Prevent-Teach-Reinforce for Families

A Model of Individualized Positive Behavior Support for Home and Community

by

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Janice K. Lee, M.Ed., BCBA, is a member of the research faculty at the University of Nevada, Reno. She is a co-author of *Prevent-Teach-Reinforce for Young Children: The Early Childhood Model of Individualized Positive Behavior Support* (Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2013) and coordinated the randomized controlled trial of Prevent-Teach-Reinforce for Young Children in northern Nevada. She also coordinates Nevada's early childhood initiative on promoting social-emotional competence and Pyramid Model implementation across early care and education settings. Janice's experiences and interests include early intervention, early childhood, challenging behavior, positive behavior support, social and emotional competence, autism and developmental disabilities, inclusion, and working with families. For more than 20 years, she has worked with children, families, practitioners, and professionals at the local, state, and national levels as a practitioner, consultant, coach, trainer, and technical assistance provider. Janice has a master's degree in early childhood special education and is a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst.

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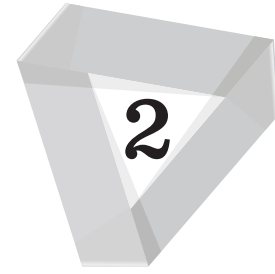
In Prevent-Teach-Reinforce for Families (PTR-F), the family should play a role in all aspects of the model for effective implementation. PTR-F is more than just a focus on home and family routines. Family-centeredness (see Chapter 1) is a guiding principle of the PTR-F process, in which the family unit is the primary implementer of the support plan. The goals, input, and unique characteristics of the individual family inform the PTR-F process and help determine the interventions and supports that are provided for a child's challenging behaviors. An understanding of families is therefore crucial to all steps of the PTR-F process, from assessment to planning to implementation. In this chapter, we describe how challenging behaviors affect the family system, and we discuss issues related to supporting families in addressing challenging behavior. This chapter also discusses principles that should guide the PTR-F process with families and provides strategies for ensuring that families are collaborative partners in implementing the PTR-F model.

Before discussing ways to support families, we should begin by defining the concept of "family" and who a family entails. For the purposes of this book, we define family broadly. As described by Poston and colleagues (2003, p. 319), family is inclusive of "people who think of themselves as part of the family, whether related by blood or marriage or not, and who support and care for each other on a regular basis." In many cases, the family may be headed by a set of parents or a single parent; however, depending on cultural, interpersonal, historical, and other factors, parenting duties are often shared with other individuals in the child's life. Based on this broad definition, family members may include foster parents; nonparent caregivers, including individuals related (e.g., a grandparent, uncle, aunt, cousin) or unrelated (e.g., neighbor, friends, in-home staff) to the child; or a combination of parents and other caregivers. The planning and intervention processes must be able to support any and all potential configurations of caregivers. (See the case example of Lucy in the Appendix at the end of this chapter for an example of a situation in which multiple individuals might be invited to participate in the PTR-F process, including grandparents and teachers.)

GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORTING FAMILIES THROUGH THE PTR-F PROCESS

A number of key principles are pivotal to successful family engagement in PTR-F. These foundational principles are presented as guidelines for how facilitators can be most effective in supporting families. These guidelines describe how to develop rapport with families throughout PTR-F assessment, behavior support planning, and ongoing implementation. They are in line with an approach that celebrates family strengths and acknowledges the family voice as necessary in development and implementation of behavior intervention.

Establish and Maintain Collaborative Partnerships

Families are central to the PTR-F process and ultimately have ownership of the behavior support plan. Although a professional facilitator plays a crucial role in actual PTR-F

implementation, the facilitator should also serve as a guide, coach, supporter, and cheer-leader in the family's efforts to address challenging behavior. From the initial steps of involvement with families, the facilitator should convey to the family and all other care-givers that they are central members of the team, that they have valuable information to contribute, and that their perspectives are valid and appreciated. Research indicates that families can provide valid and reliable information for functional behavioral assess-ments, can develop accurate hypotheses for challenging behaviors, and can implement effective interventions in reducing challenging behaviors (Arndorfer, Miltenburger, Woster, Rortvedt, & Gaffaney, 1994; Frea & Hepburn, 1999; Lucyshyn et al., 2007; Vaughn & Fox, 2015). When we treat parents and family members as equals in the process, and when we empower families by giving them strategies to reduce challenging behaviors and effectively teach their child useful and desirable skills, we increase the likelihood of pro-nounced and sustainable change that will positively affect both the child and the family.

The case example of Timmy, introduced in the Appendix at the end of this chapter, provides a good example of a successful initial meeting in which one facilitator, Kaci, builds early rapport with a family implementing PTR-F with their child.

Remain Family Centered in All Aspects of the PTR-F Process

Family-centeredness will be a primary focus in implementing PTR-F. When planning for an individual with support needs, a family-centered approach uses systematic procedures for bringing people together who are important to the family (e.g., relatives, friends, support providers) to work as a team. Together, the team sets a vision and goals for the family based on the family's values (Epley, Summers, & Turnbull, 2010; Keen, 2007; O'Brien & O'Brien, 2002). Although initially developed to support families of children with developmental disabilities, family-centered processes can lead to valuable outcomes for families with typically developing children and can be a useful tool for all families. Family-centered planning approaches provide a broader view of the family that takes into account the larger contexts and factors (e.g., family and agency values, funding, any disability, com-munity supports) that substantially impact quality of life (Fleisher, Ballard-Krishnan, & Benito, 2015; Kincaid, Knab, & Clark, 2005).

The PTR-F model emphasizes the use of family-centered practices to provide all fami-lies with access to supports that are relevant to their values and needs. It is not a "one-size-fits-all" model but a dynamic model that allows support providers to modify practices to ensure that family supports are efficacious and sustained over time. The PTR-F approach to family support mirrors Turnbull and Ruef's (1996) recommendations that families need an alliance with those who can provide dependable, trusted, and nonjudgmental assis-tance that is adaptable to their needs.

Ensure Contextual Fit of Behavior Support Plans

Contextual fit refers to the match between the elements of the intervention and the val-ues, needs, skills, and resources of those who are implementing the intervention (Albin, Lucyshyn, Horner, & Flannery, 1996; Singer & Wang, 2009). In the case of PTR-F, the con-text is family and includes all members of the family's household. If the family is imple-menting an intervention that is not a good match with the workings of the home or with their vision and values, there is little chance that it will be implemented for any extended period of time. When contextual factors are accounted for, with an awareness of culture, personal and group ambitions, and attitudes and preferences, a plan can be created that is not only more likely to be implemented with fidelity but also is more likely to be embraced and owned by the family.

Any behavior support that occurs within the home should also be tailored so that it is minimally intrusive to the family and to the family's functioning. When designing

behavioral interventions, remember that their level of intrusiveness may vary from family to family and may depend on numerous factors, including the prevalence of challenging behavior, cultural norms for the family, and level of intervention required. Families can provide a great deal of input on how interventions might work in their home and how coaching and other supports might be best provided in an unobtrusive manner. Parents may also have specific ideas about the scripting, modeling, and role-playing aspects of the intervention. These family perspectives can be invaluable in creating interventions that fit the child, the implementer, and the environment in which they are applied.

Use a Strength-Based Approach

While the PTR-F assessment and behavior support plan attend to a child's behavioral challenges, they must also capture the strengths of the child, which help inform strategies and provide a foundation for future successes. In efforts to support families with children who have challenging behavior, too often conversations focus on challenging behavior and what else is going on when this behavior occurs, with little acknowledgment of the successes, strengths, and skills of the child and family. Increased focus on these strengths and successes not only builds morale, but allows the team to learn important lessons from what went right as well as what went wrong. Thus, data should always reflect not only decreases in challenging behaviors but also increases in prosocial behaviors. Equipped with this information, effective facilitators help to direct conversation to these positive trends in desired or prosocial skills and behaviors.

Families that make positive behavior happen need to be supported. Research emphasizes that parents' optimism and confidence in their ability to alter their child's challenging behaviors have an important impact (Durand, 2001; Hastings & Brown, 2002; Jones & Prinz, 2005). We also know that we, as practitioners, can positively affect parents' outlook on their own abilities and belief in their potential to impact their child's behavior (Durand, Hieneman, Clarke, Wang, & Rinaldi, 2012). In PTR-F, the family is foundational to both planning and implementation of behavioral interventions. The facilitator in this process plays the role of cheerleader, reminding families of their strengths, helping families to feel both prepared and empowered, and setting expectations for success.

Recognize the Importance of Coaching and Support

Coaching and support have long been seen as vital aspects of effective, sustained behavior intervention in early childhood programs (Conroy, Sutherland, Vo, Carr, & Ogston, 2014; Fox, Hemmeter, Snyder, Binder, & Clarke, 2011). Similarly, coaching has been shown to be effective in family contexts (Fettig & Barton, 2014; Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005). Thus, it is no wonder that coaching is a core element of the PTR-F process.

Behavior support plans change child behavior by also altering adult behavior in the context of the routine. Coaching provides scaffolding to help families learn new skills outlined in a plan and gain comfort and proficiency with using these skills with their child in a natural setting. It is this support following plan development that sustains parents' continued optimism in the plan, ensures fit of the intervention with the child's and family's needs, and allows for adaptations or changes to the plan if warranted. If we are to develop a plan that is the best fit for both the child and the family, this initial support is necessary. The goal in PTR-F is eventual independent implementation by family members, but providing a plan with little scaffolding will not ensure success over time.

Provide Support that Is Tailored to Both Family Needs and Preferences

Family-centered positive behavior support acknowledges that parents can be and are experts regarding their child's behavior (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001; Vaughn & Fox, 2015).

We recognize that with education in positive approaches to intervention and support, parents can be empowered to use this knowledge and insight to develop positive plans of support that work within their home. A collaborative planning process also helps families to identify and find resonance with the developed plan of support.

When supporting families in their home, it is vital that the language used is accessible to all. This goes beyond translating for the family—the facilitator should ensure that all communication welcomes dialogue and is free of jargon that might alienate anyone from the conversation. Listening is crucial in these initial meetings so that families are heard and can express their views. The facilitator can also help keep conversations positive and productive by actively shaping and reinforcing communication that describes desired behaviors and notes the strengths of the child and other individuals in the family (Lucyshyn, Dunlap, & Albin, 2002).

UNIVERSAL PARENTING PRACTICES

In the past two decades, emphasis has been placed on promoting desirable social-emotional behaviors as a way to prevent the emergence of serious challenging behaviors. In the previous chapter, we referred to the Pyramid Model (Fox et al., 2003) as a framework for organizing effective strategies for promoting desirable behavior, preventing behavior problems, and, when necessary, implementing individualized intervention procedures. We briefly mentioned some general parenting strategies that are used by many families and that can be effective in averting challenging behaviors. These are also known as *universal practices* and are similar to strategies used in preschool, kindergarten, and elementary school classrooms to establish a positive approach to social behavior. When implemented consistently, these practices can reduce the occurrence of problems and help children acquire useful patterns of interaction. There are many universal strategies that families can adopt. We recommend four strategies: 1) provide high rates of positive attention and acknowledge occasions in which the child is behaving appropriately; 2) establish and maintain regular and predictable daily routines; 3) include consistent patterns of activities within those routines; and 4) clearly define behavioral expectations within daily routines and be clear about the difference between desirable behavior and undesirable behavior.

Provide High Rates of Positive Attention and Acknowledge Occasions in Which the Child Is Behaving Appropriately

It is easy for parents to fall into a pattern of giving time and attention to a child when he or she is exhibiting challenging behavior and to largely ignore that child when he or she is behaving appropriately. This conveys to the child that a good way to attract attention is to engage in problem behaviors. Likewise, when little attention is given to desired behavior, the child does not learn that his or her actions have merit and value beyond the intrinsic reinforcement for engaging in the behavior. Therefore, it is critical that families spend the vast majority of time interacting with their child when he or she is behaving well and provide positive feedback with great frequency and sincerity. We recommend that families provide attention for their child's positive behaviors at a rate of at least five times the amount of attention provided as corrective feedback for challenging behavior.

Although positive interactions are important throughout the day, parents have an especially valuable influence when they sincerely acknowledge their child's desirable social interactions. Examples of particular opportunities for special attention are when the child is responsive to a parent's request, shares toys with a sibling, or participates happily in a daily routine (such as dinner, bathing, or getting ready in the morning) that has been associated previously with challenging behaviors. The universal practice of "catching them being good" is a time-tested and helpful strategy for children of all ages.

Establish and Maintain a Predictable Daily Schedule

As a general rule, children do better and have fewer challenging behaviors when the family has regular routines that the child can learn to anticipate on a daily basis. Predictable daily schedules can be useful in preventing problems. Almost every household has a schedule of activities in place (e.g., getting dressed, mealtime, bathing, bedtime); however, sometimes the schedule does not have the level of predictability or certainty necessary for children to fully understand and be comfortable with upcoming activities. When schedules are interrupted or altered in some way, it is important for parents to do everything possible to inform their children and to be sure that they can adapt successfully. It is helpful to teach children to understand and follow schedules and to review schedules and routines on a regular basis.

Develop Consistent Routines within the Elements of the Daily Schedule

Along the same lines as having a predictable daily schedule, it is also important to have regularly occurring activities within the daily routines. For example, having a family breakfast after the early morning routines (getting up, using the bathroom, and getting dressed) is a common activity that occurs on a regular basis. However, simply having breakfast as a routine may not offer sufficient predictability to help prevent challenging behavior. It can be even more helpful if the family has a regular sequence in which, for example, members decide what they want for the breakfast meal, one member helps set the table, one member pours the juice, and so on. As much as possible, it is useful for children to have active roles in the sequence of activities that compose the daily routines.

Clearly Define Behavioral Expectations and the Difference Between Desired Behavior and Undesired Behavior

A vitally important step for helping children learn how to behave appropriately is for the family to explicitly teach the behavioral expectations for each family routine. Many families have at least a basic set of rules in place (e.g., use walking feet, share toys and materials, use inside voice, keep toys and friends safe), and these guidelines can be very worthwhile. But in many cases, these general rules are not translated into how they are applied to specific routines. In some cases, parents make the mistake of assuming that children know how to behave appropriately and that their doing otherwise is simply noncompliance. For example, when considering the expectation of respecting others, a rule of "hands to self" can look very different at the dinner table than it might when playing games outside. Noncompliance should not be assumed unless the difference between good behavior and challenging behavior is taught directly and until the child has demonstrated that she or he knows the difference and can behave accordingly.

It is critical for children to be taught the boundaries of desired behavior in all routines, including playtime, mealtime, bathing, and bedtime, and to appreciate that those boundaries will differ from routine to routine. Children must also learn that challenging behaviors will be followed by corrective feedback. Such feedback should include a clear message that the behavior is not acceptable along with instructional guidance so that the child knows what she or he should do instead. And, of course, the child's desirable behavior should be enthusiastically acknowledged. It is important to remember that a child's positive social behavior is the result of learning, and learning valuable life lessons (like how to get along in a family context) is something well worth acknowledgment and celebration.

DESIGNING INDIVIDUALIZED INTERVENTION FOR CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR WITHIN THE FAMILY CONTEXT

Challenging behavior affects all functioning in the home and can dramatically change the dynamics of the living environment. At a point of crisis, a family is often identified as

requiring supports when they state that they are unable to support the child or effectively address the severity of the behaviors within the current functioning of the family system. When a child exhibits this degree of challenging behaviors, the quality of life for the child and anyone else he or she interacts with is affected in profound ways. For example, challenging behaviors can affect a family's ability to go shopping, eat out, attend family and community activities, or find and keep a babysitter. Understanding that a child's challenging behavior impacts the family as a whole is important to consider when including families as essential and valued team members for the PTR-F process. When children have social and emotional needs, this may reflect the family's needs as well, and a family's needs should always be considered when designing individualized behavior support.

When a child's challenging behavior is significant enough to require the need for individualized interventions, families need to feel supported and empowered to play a key role in helping the child learn more socially appropriate skills. Families are typically the one constant in a child's life, providing the most essential roles in their child's development, and thus are an invaluable resource. They often know many of the situations that contribute to a child's challenging behaviors, and thus, involving families in meaningful ways can help improve the effectiveness of any behavior intervention process. Families also often develop strategies to cope with or avoid the challenging behavior, and these intervention or preventative strategies can be informative when designing an effective intervention plan because they provide some insight into the function (or purpose) of the behavior, the outcomes that are valued by the parent, and a history of approaches that have been implemented, including those that have shown some promise and those that have failed. For example, when a child engages in challenging behaviors in a store, a family might prevent these challenging behaviors by not walking down certain aisles in the store to avoid items (like candy) that may cause a tantrum. Or, when a child demands something, a family might bargain with the child for the amount of time that he or she can engage in the desired activity. The parent may state that the child can spend 1 minute engaged in the activity and then respond to pleadings from the child with increased time. These are only two examples, but the key is that families often have identified interventions and preventative strategies to manage challenging behavior throughout the day and across settings. We recommend getting information about the way in which current and past interventions were applied, including the frequency and consistency of their application.

SUMMARY

Families are the cornerstone of the PTR-F process. They are experts on their child, their culture, their environment, and themselves, and have invaluable information to contribute. When families are valued and appreciated, it becomes easy and natural to include them in all steps of the PTR-F process. It is up to us, the facilitators, to ensure that the families are fully invested and that everyone has the same goals and vision for the future. This leads to lasting behavioral change that not only affects the child but also overall family functioning and quality of life.