



PBS Practice

The purpose of the series on PBS Practices is to provide information about important elements of positive behavior support. PBS Practices are not specific recommendations for implementation, and they should always be considered within the larger context of planning, assessment and comprehensive support.

Proactive Support Strategies

Behavior is related to and affected by its context (i.e., the environment influences behavior). Through environmental modifications, it may be possible to prevent or reduce challenging behavior. Proactive support strategies are focused on reducing the likelihood of problem behavior and allowing an individual to be as independent and successful as possible.

Modifications can be directed at circumstances that immediately precede behavior (antecedents) or broader setting events. Specific strategies should be individualized (e.g., determined based on a functional assessment). Examples of proactive strategies include modifying task characteristics, reorganizing the physical setting, clarifying routines and expectations, revising the activity schedule, changing social interactions, providing more opportunities for choices, enhancing the predictability of the setting, and addressing physiological issues that may be affecting behavior.

<i>Examples- Hypotheses</i>	<i>Proactive Strategy</i>
When the staff person's attention is withdrawn or focused on other individuals at the day program, John starts to take his clothes off; his behavior results in the staff person talking to him and moving closer to him.	Tell John you will be unavailable for a period of time, "I'm going to be with __ now." Interact with John periodically from across the room.
When James becomes frustrated with a task, he destroys the task materials; because the materials are damaged, the task has to be discontinued.	Modify the characteristics of the task so that James is likely to be successful.
When Sharon finishes an activity early, she bites her fingernails and cuticles until they bleed; this gives her another form of stimulation.	Provide Sharon with access to enjoyable tasks that she can do with her hands when she finishes an activity early (e.g. hand-held games, jigsaw puzzle, crafts).
Mary insists on wearing her preferred sweatshirt every day and she hits her roommates to make them stop complaining about the sweatshirt's odor.	Teach Mary the specific steps for using the washing machine so she can wash her own clothes.

Through functional assessment and brainstorming interventions, many proactive strategies may be identified for consideration. It will be up to an individual's behavioral support team to determine which strategies are most promising and fit best for the person and circumstances.

Behavioral problems may be prevented on a large scale through the appropriate design of settings, programs, and systems. For example, effective school-wide programs and classroom management systems may reduce the number of students who will require individualized behavior plans.

Frequently-Asked Questions

1. *Does being proactive mean that you are expected to anticipate and prevent every problem? This doesn't seem possible.* There may always be novel circumstances - or unusual combinations of events - that provoke problems. Assessing patterns and making proactive changes may prevent some, if not most, difficulties. Such changes may also establish a more positive lifestyle for the individual.
2. *If you eliminate all difficult circumstances, doesn't that further limit a person's ability to interact effectively in typical settings?* We can run the risk of creating situations in which the surroundings are so highly controlled that day-to-day challenges simply don't arise. When making environmental adjustments, it is important to evaluate whether or not the circumstance is something the person must come in contact with now or in the future. If so, teaching replacement skills to deal with those conditions is essential.

Other Resources

Fox, J. & Conroy, M. (1995). Setting events and behavior disorders of children and youth: An interbehavioral field analysis for research and practice. Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 3, 130-140.

Horner, R.H., Vaughn, B.J., Day, H.M., & Ard, W.R. (1996). The relationship between setting events and problem behavior: Expanding our understanding of behavioral support. In L. Koegel, R. Koegel, & G. Dunlap (Eds.), Positive behavioral support: Including people with difficult behavior in the community (pp. 381-402). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

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