

The Teacher Para Learning Connection

State Support Team 9

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Autism Certification Center offers the new *ASD Strategies in Action* project. This online training is a series demonstrating evidence-based practices that can be used in the home, school, and workplace of individuals with autism spectrum disorders. *ASD Strategies in Action* gives families and service providers tools to ensure they are equipped to effectively care for, support, educate, employ, or work with individuals on the autism spectrum from early childhood to young adulthood. The video clips are relevant to family members and direct service providers including paraprofessionals, support staff, and professionals. Check out the website at <http://www.autismcertificationcenter.org/>. The series is free for Ohio residents and provides the option of receiving professional development hours and certificates.

This newsletter is a means of connecting teachers and paraprofessionals as they learn new ideas together that support the students they serve.

Professional Learning by Paraprofessionals

In the October Teacher-Para Learning Connection Newsletter we focused on classroom management practices using Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports. We then discussed the ABC Cycle of Behavior that may assist us in defining the function or purpose of a behavior. The *Ohio Operating Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities* states that paraprofessionals need to develop the knowledge and skills to support the specific students with whom they work. In this newsletter we will describe evidence based strategies designed to prevent or correct challenging behaviors including our actions when working with students. These techniques may be used by the teacher-para team to support individual students recognizing that the licensed professional is responsible for the decisions for their use. Coaching and feedback to the paraprofessional to develop their skills in using strategies is important.

Strategies of Support and Prevention

In our school settings, **an interaction between the curriculum** (content taught), **the environment** (setting, situations), and the **instructional strategies** (group work, lecture, computer learning) occurs to support the development of socially acceptable behaviors and offer specially designed instruction. Each of these serve as factors that can be adjusted to promote student success and minimize behavior issues. Instructional strategies are varied to support student learning such as whole classroom lesson followed by small group work facilitated by an adult. The environment in which student interact may be adapted through seating arrangements, lighting, study carrels, and adult proximity.

In the classrooms, the teacher-para team supports positive student behavior through **being visible and aware of students** at all times, defined as **withitness**; explaining and **re-teaching classroom procedures** such as bathroom breaks and working with others; **building relationships** with students and using a student's name when interacting; monitoring and providing **specific feedback** to students on their assignments; **praising student effort** rather than their grades; and supporting students' **sense of accomplishment**. To support the development of socially

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acceptable behaviors, licensed professionals (teachers, school counselors, school psychologists, speech language pathologists) **intentionally teach specific skills** such as social skills, anger management, self-control, conflict management, communication, and decision making. To further support student in learning these skills, educators including paraprofessionals **re-teach with encouragement and effective praise** within various school settings such as the lunchroom or playground. Providing paraprofessionals with the goals for the student and coaching/teaching paraprofessionals the specific strategies to use will support student learning of new and replacement behaviors.

Effective Proactive Prevention Strategies

- **Choices** promote student involvement and responsibility. Examples of choices: which assignment to complete first; whether to complete a worksheet from the last problem to the first one; how to express his/her responses (written or via dictation); which partner to select for an activity; when to take a break; where to listen to a book or have it read by a peer; whether to write spelling words or spell aloud with a peer.
- **Planning prior to a learning task** helps to organize materials that promote engagement by the students, define procedures for material distribution, and review rules and procedures.
- **Visual cues** or hints support a student learning new behaviors. Examples include visual schedules, If-Then contingency models, visual supports that may provide a picture of the desired behavior, or charts defining what task to do next. Students may need to be taught to use these visual cues and the natural cues in a classroom such as watching other students as they line up at the classroom door or checking the word wall.
- **Social stories** help teach routines, expectations, and the standards of socially acceptable behaviors or reinforce behaviors using information presented in a story format with the student as the main character. Often visual examples of behavior expectations using photos of the students or pictures are incorporated (<http://carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories/>).
- **Reinforcement systems** provide praise and reinforcement of behaviors that are given immediately following the desired behavior, with enthusiasm, and a description of the specific behavior. A menu of reinforcers and a schedule of how often to reinforce need to be defined by the licensed professional or team.
- **Specific statements** tell the student what to do rather than ask the student if they will do a task. Example: You may ask a student “Can you get your math book out to work?” This request gives the student the option of saying “No!” A more effective statement is to state “Please get your math book out.”
- **Classroom responsibilities** provide students with legitimate avenues for power in the class to support students who display controlling types of behaviors and want control of specific aspects of their school program (function of their behavior). Other means to giving legitimate power are involving students in the decision-making process and providing choices.



Discussion Points: In the scenarios that follow, share ideas about strategies to potentially prevent misbehaviors from occurring. Example: Stacey rocks back and forth in her chair when given a worksheet to write a story about the zoo trip. An effective strategy may be to provide her with cues such as a graphic organizer to define the place, pictures to select what animals were seen, list of names to define friends on the trip, and pictures of zoo events including a picture of Stacey at the zoo petting a lamb.

- 1) Caley begins to hit her head with her flat palm in the lunchroom. The adults observe her each day and note that her class is typically the first to arrive. The noise level increases when the fourth or fifth class arrives which coincides with Caley’s behaviors. Caley is told to stop hitting her head but she continues the behavior.
- 2) In Jackson’s class, the teacher has set the expectation that students are to raise their hand before being called upon. Jackson often forgets to raise his hand and then blurts out the answer to a question. His teacher reprimands him and after several episodes of blurting out the answer, he is sent out of the classroom to think about his actions.
- 3) Taylor struggles to begin her math worksheet each day. She sits quietly then after repeated prompts to “get started” then she scribbles on the paper. She is capable of completing the work. What strategies may give Taylor support for taking responsibility for her work completion?

Corrective Strategies

Sometimes prevention and support strategies are not sufficient to address challenging behaviors. The previous mindset was to punish students for unacceptable behaviors which meant students had few opportunities to learn acceptable behaviors and were not reinforced and encouraged to use socially acceptable behaviors. The **paradigm shift** means that we need to continue to **teach and re-teach socially desired behaviors** and potentially use corrective strategies within our school programs. The purpose of understanding the ABC cycle and the function of behavior is to develop a plan for how to respond using effective strategies to specific behaviors. Example: A= new adult enters the room; B=Hannah runs to adult and hugs her; C=adult laughs and pats her on the back. Hannah wants to greet people she knows and has been reinforced to do this through hugging. Since Hannah is 12 years old, hugging is deemed to be inappropriate and a high five or handshake is considered more socially acceptable for greeting adults. A plan is put into place to teach Hannah a new behavior to shake hands and reinforce her for the use of this new behavior. The principle of reinforcement is that desired behaviors are more likely to increase when recognized and rewarded.

Token economy systems are “based upon the principles of applied behavior analysis and emphasize the use of positive reinforcement to target behavior change. Token economies help students to visualize progress, accept and work for delayed reinforcement, learn to self-monitor, and learn to regulate behavior” (Vandebilt Kennedy Center). Token economy systems are used in school settings similar to the world economy system we have for going to work, earning our salary, and buying what we need or want using the money we earned. Tokens are given to reinforce a student for the specific behavior that they are learning to use. Using the tokens earned, he/she acquires an activity or tangible item of their choice.

Check-in Check-out systems focus on self-monitoring skills. The student checks in daily with an adult at the start of the school day to review personal goals and behaviors reflecting those goals. Following individual lessons/classes throughout the day, teachers provide feedback to the student regarding their specific behaviors. At the end of the day the student reviews their progress and takes a home communication form for signature by the parent that is returned the following morning (www.pbisworld.org).

Contingency maps give a visual diagram of the outcomes of behaviors: one path shows what happens when the student uses a desired behavior and the other path shows the consequences when the desired behavior is not used. The antecedent (A), desired behavior being taught (B), and the consequence (C) are depicted. Example: During clean up time, the student picks up the art supplies and puts them next to the sink to earn time to play basketball with a peer for 10 minutes.



We know that we need to use calm responses to challenging behaviors and we need to control our own actions. Our behaviors that may trigger students or escalate a crisis include yelling, acting superior, using sarcasm, pleading, bribing, or nagging. Students often learn what ‘buttons’ to push such as asking the same question repeatedly or pleading with us for an object. Adult behaviors to remain calm by taking a breath, acknowledging student power (You’re right, I cannot make you.), offering brief choices, redirecting the student or posing options of responsible behaviors along with the consequences are helpful. Our natural response is to react negatively, retaliate or escape yet we need to **control our actions including our reactions to misbehaviors** at all times.



Which students have individualized plans to support the learning of new behaviors? What role does the paraprofessional have in support of these plans? How can the team develop consistency when implementing the plans for individual students? What specifics about the reinforcement system (menu of reinforcers and timing of reinforcements such as immediate, continuous versus random) do the team members need to use?

Resources

In order for teacher-paraprofessional teams to collaboratively learn as they provide services to students with disabilities, resources are critical. In this section a variety of resources are provided with a brief description of each. Note that these resources are from credible websites and typically directed toward licensed professionals. Use by a teacher-paraprofessional team needs to be determined by individual district personnel.

Articles

These articles are brief, easy to read, and provide information to develop educational terminology and strategies for teams. Note that these articles were written for licensed professionals and will need to be discussed with the paraprofessional to insure both an understanding of the content and the necessity to implement strategies under the direction of the teacher or licensed professionals.

Educate Autism – Token Economy (articles & downloads) - information on other strategies & resources available from home page
<http://www.educateautism.com/token-economy.html>

Positive Intervention Strategies – Token Economy (article with suggestions)
<http://165.139.150.129/intervention/Token.pdf>

Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (token economy)
<http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/assets/files/tipsheets/tokeneconomytips.pdf>

Intervention Central (precision commands)
<http://interventioncentral.mysdhc.org/documents/08-PrecisionCommands-Checklist.pdf>

National Professional Development Center on Autism (evidence based practice resources including brief articles and instructional tools within training modules, such as: antecedent based interventions, prompting, reinforcement, task analysis, visual supports)
<http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/node/19>

VCU Autism Center for Excellence (prompts, reinforcement assessment, developing instructional programs, positive reinforcement)
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/EBP.cfm>

Web-based links

These links provide a variety of resources which can be read online or printed for review and discussion.

Behavior Advisor – Token Economy – information on other strategies & resources available from home page
<http://www.behavioradvisor.com/Tokens.html>

Challenging Behaviors Toolkit – multiple resources
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/challenging-behaviors-tool-kit>

Intervention Central (defusing behaviors & de-escalating behaviors)
<http://www.interventioncentral.org/behavioral-intervention-modification>

Carol Gray Social Stories
<http://carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories/>

References

Liber, D., Frea, W., & Symon, J. (2008). Using time-delay to improve social play skills with peers for children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 38, 312-323.

National Association of Schools Psychologists – handouts by Kyle & Rogien

Send comments and questions for future topics to Denise Uitto at edconnectlearning@gmail.com for publishing in an upcoming edition of this newsletter.