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Schoolwide Behavior Support Practices

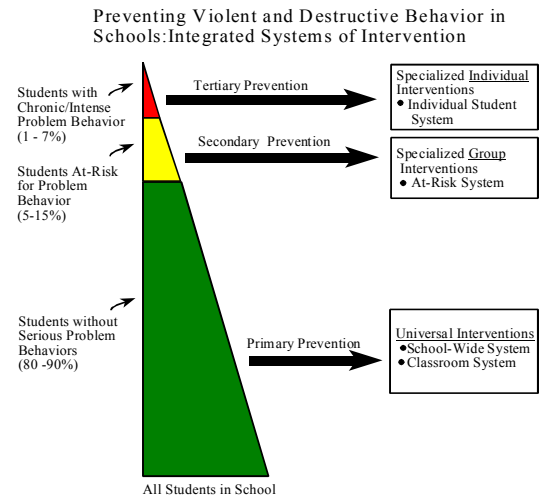
Among the most important advances in improving the behavior of children in schools has been the systematic emphasis on schoolwide systems of behavior support. Historically, behavior support has been viewed as (1) only for children who engaged in problem behaviors and (2) implemented only after the child displayed patterns of problem behavior. Research by Roy Mayer (Mayer, 1995), Hill Walker (Walker, 1996), Ron Nelson (Nelson, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, in press) and George Sugai (Sugai et al., 2000) suggests that these more intense intervention approaches are most effective when they are used in combination with a schoolwide behavior support effort.

Schoolwide behavior support is:

- Comprehensive (all children in the school receive behavior support)
- Proactive (children receive behavior support before they engage in behavior problems)
- Preventive (early intervention reduces the number of children needing intensive support).

Walker (1996) provides a model that links schoolwide

Figure 1. Three Levels of Prevention



(Reprinted with permission from Walker et al., 1996)

behavior support and more intensive behavior intervention practices within a comprehensive system of prevention. Walker noted that prevention of behavior problems may occur at three levels, and offer Figure 1 (above) as a way of depicting how these three levels of prevention are interconnected.

- *Primary prevention* refers to the proactive defining, teaching, and acknowledgement of appropriate social behaviors. All children in a school are taught the critical social skills needed for success. This

teaching occurs before problems arise. Children from different cultural and social backgrounds receive the same training. The goal is to create a culture of social competence where students: (1) know exactly what is expected; (2) are acknowledged for behaving appropriately; and (3) expect appropriate behavior from each other. Initial research suggests that investing in proactive teaching of appropriate behaviors actually saves staff time through reduction in the number of problem behaviors that command teacher and staff time later in the year.

- *Secondary prevention* refers to behavior support that is provided for those students who do not respond to the primary prevention efforts. Secondary prevention efforts are typically delivered in a group format. Students receive brief, efficient, targeted support.
- *Tertiary prevention* refers to the intense behavior support intended for students who exhibit chronic, high-intensity problem behaviors to prevent them from developing a life of violence and crime. Behavior support at this level is highly individualized, comprehensive in scope, and often coordinated across mental health, juvenile justice, and

local social support organizations.

The focus of this chapter is on primary prevention (e.g., those behavior support efforts that are schoolwide). The emphasis is not just on the teaching of social and lifestyle skills to all students, but the use of proactive systems that result in a school environment that is predictable, positive, and collaborative. When schoolwide behavior support is successful, the majority of students work actively to build and sustain a positive school climate.

Schoolwide Discipline

Schoolwide discipline is intended to promote a positive social climate for instruction and learning (Colvin, Sugai, and Kameenui, 1992; Lewis & Sugai, 1999). Discipline fosters the academic achievement and social development of all students. Educators agree that while students who exhibit antisocial behavior can destabilize a school, these students can be influenced by positive approaches to discipline.

Collegial commitment is a major factor in successfully implementing a schoolwide discipline plan. The discipline plan depends upon a well-constructed and consistently enforced discipline code, high expectations, staff training, a positive school climate, and staff cooperation and collaboration. In

addition, the school discipline plan should include a database to monitor assigned staff responsibilities, as well as occurrences of antisocial behavior.

Positive and Safe Environment

Schools are also more effective when, in addition to being safe, they are warm and friendly places where appropriate social behavior is encouraged and academic achievement is recognized. Sugai et al., (1999; 2000) recommend the following:

1. Invest in building a culture of social competence.
 - Define three to five positively stated behavioral expectations that apply to all students, in all locations, at all times in the school.
 - Actively teach the behavioral expectations to all students early in the academic year.
 - Develop multiple strategies for acknowledging appropriate social behavior. Every student in the school should be acknowledged for appropriate social behavior on a regular basis.
2. Do not tolerate antisocial behavior.
 - Define categories of problem behavior that are clear, operational, and mutually exclusive.

- Develop a continuum of consequences for antisocial behavior that (1) prevent antisocial behavior from being rewarded, (2) allow for minimal disruption of ongoing instruction, and (3) provide a clear message that antisocial behavior will not be condoned.
 - Implement the consequences for antisocial behavior with consistency and predictability.
3. Gather and use information about social behavior for ongoing decision-making.
 - Collect information about key indicators of antisocial behavior (e.g., office discipline referrals, attendance, vandalism, suspension, and detention).
 - Organize information about social behavior for use by school-based teams
 - Monitor the impact of team decisions to build a positive social climate.

Walker and his colleagues (Schneider, Walker & Sprague, 2000; Walker & Epstein, 2001) also emphasize that a safe school environment requires attention to the physical features of the school. They recommend careful review of entry and exit paths within a school, and minimizing the number of spaces that are difficult to monitor. In addition, safety procedures should include:

- Regular review of school safety policies
- Discussion of school crisis intervention plans with staff members and volunteers
- Monitoring of school entrances, exits, and hallways;
- Requiring that all visitors sign in when arriving and sign out when leaving the school
- Effective use of lighting, proper location of restrooms, increased supervision, and closing of unnecessary entrances.

Establish Behavioral Systems That Support Effective Practice

Successful schoolwide behavior support requires effective policies and administrative systems, as well as effective practices. Effective practices such as teaching and acknowledging appropriate behavior, and establishing consistent classroom routines rely on active implementation by faculty. These practices are much less likely to be effective or to endure without attention to the policies and systems that nurture and support effective practices. Sugai et al., (1994; 1999; 2000) recommend that for a schoolwide behavior support to be effective, the following system features need to be in place:

- Improving the behavioral climate of the school needs to be one of the top three goals of

the faculty, staff, and administration.

- 80 percent of the faculty needs to be committed to improving the social skills of students.
- The faculty needs to agree to maintain a commitment to improved social climate over a three-year period. Changing the social culture of a school takes time. The initial development and implementation of schoolwide behavior systems typically take a full academic year.
- The school should establish a team to build and maintain schoolwide behavior support procedures.
- The team needs to include an administrator, faculty representation, and school-related personnel. Community members may also be an asset to the team.
- The team needs a budget and adequate personnel time to implement schoolwide behavior support actions.
- The team needs regular, accurate, timely access to information about the social behavior of students, and should use this information for ongoing decision making.

Gang Identification/ Interventions

Students who exhibit disruptive behaviors are often at risk of gang affiliation. In

addition, gang activities contribute to antisocial behavior patterns in schools. Universal and selected strategies should be used to prevent and intervene in gang activities that affect the school. Early intervention may prevent young students from later gang involvement. Walker et al. (1995) recommend that schools improve their interaction and involvement with the neighborhoods they serve. The school should develop its prevention and intervention strategies in collaboration with students' families, law enforcement authorities, and other community agencies. Students vulnerable to gang involvement need to be engaged in positive activities such as adult and peer mentoring, social skills training, and academic tutoring.

Bullying Identification/ Interventions

Perhaps the first and most prolific researcher on schoolwide bullying interventions is Dr. Dan Olweus, of the Research Center for Health Promotion in Bergen, Norway. Since his initial work in bullying intervention, Dr. Olweus has teamed with researchers from Clemson University, Dr. Susan Limber and colleagues. Their work has been to design and implement comprehensive, multilevel, multi-component school-based programs to prevent or reduce bullying in students 6- to 15-years

of age. Their research has shown that these interventions:

- Reduce student reports of bullying as much as 30 percent to 70 percent
- Significantly reduce general reports of antisocial behavior by students
- Significantly improve classroom order
- Produce more positive attitudes toward school and schoolwork (Olweus, 1991).

Like most schoolwide interventions, anti-bullying interventions seek to restructure the school environment to prevent and reduce the occurrence of bullying behavior. This is primarily done by providing staff with the skills necessary to identify and react to bullying behavior, actively teaching students to improve peer relations, and making the school a safe, positive learning environment.

Interventions based on the work of Olweus and colleagues include Bully Proofing Your School (Garrity et al., 1994). This comprehensive approach to the prevention and reduction of bullying—primarily for elementary schools—is designed to make schools safe places, both psychologically and physically. The basic underpinnings of this program are:

- It is the responsibility of adults to ensure that school is a safe

environment in which children can learn

- Bullying is not synonymous with violence
- The bully-proofing program will be most successful if implemented comprehensively
- Punitive programs are only successful with bullying behavior to a point.
- Bullies, when confronted with a unified group of adults and peers within a school, are defused
- There are many means to any end (Garrity et al., p. 2).

Many of the techniques taught in this course will greatly reduce the occurrence of bullying in schools if implemented comprehensively and consistently. It is essential that school staff understand what bullying is and how they can both individually and collectively work to prevent bullying and make victims feel safe in school.

Teach Social Skills That Generalize and Endure

Changes in social behavior that are realized in alternative settings often do not generalize to other settings or maintain over time once the students return to the regular classroom. Students with antisocial behavior problems need assistance in making the transition to less-restrictive settings. Because of concerns related to generalization and maintenance, it is highly

recommended that students with antisocial behavior be taught appropriate social skills in those settings where they are expected to perform those skills.

When support cannot be added to the regular classrooms, and students are transferred to restricted settings, extra care is needed to plan for generalization and maintenance of newly acquired social skills.

Transenvironmental programming is the name for the systematic preparation of students for success in different educational environments (Anderson-Inman, 1981; Walker, 1996). Transenvironmental programming provides students who have been assigned to more-restrictive placements (such as resource, self-contained, day treatment, or residential programs) the instruction and support needed to adjust to a less-restrictive environment. The four major components of transenvironmental programming are:

- Assessment of regular classroom environment(s) to identify critical behavioral and academic expectations
- Instruction of students with antisocial behavior problems in these competencies and skills necessary to successful social function
- Implementation of transition and support strategies that enhance students' ability to

transfer the competencies and skills to new settings

- Regular monitoring to ensure that students' competencies and skills are maintained in other settings (Walker, 1996).

Collaborative Teaming

Collaborative teaming is an interactive process that brings together special education teachers, regular teachers, and paraprofessionals to develop and implement strategies for working with students who exhibit antisocial behavior. Practitioners broaden their understanding of their students' academic and social behavioral needs as they work together in applying behavior management strategies and instructional techniques in educational settings. Such collaborative partnerships require teachers and paraprofessionals to be proficient in joint decision making and sharing responsibility for interventions (Warger & Rutherford, 1993). Social skills training, anger control, and social problem solving are instructional techniques that can be effectively implemented by two or more teachers. The collaborative teams work in (1) the systematic presentation of concepts, (2) the continuous tracking of student progress; and (3) assessing the effectiveness of their interventions.

Summary

Antisocial behavior is a major concern in schools. Safe and orderly classrooms are essential for providing effective instruction so students may reach the higher educational standards expected in our schools. Antisocial behavior is the factor that most threatens the safety and orderliness of schools. If we are to realize the goal of safe and orderly schools, we must first learn how to address antisocial behavior.

Multiple factors contribute to the development of antisocial behavior including family-related, school-related, and community-related factors. While the schools cannot change all of the factors that lead to antisocial behavior, specific schoolwide and classroom strategies can mitigate the effects of those factors and help students develop socially acceptable behavior.

Major research findings on managing antisocial behavior indicate:

- Antisocial behavior is increasing in schools
- Many school-related factors can help predict antisocial behaviors such as:
 - ◇ Lack of academic engagement
 - ◇ Social skills deficits
 - ◇ Negative interaction with peers
 - ◇ Inappropriate behaviors such as noncompliance, aggressiveness, and hostility

toward others; disregard for the safety and property of others; negative verbalizations; and off-task behavior

- Certain classroom management strategies are effective in preventing antisocial behavior. These strategies include:
 - ◇ Establishing well-defined and predictable classroom routines
 - ◇ Acknowledging appropriate student behavior at least four times for every negative interaction with students
 - ◇ Providing consistent classroom management practices
 - ◇ Matching curriculum demands to the skill level of students
- ◇ Providing excellent classroom management and instructional practices
- ◇ Providing specific consequences for antisocial behavior
- ◇ Providing specific instruction to build alternative prosocial responses.
- Districts need to develop schoolwide approaches focused on preventing antisocial behavior.
- Schoolwide behavior support begins by investing in the teaching and rewarding of appropriate social behaviors.
- Schoolwide approaches to bullying are more likely to be successful when school teams have consistently addressed the issue.
- Establishing a positive social culture in a school makes all other behavior support efforts more effective.
- Students need assistance in generalizing acceptable behavior learned in one setting to other settings; transenvironmental programming can be useful in providing this assistance

- The collaborative teaming model holds promise for facilitating the management of students with antisocial behavior—special education teachers, regular education teachers, and paraprofessionals cooperate in planning and carrying out instruction in classroom settings
- Sustained implementation of schoolwide behavior support will require ongoing assistance from district-level personnel.
The implementation of these important research findings can go a long way toward creating the kinds of school and classroom environments that foster high educational standards and promote student learning.