

BEHAVIOR INTERVENTIONS

Behavior problems are prevalent issues in today's schools. Utilizing a problem solving process, such as RtI, applies to behavioral difficulties, much like it applies to academic skills. One similarity between academic and behavior systems is in program and intervention selection. Specifically, when selecting a behavioral intervention, schools should carefully select programs and interventions that are consistently implemented school-wide.

Different types of student behavior require different interventions. We can compound problems by applying incorrect strategies to any student behavior—positive or negative. The information offered in the following three strategies help reinforce positive behavior (without using conditional approval, or reinforcing dependence or people-pleasing behaviors), can help motivate desirable behaviors (without nagging or threatening), and can help intervene with negative behavior effectively and non-punitively.

RtI for academics and behavior relies on data collection. In order to assess the level of intensity and select an appropriate behavioral intervention, data must be analyzed. Prior to intervening, a teacher ideally gathers baseline data on the student's problematic behaviors. One way to obtain a baseline is to evaluate discipline referrals. However, there are many ways to evaluate a student's behavior depending on the definition of the behavior. For example, observations may be conducted to evaluate the duration, intensity, and frequency of the defined behavior. Baseline data and teacher information assist teams in determining appropriate steps to address the student's needs.

School-wide behavioral systems are important for all students, and a system for identifying at-risk students must be in place. For example, looking carefully at office disciplinary referrals (ODR) is one way of analyzing which students are in need of intervention (Irvin et al., 2006). ODRs are a naturally occurring data source that are relatively cheap, ongoing, and effective measurements for identifying at-risk students (Irvin et al., 2006; Putnam, Luiselli, Handler, & Jefferson, 2003; Sprague et al., 2001; Sugai et al., 2000; Tidwell, Flannery, & Lewis-Palmer, 2003; Walker, Cheney, Stage, & Blum, 2005).

Behavior interventions, like academic interventions, should be implemented in a systematic format. Implementing school wide systems reduces student confusion by assuring classroom and grade level consistency. Behavioral systems should be selected after consideration of the unique needs of your school (e.g., students' age/grade, class size, staff composition, etc.).

At the most basic level (Tier I, also known as Primary Prevention or least intensive), the teacher begins by addressing problem behaviors with a class-wide intervention. Tier I works most effectively when the system is implemented in Kindergarten through 6th grades, much like an academic core program should be implemented. Primary prevention strategies focus on interventions used on a school-wide basis for all students (Sugai & Horner, 2002). This level of prevention is considered "primary" because all students are exposed in the same way, and at the same level, to the intervention. The primary prevention level is the largest by number.

Approximately 80% to 85% of students who are not at risk for behavior problems respond in a positive manner to this prevention level (Sugai et al, 2000).

Primary prevention strategies include, but are not limited to, using effective teaching practices and curricula, explicitly teaching behavior that is acceptable within the school environment, focusing on classroom arrangement and systems within the school, consistent use of precorrection procedures, using active supervision of common areas, and creating reinforcement systems that are used on a school-wide basis (Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998; Martella & Nelson, 2003; Nelson, Crabtree, Marchand-Martella, & Martella, 1998; Nelson, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, 2002).

If, after these attempts, progress is not identified and a student has additional needs that have not been met, more intensive interventions should be attempted. This moves the intervention along the continuum toward Tier II (also known as Secondary Prevention Strategies or Moderate Intensity). Tier II may require direct instruction for the student and can be individualized in the classroom setting or can occur in a smaller group setting (i.e., social skills). Secondary prevention strategies involve students (i.e., 10% to 15% of the school population) who do not respond to the primary prevention strategies and are at risk for academic failure or behavior problems but are not in need of individual supports (Nelson, et al., 2002).

Interventions at the secondary level often are delivered in small groups to maximize time and effort and should be developed with the unique needs of the students within the group. Examples of these interventions include social support such as social skills training (e.g., explicit instruction in skill deficit areas, friendship clubs, check in/check out, role playing) or academic support (i.e., use of scientifically-validated intervention programs and tutoring). Additionally, secondary programs could include behavioral support approaches (e.g., simple Functional Behavioral Assessments [FBA], precorrection, self-management training). Even with the heightened support within secondary level interventions, some students (1% to 7%) will need the additional assistance at the tertiary (Tier III) level (Walker et al., 1996).

Tertiary prevention programs focus on students who display persistent patterns of disciplinary problems (Nelson, Benner, Reid, Epstein, & Currin, 2002). At times, a student's behavior is so severe that intensive and individualized behavior planning must be put in place to address his/her needs. A student is then moved into Tier III where specific and involved behavior plans will likely occur. Tertiary-level programs are also called intensive or individualized interventions and are the most comprehensive and complex. The interventions within this level are strength based in that the complexity and intensity of the intervention plans directly reflect the complexity and intensity of the behaviors. Students within the tertiary level continue involvement in primary and secondary intervention programs and receive additional supports as well. These supports could include use of full FBA, de-escalation training for the student, heightened use of natural supports (e.g., family member, friends of the student), and development of a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP).