

Closing the Gap Before it Widens:  
Addressing Problem Behavior in  
Preschool and Kindergarten

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## Overview

- Prevalence of problem behavior in early childhood
- Need for effective early interventions
- Critical components of effective intervention
- Review of useful strategies for preschool and kindergarten populations

## Introduction

Types of Problems

- Externalizing
  - Tend to show more stability over time (Doctoroff & Arnold, 2004)
- Internalizing
  - Also a risk factor for later social development, however less commonly diagnosed in early childhood (Gimpel & Holland, 2003)
- Other (e.g., sleep problems, toileting problems, selective mutism)

## Introduction

- 15% of preschool age children display chronic problem behaviors (Campbell, 1995)
- Higher percentage at risk (Hemmeter, Ostrosky, & Fox, 2006)
- Up to 25% of children age 4-7 may exhibit behaviors such as aggression, noncompliance, or disruptiveness (Campbell, 1995; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1998)
- Up to 50% of preschoolers displaying disruptive behavior continue to show challenging behavior in future schooling (Powell et al., 2006).

## Introduction

- Early childhood research has shown that children with externalizing problems are often most disruptive to teachers and parents (Stacks, 2005)
- However, fewer than 10% of young children who show signs of problem behavior actually receive intervention (Kauffman, as cited in Gettinger & Stoiber, 2006).

## Early Behavioral Difficulties

- May lead to:
  - A cycle of academic difficulties (Hojnoski & Missall, 2006)
  - A variety of future, likely more severe, behavioral problems (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2006; Spira & Fischel, 2005; Brotman, Gouley, Chesir-Teran, Dennis, & Klein, 2005).
  - Problems with learning and prosocial engagement with peers (Powell et al., 2006)

## These difficulties...

- Emphasize the great need for effective interventions targeting early childhood populations.

However...

## Need for Early Intervention

- Despite recognition for and investment in early childhood programs at federal, state, and local levels, effective interventions for addressing exhibited problem behaviors in young children are lacking (Walker et al., 1998).
- Those that have been empirically validated for young children often are not widely implemented in preschools or do not begin until kindergarten (Conroy & Brown, 2004).

## Critical Components of Effective Early Intervention

- Effective assessment & Data based decisions
- Ecological approach (i.e., providing intervention across environments)
- Family-Professional Partnerships (i.e. collaborative relationship between home and school)
- Teaching appropriate skills
- Positive based supports and reinforcement

(Fox, Dunlap, & Cushing, 2002)

## Effective Intervention Strategies

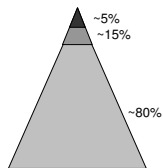
## School-Wide Positive Support (SWPBS)

- 3-Tiered Intervention Model: provides universal support for all students and additional support for students non-responsive to universal interventions (Sugai & Horner, 2002)

- Key ideas:

- responding to student needs
- teaching appropriate behaviors
- providing contextual supports or environmental modifications to allow a child to succeed

(Barnett, Bell, & Carey, 1998).



## School-Wide Positive Support (SWPBS)

- A highly effective program, currently being implemented in 3500 schools across 44 states and 6 countries ([www.swis.org](http://www.swis.org), March 2007).
- Mostly in elementary and secondary schools
- Possibility of using SWPBS with young children and the potential benefits for early childhood populations does exist (Barnett et al., 1998; Fox, Dunlap & Cushing, 2002; Stormont, Lewis, & Beckner, 2005; Duda & Colleagues, 2004)

## Positive Behavior Support in Preschool

- Establish a team for program-wide PBS support
- Teach behavioral expectations, but a smaller number than for older students (e.g., Be safe, be kind, be responsible)
- Encourage and acknowledge good behavior
- Use visuals, group celebration strategies, specific feedback



Stormont, Lewis, & Beckner, 2005)

"Nice sitting crisscross applesauce Johnny!"

## Positive Behavior Support in Preschool

- Office discipline referrals may not be an option in preschool, but you can create a behavioral incident form to monitor and communicate problems.
- Teachers should be prepared to provide targeted supports in the classroom for students with more intense needs



Stormont, Lewis, & Beckner, 2005)

What? \_\_\_\_\_  
Where? \_\_\_\_\_  
With who? \_\_\_\_\_  
Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
Consequences \_\_\_\_\_

## Global Strategies

- Classroom Training
  - Teaching (e.g., expectations, problem-solving)
  - Reinforcing (e.g., verbal praise, token system)
- Parent Involvement/Training
  - Positive Attention and Praise
  - Effective discipline



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## Comprehensive Intervention Example

First Step to Success (Walker, Kavanagh, Golly, Stiller, Severson, & Feil, 1998)

- Behavioral intervention model for children at the point of school entry (Walker & colleagues, 1998).
- Goal: Develop competencies needed to build effective behavioral adjustment
- Targets parents, teachers, and peers

## First Step to Success

(Walker et al., 1998)

Components:

- 1) Universal screening procedure
  - Nomination
  - Nomination & brief rating scale
  - Rating procedure
- 2) School intervention
- 3) Parent training component (Walker, Golly, McLane, & Kimmich, 2005).

## First Step to Success

(Walker et al., 1998)

- Involves an ecological approach, family-professional partnerships and assessment based PBS.
- Initial evaluation of effectiveness showed behavior improved (Walker et al., 1998)
- Follow-up study found the program to teach appropriate behavior and have a positive effect on the child's peer relations (Golly, Stiller, & Walker, 1998).
- Effectiveness for preschoolers is unknown.

## Example Collaborative Tool

### Tool Names:

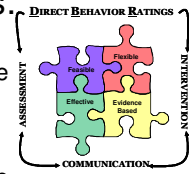
- School-Home Note
- Daily Progress Report
- Daily Behavior Report Card (DBRC)
- Direct Behavior Rating (DBR)

### Can be used as:

- A means to monitor student behavior
- A component of an intervention
- A tool through which to communicate obtained information to other individuals

## Such collaborative tools:

- Involve a check-in/check-out system to provide feedback to the parent and student and increase positive adult attention (Crone et al.)
- Involve the teacher evaluating student's behavior, sending home to parents, who provide consequences based on the report (Kelley & McCain, 1995)
- Have been shown to have potential use for early childhood (McCain & Kelley, 1993)



## How and Why To Use DBRs:

### How?

- 1) Define the target behavior
- 2) Select the rating frequency and type of scale
- 3) Design the DBR-tool
- 4) Determine if consequences will be used, define the criteria, list potential consequences
- 5) Determine the responsibilities of all parties

### Why?

- Broad array of possibilities
- Individualizable
- Cost efficient
- Widely used and highly accepted

### Example DBR for use with young children

Child Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Today, this is how well I \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Write specific behaviors here.) \_\_\_\_\_  
 During \_\_\_\_\_  
  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 During \_\_\_\_\_  
  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 During \_\_\_\_\_  
  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 I learned \_\_\_\_\_ smiley faces.

## Related Studies

- McCain and Kelly (1993)- Daily feedback and home-based reinforcements based on card
  - Results showed increased attentiveness and decreased disruptiveness in preschool
- Lahey and colleagues (1977) investigated the use of daily behavior report cards with minimal teacher and parent contacts as an efficient method of classroom intervention.
  - Targeted kindergarten resting behavior
  - Showed significant improvements and preference of daily home notes

## To Conclude...

- Behavior problems in early childhood are often a cause for concern and intervention
- Critical components include effective assessment/data-based decisions, ecological approach, partnerships between families and professionals, teaching appropriate skills, and positive behavior support
- Global strategies targeting universal supports should be established and then secondary & tertiary interventions can be implemented (e.g., First Steps, Direct Behavior Ratings.)

**Useful Resources!**

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Gimpel & Holland, 2003. Provides hands-on tools and resources for addressing common emotional and behavioral problems in preschool and kindergarten children. Focus on evidence-based interventions that are practical and effective, and that help prevent the development of more serious difficulties.

Barnett, Bell, & Carey, 1998. Delinates the basic steps of developing effective interventions for learning and behavior difficulties in children aged 2-5. Sets forth an ecological framework that stresses identifying problem situations rather than classifying individual children as disabled or at risk.

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Campbell, 2006. Empirically supported prevention and treatment approaches are reviewed, and concrete recommendations are offered for improving the quality and availability of child care and early intervention programs.

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Bagnato, 2007. Describes principles and strategies for collecting information about children's everyday activities in the home, preschool, and community. Provide a valid basis for intervention planning & progress monitoring. Emphasizes the importance of enlisting parents as partners with practitioners and teachers.

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[www.interventioncentral.com](http://www.interventioncentral.com)

[www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)

Thank you.

By addressing behavioral problems early, we can perhaps prevent the achievement gap from widening!

Questions/Comments:  
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