

# The Teacher's Pocket Guide for Positive Behavior Support Targeted Classroom Solutions

by

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## About the Authors

**Tim Knoster, Ed.D.**, is a professor at the McDowell Institute for Teacher Excellence in Positive Behavior Support in the College of Education at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. The McDowell Institute emphasizes the translation of research on multi-tiered systems of support—most specifically, positive behavior interventions and supports—into practice in schools. Dr. Knoster has also served as Executive Director of the International Association for Positive Behavior Support since its inception in 2003. Dr. Knoster (or Tim, as he prefers) has been involved with preservice and in-service teacher training for more than 30 years. He has worn many hats throughout his career, including the role of an instructor of undergraduate and graduate courses, a classroom teacher in the public schools, Director of Student Support Services and Special Education, and Principal Investigator as well as Program Evaluator on federal projects focused on classroom and student-centered behavior intervention and support. Specifically relevant to this book, Dr. Knoster has extensive experience in providing professional development for classroom teachers and has been the recipient of numerous awards for his endeavors in this regard. He has extensively published and provided training for educators and staff from various child-serving systems in the application of positive behavior support in schools and community-based settings. Dr. Knoster has an uncanny ability to help teachers interpret the research literature on behavioral matters in a way that enables them to translate that same research into practical strategies and approaches in their classrooms.





**Robin Drogan, Ph.D.**, is an assistant professor and graduate program coordinator in the Department of Exceptionality Programs at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. She has been involved in the education of individuals with disabilities for more than 20 years. During this time, her roles have included teacher, teacher collaborator, educational and behavioral interventionist, researcher, and author. Her research and practical interests focus on tiered behavioral and academic supports for students, preven-

tive intervention strategies for young children, team collaboration emphasizing teacher involvement, family engagement, and peer support systems within the context of addressing the needs of all students and staff in inclusive settings. Dr. Drogan spends much of her time supporting preservice students in extensive field experiences focusing on the implementation of evidence-based practices and prevention-based strategies.

## How Are Targeted Supports Different from Universal Supports, and Which Students Will Benefit from Them?

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**A**s a teacher, time is likely one of your most precious and fleeting commodities. Thus, we do not want to waste your time in reading (nor did we want to waste our time in writing) this book for its own sake. The most important reason you should read this book is that the content should be helpful if you work directly (or aspire to work directly) with young children or adolescents in a classroom setting. Let's face it—anyone who works with kids in schools knows the rewards and challenges (the proverbial roller coaster ride of emotions with the highs and lows) that are experienced in classrooms on a daily basis. Student behavior is a major cause of or contributing factor to these rewards and challenges. This book—a quick and encouraging guide to behavior interventions for your students who need extra support—can help with some of those challenges.

Teachers have a uniquely personal, firsthand understanding of their students and classrooms through their

day-to-day experiences. This understanding enables teachers to organize effective and efficient instructional practices to meet the needs of all their students. However, even if you are an experienced teacher, you will sometimes need ideas for how best to apply your expertise to help certain students or how to reconcile what you know about what works for your students against a context of structures that your school puts into place. As we present strategies and guidance in this book, our goal is to honor and build on your existing frame of reference—both the positive experiences that make you feel good inside, as well as the highly frustrating experiences that, although uncomfortable, have likely helped you to grow as a teacher.

## STARTING WITH A FIRM FOUNDATION OF UNIVERSAL APPROACHES

We follow a similar approach to the one used in *The Teacher's Pocket Guide for Effective Classroom Management, Second Edition* (Knoster, 2014). Collectively, the practices highlighted in that book can help teachers to integrate positive behavior support (PBS) at a universal level with all students in the classroom. This foundation of classroom management provides a solid platform upon which to build targeted supports, much like a home's foundation provides a solid base for building. A wide array of universal approaches can help teachers to facilitate the healthy growth and development of their students while also diminishing the likelihood of misbehavior. Table 1.1 provides a brief review of these key universal preventive approaches.

Rather extensive research (see Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010) has been conducted about universal preventive approaches, which can be considered to form the first tier of positive behavior support in the classroom, or Tier 1 in what is often explained as a three-tiered support model. Universal preventive approaches can be summarized simply as preventive classroom management and interpersonal

**Table 1.1.** Key universal preventive approaches

Universal practice	Brief description of the universal practice
Building rapport (staying close)	The teacher's actions result in each student trusting that the teacher has a genuine interest in him or her as a person. The teacher's behaviors result in a constructive student-teacher relationship that is based on trust and mutual respect.
Establishing/teaching performance expectations	The teacher and the students in the classroom together identify three to five broad expectations (e.g., be responsible, be respectful, be here/be ready) and, in turn, create positively stated operational definitions that reflect what students would look/sound like in meeting the expectations across pivotal contexts in the classroom. Once the expectations are established, direct instruction is provided to the students through simulations, with periodic booster sessions over the course of the school year.
Positive reinforcement (behavior-specific praise)	The teacher's presentation of a desired stimulus (e.g., verbal praise in the instance where the student finds verbal praise rewarding) is contingent on the student(s) acting in a manner that is expected (e.g., the student raising his or her hand to gain the teacher's attention in the classroom). The delivery of the reinforcer (e.g., verbal praise) is explicitly labeled in connection to the behavior that is being reinforced (e.g., "Nice job of raising your hand, Sam. How can I help you?").
Achieving the 4:1 ratio	The teacher, through his or her distribution of positive reinforcement for desired behavior in relation to corrective feedback in response to student problem behavior (misbehavior that requires direct intervention), achieves a ratio of four positive reinforcements for desired behavior to each instance of redirection for problem behavior (thus, the 4:1 ratio). This ratio should ideally be achieved with both the class (in aggregate) and each individual student in the classroom.

relationship strategies; however, it is important to understand that certain approaches need to be applied with fidelity and consistency. Your particular school may be implementing positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) on a schoolwide basis (often referred to as schoolwide positive

Universal approaches are the foundation for positive student behavior across a whole classroom or school.

behavior support, or SWPBS). In such cases, there are likely set expectations, rapport-building structures, and reinforcement systems in place that everyone in the school should employ. Whether or not your school is implementing this framework, it is helpful to know effective universal preventive strategies.

## WHAT ARE UNIVERSAL (TIER 1) SUPPORTS, AND WHO ARE THEY FOR?

Universal supports are for everybody. The key components—building rapport, setting clear expectations, and reinforcing desired behavior—are principles that establish a climate conducive to learning. Students will be more engaged in your instruction when it is clear that you care about them (have rapport), when it is clear what they should be doing (set expectations), and when they see that doing what they are supposed to do pays off (reinforcement). Ensuring that these components are addressed in your classroom—whether through your own initiatives or in conjunction with schoolwide procedures—is very much worth the effort. We know from personal teaching experience, as well as research, that using these universal approaches fosters a positive classroom environment and prevents a lot of potential problem behavior.

### Establishing Rapport

Most teachers naturally understand that developing rapport with their students is essential for a classroom to function well. When students believe you know them, care about them, and have their best interests at heart, they are more likely to respect the expectations you set and are more receptive to your instruction. However, as would be the case in any human relationship, you will find some students easier to bond with

than others. For those students who seem harder to reach, you may need to employ a more systematic approach to develop necessary rapport. Make a conscious effort to be in closer physical proximity, be inviting with your body language and be empathetic with how you talk, find out what the student is interested in and ask open-ended questions about it, and seek out extra occasions to start a conversation with the student. Rapport-building efforts should be comprised of numerous brief interactions. You should expect the process to take some time, or many small interactions, before the student of concern warms up to you (and for you to feel more comfortable with the student).

### **Setting Clear Expectations**

The most effective classrooms are governed by simple, concise, and overarching guiding principles for behavior, not by exhaustive lists of rules. Choosing three to five positively stated, broad behavioral expectations and posting them in your room is encouraged (e.g., “Be responsible, be respectful, and be ready”). In PBIS schools, there are likely already three to five schoolwide expectations like these in place, and you should translate them into your classroom. After identifying these broad expectations, you should identify key settings and routines and operationally define the expectations for those contexts (e.g., “What would my students look and sound like if they are being responsible during group work in my seventh-grade physical science class?”). At the beginning of the school year, instruct the students on the expectations, and provide booster sessions throughout the year.

### **Reinforcing Positive Behavior**

When your students behave appropriately per the classroom expectations, it is important to frequently reinforce that good behavior. Positive reinforcement (i.e., the presentation of a desired stimulus contingent on the performance of a desired behavior in order to increase the likelihood of the future

recurrence of that same desired behavior) is great to use in your classroom because it also helps with building and maintaining rapport with your students. Reinforcement can take the form of praise as well as tangible reinforcers and can be delivered in a number of ways, including token economy systems. When determining how often you need to provide reinforcement, you can base the interval on how often you find yourself having to redirect problem behavior. Always aim, at least, for reinforcing appropriate behavior four times for every one instance of redirection or other consequences for problem behavior. Achieving this 4:1 ratio will steer students toward desired behavior and result in a majority of teacher–student interactions being positive.

### WHERE THIS BOOK COMES IN: STUDENTS WHO NEED MORE SUPPORT

Targeted supports are layered on top of universal approaches, offering extra support to a particular group of students.

As valuable as these universal approaches are for teachers, some students will need additional, more targeted support. This book was written to provide guidance to teachers working with students who have not sufficiently responded to universal, or Tier 1, approaches and are in need of additional targeted support.

### WILL THIS BOOK HELP ME IN MY CLASSROOM?

We believe you will find this book to be valuable regardless of whether you are an aspiring teacher or a veteran with many years of experience in the classroom. We also firmly believe you will find the targeted strategies and supports emphasized in this book to be useful regardless of the age of your students or other circumstances outside of your control, such as poverty, adverse or traumatic life experiences, or the presence of

a disability. The practices and approaches described in this book are based on the literature and reflect evidence-based practice (Brown, Anderson, & De Pry, 2015; Dunlap, Sailor, Horner, & Sugai, 2009; Koegel, Koegel, & Dunlap, 1996). To keep things accessible for you, we wrote this book in a conversational tone, reflecting the plain language we have used in workshops and in-service trainings throughout our teaching careers.

Just as with universal approaches, prevention is the bulls-eye of targeted intervention and supports. Many parts of this book are framed within a preventive context of what has come to be described as a multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) framework in the form of PBIS. Although more and more schools are implementing PBIS, a large number of school systems have not yet fully adopted such a data-driven approach to organize resources in their local schools. In light of this reality, we provide guidance in this book both for educators who work in schools that have formally adopted a PBIS approach and for educators who are teaching within more traditional school settings. We also provide a list of recommended resources (see Resources) to increase your access to the expansive literature base that supports the practices that we incorporate into these chapters. We are optimistic that you will find this book to be an easy read in terms of concepts and practices.

## WHICH STUDENTS CAN THIS BOOK HELP?

All teachers share a common mission to help students learn and grow in a manner that enables each child to develop both academic and social-emotional (behavioral) competence. Some things that affect learning are within your direct influence, such as your pace of instruction, the provision of opportunities to respond, and the reinforcement procedures used with students. However, many students come to school with challenging life experiences that often set the stage for difficulty with learning.