently and in what manner. Two-way communication between message senders and recipients is important.
 - **Requirement:** The communication needs to be frequently enough to result in the continuous teaming necessary to achieve success.
 - **Method:** Communication can be sent home in writing, through messages on email or voice mail, through posting (if information can be communicated in codes to assure confidentiality) or face-to-face.

- **Example of Communication between important stakeholders:**

Billy's team decided on the following communication provisions:

1. **Communication between:** parents, teacher, school counselor, therapist from Department of Mental Health, school principal
2. **Frequency:**
 - a. **Daily:** Report card on use of replacement behavior will be sent home; parents report back on praise or other reinforcers for accomplishment they gave Billy each day.
 - b. **Weekly:** Teacher will send weekly summary of Billy's behavior to principal, school counselor, parents and therapist
 - c. **Per Incident:** Episodes of protest that include throwing furniture or loud swearing will be reported to the school counselor, who will debrief and send "My Inappropriate Behavior" analysis sheet to the principal, therapist, family, teacher. Therapist and parents will communicate any discussions with Billy about the incident which have yielded important insights about future interventions to counselor, who will inform others as needed.
3. **Manner:**
 - a. **Daily:** written report hand carried by Billy to parents
 - b. **Weekly:** email summaries using a report chart
 - c. **Per Incident:** paper copy to principal, teacher. Email copy to therapist, family