



## 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.

### *Teaching Replacement Skills*

Problem behavior may best be viewed as evidence of skill deficits (i.e., people misbehave because they lack other skills for effectively dealing with situations). Given this perspective, building competencies is critical to producing broad, durable behavior change. Positive behavior support involves pinpointing skills that provide appropriate ways to meet a person's needs, promote self-sufficiency, and enhance access to people and activities.

An intervention plan should target specific skills that will allow an individual to meet his or her objectives in more efficient, effective, and appropriate ways. Such skills might include replacement behaviors (e.g., communicative alternatives that provide an immediate mechanism for the person to meet their needs) and other skills that improve overall functioning (e.g., independent living, social skills, leisure/recreation, tolerance).

<i>Examples - Hypotheses</i>	<i>Replacement Skills</i>
<i>When an adult's attention is withdrawn or focused on other children, Lisa makes noises; her behavior results in the adult talking to her and moving closer to her.</i>	<i>Teach Lisa to ask for adults' attention in an appropriate manner (e.g., "excuse me"). Encourage her to interact with peers or get involved in other activities while waiting.</i>
<i>When unanticipated changes in the routine occur, Ben throws his materials; having to pick them up delays the transition to the next activity.</i>	<i>Teach Ben to ask for clarification regarding schedule changes (e.g., by pointing to the picture schedule). Teach him relaxation strategies such as deep breathing.</i>
<i>When Donna finishes an activity early, she bites her fingernails and cuticles; this gives her another form of stimulation.</i>	<i>Teach Donna to ask for something else to do or initiate another activity when she finishes early.</i>

Skills must be taught systematically and effectively, especially when supporting individuals with significant disabilities. Systematic instruction involves using effective instructional cues, analyzing and breaking down task components, employing appropriate teaching methods (e.g., prompting, shaping, and fading procedures), and rewarding and correcting behaviors consistently. Failure of a person to develop the desired skills should prompt a reassessment of these teaching methods.

## Frequently-Asked Questions

1. *What do you do when an individual knows how to perform a skill, but doesn't use it?* There may be a number of reasons why a person does not use a skill under the desired circumstances. First, an individual may not recognize environmental cues that should prompt use of the skill. Second, the target skill may not be as efficient or effective as the problem behavior (e.g., problem behavior gets reinforced more immediately or consistently or requires less effort). And third, there may be other situational variables that are influencing behavior (e.g., distractions, discomfort).
2. *Aren't some people incapable of learning due to severe communication or other deficits?* People with the most severe cognitive and physical challenges are still able to develop capacities that will improve their ability to interact and function. Depending on an individual's specific disabilities, it may be necessary to utilize augmentative devices and/or ongoing assistance from support providers.

## Other Resources

Dunlap, G. & Kern, L. (1993). Assessment and intervention for children with the instructional curriculum. In J. Reichle and D. Wacker (Eds.), Communicative alternatives to challenging behavior (pp. 177-203). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Horner, R.H., Sprague, J.R., & Flannery, K.B. (1993). Building functional curricula for students with severe disabilities and severe problem behavior. In R. Van Houton & S. Axelrod (Eds.), Behavior analysis and treatment (pp. 47-71). New York: Plenum Press.

Snell, M. & Browder, D.M. (1993). Instructional planning and implementation. In M. Snell (Ed.), Instruction of students with severe disabilities (pp. 99-151). New York: Merrill Publishing.

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