

Teachers' Guides  
to Inclusive Practices  
**Behavior Support**  
Third Edition

by

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# About the Authors

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## CORE FEATURES AND PRINCIPLES OF POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT

The support methods and intervention techniques incorporated within school-based PBS are those that have demonstrated effectiveness, are suitable for implementation by teachers and others in a school setting, and are consistent with values of equality and respect. Several distinct features and principles about the causes of behavior problems, the most appropriate and helpful ways to alter behavior, and the desired outcomes of behavior intervention are at the foundation of a PBS orientation. PBS incorporates five core features and principles that distinguish it from other approaches to behavior intervention. These features may be given slightly different names in various writings on PBS (Bambara & Kern, 2005; Carr et al., 2002; Crone, Hawken, & Horner, 2015), but the underlying concepts remain consistent. The features apply to each of the three levels of behavior support—primary, secondary, and tertiary—but are implemented differently depending on whether the support is schoolwide, for a smaller group of students, or for an individual student.

### 1. Behavior Is Learned and Can Change

The question “Why do some children and young adults act in ways that are difficult to understand, disturbing to others, and even destructive to self, others, and property?” can be answered this way from a PBS perspective: A person’s behavior is a function of the interaction between the person and the environment. According to this theory,



## What the Research Says

### Effectiveness of Positive Behavior Support and Future Research Needs

Schoolwide positive behavior support (SWPBS) has been effectively implemented in a wide range of contexts—urban, rural, and suburban settings; elementary and middle schools; and both public and alternative settings (Goh & Bambara, 2012; Horner, Carr, Strain, Todd, & Reed, 2002; Snell, Voorhees, & Chen, 2005). Given training and technical assistance, typical intervention agents, including teachers, administrators, and school psychologists, have demonstrated accurate implementation of research-based intervention practices, along with the organizational systems required to sustain them. Literature reviews and individual studies supported the following findings about the effectiveness of the continuum of supports that compose SWPBS and the research that is still needed to promote the most effective applications of positive behavior support (PBS) in schools and community settings.

#### Universal Level

Case studies and quasi-experimental studies have suggested that SWPBS can have the following outcomes: 1) reduced office disciplinary referrals, 2) reduced out-of-school suspensions, 3) improved academic achievement, 4) increased perceptions of school safety, and 5) reduced rates of disruptive behavior (Curtis, Van Home, Robertson, & Karvonen, 2010; Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006; Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005; Medley, Little, & Akin-Little, 2008; Nelson, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, 2002; Simonsen, Britton, & Young, 2010; Solomon, Klein, Hintze, Cressey, & Peller, 2012; Swanson, 2011; Warren et al., 2006).

Randomized controlled studies comparing accurately implemented SWPBS with typical school discipline practices report a significant reduction in office disciplinary referral levels and student suspensions, as well as an increase in overall perceived school safety (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2009), and a higher proportion of third graders passing state reading assessments (Horner et al., 2009). Training and technical assistance were functionally related to implementation fidelity and improved results in both of the aforementioned studies.

#### Secondary Level

Research suggests that secondary-level supports that effectively prevent or decrease problem behaviors include classroom practices such as increased daily progress monitoring, adult attention, positively stated expectations, explicit social skills instruction, group-based contingencies, and positive reinforcement for desired behaviors (Simonsen, Myers, & Briere, 2011).

The most evaluated secondary-tier intervention is a check-in/check-out system (McIntosh, Kauffman, Carter, Dickey, & Horner, 2009; Simonsen et al., 2011). The check-in/check-out system is designed to give students with nondangerous behavior more contact with adults who provide additional instruction, feedback, and reinforcement regarding expected behavior (Campbell & Anderson, 2011). Check-in/check-out is efficient and inexpensive to administer and has proven effective in decreasing off-task behavior and increasing academic engagement as compared with typical practice (McIntosh et al., 2009; Simonsen et al., 2011). Check-in/check-out is described more fully in Chapter 3.

#### Tertiary Level

Reviews of research on individualized PBS found function-based interventions that employed antecedent manipulations, teaching replacement behaviors that match the function of the problem behaviors, and positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior or use of alternate skills consistently demonstrated positive results (Horner et al., 2002; Snell et al., 2005).

PBS interventions consisting of antecedent manipulations, teaching alternative skills, and function-based consequences were found to be equally effective across diverse student populations and educational settings, including inclusive classrooms, in a meta-analysis of function-based interventions conducted in school settings (Goh & Bambara, 2012).

**Figure 1.2.** Effectiveness of positive behavior support and future research needs.

**Critical Features of SWPBS that Have Not Been Adequately Researched**

Few experimental assessments of SWPBS have been conducted (Horner et al., 2009). Therefore, it is difficult to know precisely which aspects of the supports provided to students precipitated the social and academic improvements associated with implementation. In particular, further examination of the relationship between SWPBS implementation and effective instruction is needed to tease out the links between improved student social behavior and academic achievement (Horner et al., 2009).

Identification of mediators (i.e., variables that are influenced by PBS implementation and, in turn, influence outcomes; examples include teachers' sense of efficacy and schools' organizational health) and moderators (i.e., variables that affect the direction or strength of the relation between PBS implementation and outcomes; examples include school size and implementation quality) are needed to increase the understanding of the impact of SWPBS on students and school personnel (Bradshaw et al., 2010).

Although a basic assumption of the three-tiered model for SWPBS is that quality implementation of Tier 1 practices will reduce the need for Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports, research has not confirmed this theory. There is a general absence of studies that demonstrate that implementation of SWPBS as a whole model reduces the need for intensive individualized supports. Furthermore, there is an absence of research that examines how the entire model affects the performance of students with disabilities.

Research on SWPBS implementation in high schools is limited. Research that has been conducted suggests that achieving and sustaining high-fidelity implementation, particularly of targeted and individualized supports, presents unique challenges (Bohanon et al., 2006; Warren et al., 2003).

which is sometimes referred to as an *ecological theory* of behavior, behavior problems are not just a reflection of some emotional or mental disturbance that dwells within the person (Hobbs, 1975). Although it is true that behavior is affected by individual

biochemical, cognitive, physical, and psychosocial characteristics, behavior also is strongly affected by the environment in which one functions. Factors in the environment that influence behavior include the physical space, the people present, the

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 (PL 108-446) includes several requirements concerning school disciplinary procedures and strategies for addressing behavior problems of students with disabilities.

1. The use of positive behavior support (PBS) must be considered in two situations:
  - a. During the development, review, and revision of an individualized education program (IEP) for a child whose behavior impedes his or her learning or the learning of others, the IEP team must consider, if appropriate, strategies to address that behavior.
  - b. When a child with a disability violates a code of student conduct and is removed from his or her current placement for more than 10 consecutive school days (unless the removal is due to certain specific reasons, such as behavior that resulted in bodily injury or other zero-tolerance offenses) and if the local education agency, the parent, and relevant members of the IEP team determine that the conduct was a manifestation of the child's disability, the IEP team must conduct a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) and implement a behavioral intervention plan (BIP) for the child. If a BIP already has been developed, the team must review the BIP and modify it as necessary to address the behavior.
2. The IDEA does not specifically prohibit any particular behavior intervention strategies, but it does require that the behavior support plans developed for students who receive special education be based on an FBA process such as the one described in this book and that PBS be considered.

**Figure 1.3.** Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) Amendments of 2004 (PL 108-446) and positive behavior support.

social atmosphere, the events and activities, and the rules and norms. The environment can elicit as well as inhibit certain types of behavior. For example, most people behave quite differently at a soccer game and in a library. The atmosphere at a soccer stadium elicits enthusiastic cheering and conversation, whereas the atmosphere in a library discourages such loud activities. Some people feel more at ease at a soccer game, whereas others feel more comfortable in a library because of the personal traits and previous experiences that each person brings to a situation. Personal factors, however, can interact differently with the environment at different points in time: A person who typically enjoys soccer games may leave early rather than remain at a game when she or he gets a migraine headache.

Some children and youth have been taught effective social interaction and self-control skills. Such skills are weak or lacking, however, for some students, including those with and without disabilities. Students with weak self-management skills may use immature, impulsive ways to accomplish their goals when the environment presents a situation calling for tolerating frustration, coping with hurt feelings, or delaying gratification. Students who are frequently off task, disengaged, disorderly, and non-compliant either may not have learned the rules for deportment at school or may not share the values behind them.

In addition, some children and youth have unintentionally been taught to use problem behaviors as a way to communicate their wants and needs (e.g., the desire to remain at recess rather than go to math class, the need for help in completing a difficult assignment, the wish for someone to sit with them at lunch, the desire to be left alone). Serious problem behaviors such as tantrums, aggression, and self-injury may be disturbing to others, and educators certainly want to help students to stop doing them. Some students who exhibit these behaviors, however, literally do not have better ways to get their wants and needs

met. Also, the disturbing behaviors must be working for the student in some way—that is, they are being reinforced at least some of the time or the student would probably stop using them.

The good news about both of these behavior problems—those that reflect a lack of teaching and those that result from having been inadvertently taught the wrong behavior—is that students' behavior reflects the interaction of their biology and previous learning with the current context. Problem behavior can be learned, and it also can be changed through learning. Educators and other members of educational teams cannot completely control the school environment, but they can make numerous adjustments to the environment that will elicit approved behavior and inhibit problem behavior. They can teach the school rules as well as social skills and self-management strategies that will help students get along during their school years and in the future. And, they can identify the specific skills they need to teach as replacements for serious problem behaviors. This point leads to the second core feature of a PBS orientation: Behavior problems cannot be simply removed; instead, students can learn other ways to achieve their wants, needs, and desired outcomes. Appropriate behavior must be increased to reduce problem behavior.

## **2. Support Is Based on the Function of Behavior**

Understanding the way the environment or context interacts with students' biology, psychology, and learning experiences is a major principle underlying the PBS approach and is crucial when designing effective supports. If a class of first graders who have not learned school rules and basic self-control strategies is left unsupervised in the cafeteria, then the result is predictably problematic. If Roberto craves adult attention and repeatedly receives more attention for acting out than for sitting quietly and

doing his schoolwork, then it is not surprising that Roberto continues to act out. If Jewel, who has disabilities that make communication very difficult for her, is given a series of challenging tasks and is uncomfortable from sitting too long, then she may cry or shriek in protest.

Analyzing the patterns and relationships among students' problem behaviors, the conditions in the environment that precede them, and the ways the behaviors are reinforced can reveal the function of the behavior. It is helpful to think of problem behaviors as having one or both of two broad purposes: obtaining something or escaping or avoiding something. Problem behavior most often serves a social-communicative function: It serves as a way to influence people and the external world. Problem behavior is controlled less often by internal factors such as having too little or too much internal stimulation. The purposes or functions of behavior problems are

- Obtaining attention, nurturance, comfort, or help
- Obtaining something tangible or a preferred activity
- Obtaining sensory stimulation (e.g., deep pressure, visual stimulation, endorphin release)
- Escaping or avoiding tasks or activities
- Escaping or avoiding attention or other social interaction
- Escaping sensory stimulation (e.g., noise, itching, pain, hunger)

Effective PBS requires understanding what people obtain or avoid by using problem behavior. This is not to say that people necessarily use problem behavior intentionally to achieve these purposes; however, research has shown that these are the consequences that commonly maintain problem behavior (Horner & Carr, 1997).

All three tiers of PBS use a function-based approach to intervention but with

degrees of specificity and rigor that correspond to the relevant intervention focus. Tier 1's supports are universal, so they are not based on analyzing the purpose of problem behavior for an individual student. Universal supports are designed, however, to be sensitive to predictable patterns in students' behavior and the ways behavior varies according to factors in the environment, such as the amount of structure and supervision present. Universal supports primarily focus on teaching approved behaviors to all students and then ensuring that the environment supports their use.

Tier 2 interventions targeted to students with emerging behavior problems or at-risk profiles are designed to match students with similar needs for environmental structure, social-behavioral skills, and reinforcement. These matches may be based on a simple FBA that relies on indirect methods, such as a teacher interview or self-reflection, to determine antecedents that are predictive of problem behavior, behaviors that should be improved, and what the student gains or avoids when using the problem behavior (see Chapter 3). Interventions at this level are applied in similar fashion for groups of students but may be somewhat customized based on functional assessment results. For example, an intervention such as a check-in/check-out system that uses adult attention as reinforcement would need to be modified for students whose problem behavior is motivated by gaining peer attention (see Chapter 3).

In contrast with the secondary tier's simple FBA, a plan based on a comprehensive FBA is implemented when a student has serious, chronic behavior problems that require an individualized plan for PBS. This assessment process is used to develop and sometimes test hypotheses about the ways the environment is setting the stage for and then reinforcing problem behavior (see Chapter 4). This FBA involves gathering data through indirect and direct observation methods and analyzing those data for patterns of behavior for the student. One of the most important

findings of research on PBS is that the likelihood of success significantly increases when systematically collected information about a person's moderate-to-severe problem behavior and the environmental variables associated with the behavior is used as the basis for behavior support interventions (Carr et al., 1999; Didden et al., 2006; Ingram, Lewis-Palmer, & Sugai, 2005; Newcomer & Lewis, 2004; Scotti, Evans, Meyer, & Walker, 1991).

The following Student Snapshots describe children and young adults the authors have known who were members of general education classes in inclusive schools and whose educational teams conducted FBAs from which to build individualized PBS plans. Their behaviors help illustrate the varied purposes of problem behaviors.



### Student Snapshot

Abby is 6 years old and in first grade. She has a significant intellectual disability and mild cerebral palsy. She speaks only a few words and has no other conventional communication system. When Abby wants more juice at snack time or does not want to put the books away when it is time to clean up after recess, she points to the thing she wants and shrieks. Her teachers and the classroom instructional assistant often feel that there is virtually nothing that Abby likes to do except eat snacks and look at books. It is quite clear that Abby is saying, "I want juice" or "I want the books" when she shrieks and cries. Her shrieking serves to get something tangible.



### Student Snapshot

Austin is a second grader who has a difficult time coping with frustration. It sometimes seems like he is walking a tightrope and any little breeze can knock him off balance. His teacher has noticed that Austin often "loses it" when he is given independent activities that take more than about 3–5 minutes to complete or when the class is doing learning center rotations and Austin has to switch

from a center he likes to one he does not like. Austin can communicate quite well when he is calm and engaged in an activity; however, when he becomes frustrated, he quickly escalates from loud complaining to destroying and throwing materials to trying to leave the room. These behaviors seem to be a way for him to say, "This is too hard! I can't do this!" Austin's behaviors serve the function of escape or avoidance of a difficult task.



### Student Snapshot

Sophia is a fourth grader with autism. She uses a few words and signs and has some very basic reading, writing, and number skills; however, she is not adept at communicating her wants, needs, and feelings. Sophia sits and rocks back and forth when she is in a place where there are a lot of people, noise, and confusion. She appears to use this behavior as a way to shut out the noise and confusion, the same way that other people might put their hands over their ears and close their eyes. These behaviors enable Sophia to escape stimulation that is aversive to her.



### Student Snapshot

Harley is a 10th grader who is classified as having a behavior disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder for which he takes medication. He has good general knowledge and basic skills and can communicate quite well with the adults in his life; however, Harley lacks skills for initiating social interactions and making friends with peers. When he wants to interact with peers, he may approach them and make a rude or off-color comment as he laughs loudly, or he may become physically aggressive. Although these behaviors do not help Harley to make friends, he usually gets a dramatic reaction from his peers. Harley seems to crave attention so much that he wants any type of peer attention, whether it is positive or negative.

Coping with the behaviors displayed by some students is a difficult task for teachers and parents; the goal is to teach these students other ways of expressing themselves and getting their wants and needs met in

legitimate ways. Teachers and parents will not be able to help the student meet his or her needs, however, unless they understand the purpose or purposes that a problem behavior serves. Once teachers and parents understand the consequences that are maintaining the behavior and how the behavior works for the student, they are in a better position to develop a plan for change that will help the student learn and use more appropriate behaviors that will serve the same purpose (Bambara & Kern, 2005).

### 3. Support Emphasizes Prevention and Teaching

The intervention practices used in PBS focus not on manipulating consequences to manage or suppress problem behavior but on preventing problem behavior by improving the environment and teaching 1) school rules, 2) skills that give students the tools to navigate the school context, and 3) ways to accomplish their needs without having to resort to difficult behaviors.

A PBS approach emphasizes using the strategies that educators and other members of school teams have available to them to prevent problem behavior by changing the environment and teaching students the skills they need to be more effective as individuals and as members of their families, schools, and communities. It is the responsibility of educators and other adults whose role is to help students grow and develop to take the first steps to improve behavior. Intervention typically begins with teachers and other adults who have created the settings in which students are required to function. Creating an environment for success is a fundamental intervention strategy when using PBS.

Although PBS uses principles of behavior analysis, it is a much broader and more comprehensive approach than traditional behavior management, which focuses on manipulating contingencies to control behavior. Multiple supports, which vary in intensity across the three intervention tiers,

are used to achieve the meaningful outcomes that are the goal of PBS. As indicated in Figure 1.1, at the primary tier, all students are provided the following supports:

- Active efforts to create a positive, inclusive school climate
- A unified, schoolwide system of discipline that includes positively stated behavior expectations, lessons to teach those expectations as suited to different settings, and a continuum of rewards and consequences
- Teaching additional social interaction and self-management skills (e.g., violence-prevention skills, self-awareness, self-monitoring skills)
- Prevention by changing the environment to alter antecedents that predict problem behavior (e.g., increased supervision of hallways, cafeteria, playground)
- Use of peer-mediated instructional and behavioral strategies (e.g., class-wide peer tutoring, peer mediation programs)

At the secondary tier, these multiple supports are somewhat intensified, with increased structure, richer reinforcement, and frequent monitoring of academic and behavioral performance (see Figure 1.1). Students also may receive supplementary instruction in schoolwide behavioral expectations and/or other social-behavioral skills.

At the tertiary level, these multiple supportive features are still more personalized, intensive, and enduring. Individualized PBS plans may include

- Modifications to the classroom environment (e.g., seating in a low-traffic area, quiet place to read)
- Visual supports for classroom participation and self-management (e.g.,

self-monitoring systems, visual schedules, picture cues)

- Individualized scheduling (e.g., placing student in classes with particular peers, alternating easy and difficult subjects or courses, providing additional movement breaks)
- Support of peer buddies, partners, or tutors
- Instruction in communication and choice-making skills

PBS plans will indeed include consequences or responding strategies, but the emphasis is on preventing problem behaviors from occurring and teaching new behaviors that are more personally and socially effective.

#### **4. Supports and Outcomes Are Personally and Socially Valued**

The goal of a three-tiered SWPBS system is to prevent or minimize behavior problems both currently and in the future. Other objectives include enhancing social skills and overall social competence, developing personal responsibility, and pursuing academic success. The goals of individualized PBS for students with the most serious behavior problems are not limited to improving specific behaviors of concern within particular settings, although such changes constitute one desired outcome. A PBS approach takes a much broader view of the possible outcomes of behavior intervention and support—to improve quality of life.

Goals of PBS include helping students to 1) develop new communication, social, and self-control skills; 2) increase and improve interactions and relationships with peers, teachers, and other community members; 3) take more active and autonomous roles in their classrooms, schools, and communities; and 4) gain further educational opportunities and, eventually, employment. These outcomes

may be preceded by, accompanied by, or followed by improvements in academic achievement. In addition to the positive outcomes for the individual student, PBS can result in improved family quality of life, as indicated by measures such as improved family interaction (e.g., enjoying spending time together) and increased feelings of safety at home, work, school, and in the neighborhood (Smith-Bird & Turnbull, 2005).

The practices described and illustrated in this book were selected based on their proven effectiveness in preventing or reducing problem behavior and increasing socially acceptable behavior through means that are respectful, normalized, and suited to the age, culture, and gender of the target student or students (Carr et al., 1999; Horner, Carr, Strain, Todd, & Reed, 2002; Snell, Vorhees, & Chen, 2005). Along with other criteria, PBS interventions are judged by the extent to which they achieve good contextual fit, meaning the following:

- The procedures are consistent with teachers', parents', and students' values and beliefs about how students should be treated.
- Teachers, parents, and others assisting with implementation have the skills to implement the support.
- Parents and teachers view the support as potentially effective and efficient because the procedures are feasible and can be implemented within typical routines and activities.
- Adequate resources are available to implement the support (e.g., staff time, material resources).
- Administrative support is provided to ensure that intervention plans are effectively managed and monitored (Albin, Lucyshyn, Horner, & Flannery, 1996; Lucyshyn, Kayser, Irvin, & Blumberg, 2002).

In short, schoolwide interventions and supports must be acceptable to the school community, be easy to implement, and yield noticeable results (McIntosh, Filter, Bennett, Ryan, & Sugai, 2009). Individual plans need to include strategies based on the FBA and specifically chosen to suit the context and be acceptable to the student and his or her PBS team. Otherwise, school team members may not willingly and competently implement interventions (Walker et al., 2004).

### **5. Comprehensive, Integrated Support Networks Require Schoolwide Systems**

A clear finding from research on problem behavior in schools is that multiple systems of support are required to create and sustain safe schools with a positive climate and high levels of academic achievement (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Carr et al., 1999; Safran & Oswald, 2003). A continuum of least-to-most special or universal-to-individualized supports is needed, including universal interventions for all students, selected interventions for some students, and specialized PBS for a few students. Using effective multitiered PBS requires systems and processes to ensure sustained high-fidelity implementation, including staff buy-in and commitment to the values and practices associated with PBS, administrative support at the district and school levels, collaborative teaming by school-focused teams and student-centered teams, family and student involvement, ongoing professional development, effective horizontal and vertical communication, technical assistance, and data-based decision making (Bambara, Nonnemacher, & Kern, 2009; Coffey & Horner, 2012; Mathews, McIntosh, Frank, & May, 2013).

Supports for students with severe, long-standing emotional or behavioral disorders may need to extend outside of

school and involve multiple agencies and individuals other than those who typically serve on school-based teams. The needs of students with severe emotional or behavioral disorders for services and supports outside the school setting also are addressed through wraparound systems of care that address both the student's and the family's needs and strengths. Person-centered planning may be the process used in these cases to develop strategies for improving the student's quality of life (see Chapter 5; Scott & Eber, 2003).