

Positive, Proactive Approaches to Supporting Children With Disabilities

Creating a Positive Predictable Environment

Overview

Public early childhood programs, elementary, and secondary schools are responsible for meeting the needs of children with disabilities, which includes addressing their social, emotional, and behavioral needs. Far too often, positive and proactive approaches that focus on preventing interfering behavior are not part of a child's individualized education program (IEP). As a result, children with disabilities—particularly children with disabilities of color—are frequently subjected to exclusionary discipline, which removes them from their learning environment without focusing on how to best meet their unique behavioral needs. Schools and early childhood programs must understand how to protect the rights and needs of children with disabilities to ensure their disability-based behaviors are understood and that their IEPs are appropriately developed and effectively implemented to enable social, emotional, and academic success.

In July 2022, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), published the guide [*Positive, Proactive Approaches to Addressing the Needs of Children with Disabilities: A Guide for Stakeholders*](#), which provides actions state educational agencies, local educational agencies (LEAs), schools, early childhood programs, and educators can take to implement positive, proactive, and preventative practices that seek to better address a child's behavioral needs while decreasing the use of exclusionary discipline. These practices reinforce core pillars of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), including how addressing the behavioral needs of children with disabilities is part of IDEA's requirement to provide a free appropriate public education provided in the least restrictive environment and the IEP as the vehicle for fulfilling this obligation. By implementing practices associated with these positive and proactive approaches, students with disabilities can be assured of access to an educational environment that is nondiscriminatory, supportive, positive, and nurturing for both their academic and behavioral development.

OSEP Technical Assistance (TA) Center Resources

The resources in the following tables can support schools and early childhood programs in implementing positive, proactive approaches to support and respond to children's behavioral needs more effectively. Following the resources is information about OSEP TA Centers that can provide additional information to support schools in implementing the practices described below.

CLASSROOM-BASED PRACTICES

Resource	Description	Audience	Reference Citation
Supporting Students with Disabilities in the Classroom within a PBIS Framework	<p>Students with disabilities are more likely to experience exclusionary and reactive discipline practices than students without disabilities. Fortunately, when educators implement positive, proactive, and evidence-based practices within a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework, students with disabilities benefit. In this practice brief, we describe the “top ten” intervention strategies effective educators implement to support all students, including students with disabilities, in their classroom.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators • School administrators 	<p>Simonsen, B., Putnam, R., Yaneck, K., Evanovich, L., Shaw, S. Shuttleton, C. Morris, K., & Mitchell, B. (2020). <i>Supporting students with disabilities within a PBIS framework</i>. Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-students-with-disabilities-in-the-classroom-within-a-pbis-framework</p>
Behavior Support for Intensive Intervention Course: Module 3 Overview	<p>This multipart module applies behavioral theory to strategy to use in the classroom. The focus is on antecedents and instructional strategies. By the end of this module participants should be able to maximize structure in the classroom, post, teach, prompt, review, monitor and reinforce a small number of positively stated expectations, and actively engage students in observable ways. This module is part of a larger series of course content designed to support faculty and professional development providers with designing and instructing preservice and in-service educators who are developing and/or refining their implementation of behavior support for intensive intervention.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators • School administrators 	<p>National Center on Intensive Intervention. (n.d.). <i>Behavior support for intensive intervention course: Module 3 Overview</i> [Webinar]. https://intensiveintervention.org/antecedent-and-instructional-strategies-behavior-course</p>
Supporting and Responding to Students’ Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Needs: Evidence-Based Practices for Educators	<p>This practice guide is an updated version of Supporting and Responding to Student Behavior (Office of Special Education Programs, 2015). “Supporting and Responding” summarizes evidence-based, positive, and proactive practices that support and respond to students’ social, emotional, and behavioral needs in classrooms and similar teaching and learning environments (e.g., small-group activity).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators 	<p>Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. (2022). <i>Supporting and responding to students’ social, emotional, and behavioral needs: Evidence-based practices for educators</i>. University of Oregon. https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-and-responding-to-behavior-evidence-based-classroom-strategies-for-teachers</p>

CLASSROOM-BASED PRACTICES

Resource	Description	Audience	Reference Citation
Supporting Students With Disabilities at School and Home: A Guide for Teachers to Support Families and Students	This guide highlights five key practices for teachers and families to support all students, including a focus on developing, teaching, reviewing, reminding, and reinforcing predictable routines and expectations. For each practice, the guide provides (a) tips for teachers to support students with disabilities during instruction; (b) tips for families that educators can share to support or enhance learning at home, especially during periods of remote instruction; and (c) free-access resources that include strategies shown to be effective by research (e.g., informational guides, downloadable materials, research-based programs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators 	Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, National Center on Intensive Intervention, & National Integrated Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Research Network (2020). <i>Supporting students with disabilities at school and home: A guide for teachers to support families and students</i> . University of Oregon. https://intensiveintervention.org/resource/supporting-students-disabilities-school-and-home
Classroom Behavior Management (Part 1): Key Concepts and Foundational Practices	This self-paced module overviews important key concepts and foundational practices related to effective classroom behavior management, including cultural influences on behavior, the creation of positive climates and structured classrooms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators • Local and district agencies • State and regional agencies 	IRIS Center. (2022). <i>Classroom behavior management (Part 1: Key concepts and foundational practices)</i> . https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/beh1

SCHOOL-BASED PRACTICES

Resource	Description	Audience	Reference citation
IDEA Behavioral Support and Discipline OSER's Dear Colleague Letter	In this Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR) webinar, Renee Bradley of OSEP is joined by representatives from Parent Centers, protection and advocacy agencies, and state directors of special education to unpack the important “Dear Colleague” letter released in 2016 by OSEP regarding behavior and school discipline and discuss its impact on the field.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and district agencies • School administrators 	Center for Parent Information and Resources. (2016). <i>IDEA behavioral support and discipline OSER's dear colleague letter</i> [Webinar]. https://www.parentcenterhub.org/webinar-oser-dcl-idea-behavioral-support-and-discipline

SCHOOL-BASED PRACTICES

Resource	Description	Audience	Reference citation
The Leadership Team's Guide for Re-Opening Programs	<p>This document is designed to guide the program leadership team around considerations for supporting young children, families, and staff as they return to the program after a break. The guidance helps program leaders consider the environmental and social–emotional practices that establish predictable, safe, and nurturing classroom environments. The guide includes hyperlinks to 29 practical tools and materials.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators • Local and district agencies • School administrators • State and regional agencies 	<p>Winneker, A., Fox, L., von der Embse, M., Sizemore, E., & Peña, D. (2020). <i>The leadership team's guide for re-opening programs</i>. National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations. https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Leadership_ReOpening_Guide.pdf</p>
Resource Collection on Positive Behavior Supports, Functional Behavioral Assessment, and School Discipline	<p>Inside this three-part collection, Parent Centers and other stakeholders will find:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an overview of the requirements for functional behavior assessments and positive behavior supports (PBS) in the IEP under IDEA, both proactively and in response to behavioral incidents; and • the discipline-related procedural safeguards under general and special education law and court cases, including manifestation determinations. <p>Parent Centers and others can search the collection to identify key strategies, tools, and resources that they can use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when advising and supporting parents around PBS and discipline issues, and • when partnering with state agencies on evidence-based strategies to improve performance on discipline-related indicators in the state performance plan/annual performance report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators 	<p>Center for Parent Information and Resources. (2017). <i>A resource collection on positive behavior supports, functional behavioral assessment, and school discipline</i>. https://www.parentcenterhub.org/pbs-fba-bip-discipline-resource-collection</p>
Resources on Bullying and Cyberbullying of Native Youth	<p>This resource list has been compiled expressly for Parent Centers (and others) and the Native families and communities they serve. You can use the list to connect with agencies and organizations, publications, bullying prevention programs, and websites that address bullying and cyberbullying.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and district agencies • School administrators 	<p>Native American Parent Technical Assistance Center. (2020). <i>Resources on bullying and cyberbullying of Native youth</i> (2nd ed.). Center for Parent Information and Resources. https://www.parentcenterhub.org/resources-bullying-cyberbullying-native-youth</p>

SCHOOL-BASED PRACTICES			
Resource	Description	Audience	Reference citation
School Discipline A Resource Collection	A resource collection compiled by and for Parent Centers and others. Resources are divided by type: materials to read and share on school discipline; from the Federal Government; and what IDEA requires.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School administrators 	Center for Parent Information and Resources. (2017). <i>School discipline A resource collection</i> . https://www.parentcenterhub.org/school-discipline-resources
A Collaborative Start to Behavioral Supports (DL #2).	Positive and consistent behavioral supports are needed by all students and, for some students, are vital to support meaningful engagement in academics. Distance learning situations are no different in this regard. An initial task before educators is identifying and transferring the knowledge of things that work in school to the new reality that exists for families at home. Collaboration and communication are key. It is also important to deliberately define what those supports have been historically, and what they should be within the new context and activities so that families can best support their children with the most success. By intentionally identifying and consistently providing these supports, students with significant cognitive disabilities will be more able to participate and engage the same as their peers within the current distance learning reality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators • Health and related services providers • School administrators 	Sommerness, J. (2020). <i>A collaborative start to behavioral supports (DL #2)</i> . TIES Center. https://publications.ici.umn.edu/ties/building-engagement-with-distance-learning/collaborative-start-to-behavioral-supports

PYRAMID MODEL IMPLEMENTATION			
Resource	Description	Audience	Reference citation
Pyramid Model Practices Implementation Checklist	The Pyramid Model Implementation Checklist is a tool designed to be used by practitioners to identify training and/or classroom implementation needs in seven areas: responsive relationships; predictable daily schedules; creating effective classroom routines; teaching behavior expectations across classroom routines; teaching social and emotional skills; systematic instructional strategies; and function-based assessment and intervention planning. The checklist encourages individual self-reflection and discussion between classroom teachers and practitioner coaches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators • School administrators 	National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations. (2021). <i>Pyramid Model practices implementation checklist</i> . https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Pyramid-Practices-Checklist.pdf

PYRAMID MODEL IMPLEMENTATION

Resource	Description	Audience	Reference citation
<p>Roadmap to Statewide Implementation of the Pyramid Model</p>	<p>This document is a guide for implementing widespread use of the Pyramid Model for Promoting Social and Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children. This guide is used by state leaders to identify how to implement and sustain the use of the Pyramid Model within early childhood environments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School administrators • State and regional agencies 	<p>Dunlap, G., Smith, B. J., Fox, L., Blasé, K., Nylander, D., Rausch, A., & Rendon, T. (2021). <i>Roadmap to effective intervention practices: Statewide implementation of the Pyramid Model</i>. National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations. https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/roadmap/roadmap_p_6_roadmap-to-statewide-implementation.pdf</p>

OSEP TA Centers

- **Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR)** | CPIR provides universal technical assistance to the network of Parent Centers funded by OSEP. Among its priorities are: (a) providing Parent Centers with products and materials to support their work with families; (b) increasing Parent Centers' knowledge and capacity in specific domains; and (c) increasing the coordination of parent training efforts throughout the network. Among the products and services CPIR provides to the Parent Center network are: (a) its information-rich website in English and Spanish (called the Parent Center Hub); (b) a twice-monthly newsletter called the *Buzz from the Hub*; (c) the eLearning Hub, which features online, self-paced learning modules for all Parent Center staff as part of capacity building; (d) frequent webinars on high-priority topics; (e) national Parent Center capacity-building conferences; (f) private communication spaces where Parent Centers can share resources and collaborate with their colleagues (CentersConnect); and (g) coordination of annual data collection and reporting of Parent Center activities, training contacts, and services provided to families, professionals, and youth with disabilities.

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org>

Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) | The Center on PBIS was initially funded in 1998 and a new 5-year funding cycle launched in October 2018. The purpose of the new center is to improve the capacity of state educational agencies, LEAs, and schools to establish, scale up, and sustain the PBIS framework to (a) scale up Tier 2 and 3 systems to improve outcomes for students with or at-risk for disabilities, (b) enhance school climate and school safety, and (c) improve conditions for learning to promote the well-being of all students. The Center on PBIS is grounded in the values of comprehensive prevention, based on human-centered science, and implemented through collaborative partnerships, centered in equity, to improve social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes.

<https://www.pbis.org>

- **IDEA Data Center (IDC)** | IDC provides TA to build the capacity of states and LEAs to collect, report, analyze, and use high-quality IDEA Part B data. IDC offers a full range of services and resources to support states' efforts to submit 616 (State Performance Plans and Annual Performance Reports or SPP/APR) data and 618 (or *EDFacts*) data that meet the U.S. Department of Education's data quality standards for accuracy, timeliness, and completeness. IDC also partners with States and LEAs to help them use these data to identify programmatic strengths as well as areas for improvement, including addressing root causes of poor performance and evaluating progress toward goals and desired outcomes.

<https://ideadata.org>

- **IRIS Center** | The IRIS Center develops and disseminates free, engaging online resources about evidence-based instructional and behavioral practices to support the education of all students, particularly struggling learners and those with disabilities. These resources, designed to bridge the research-to-practice gap, are intended for use in college teacher preparation programs, in professional development (PD) activities for practicing professionals, and by independent learners. The array of IRIS resources includes modules, case studies, fundamental skill sheets, information briefs, course/PD activities, a high-leverage practices alignment tool, and an online glossary of disability-related terms.

<https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu>

- **National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII)** | NCII is housed at the American Institutes for Research and works in conjunction with many of our nation's most distinguished data-based individualization (DBI) experts. The mission of the NCII is to build knowledge and capacity of state and local leaders, faculty and professional

development providers, educators, and other stakeholders to support implementation of intensive intervention for students with severe and persistent learning and/or social, emotional, or behavioral needs using DBI.

<https://intensiveintervention.org>

- **National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations** | The mission of NCPMI is to improve and support the capacity of state systems and local programs to implement an early childhood multi-tiered system of support to improve the social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes of young children with, and at risk for, developmental disabilities or delays. The goals of the center are to assist states and programs in their implementation of sustainable systems for the implementation of the Pyramid Model for Promoting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children (Pyramid Model) within early intervention and early education programs, with a focus on promoting the social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes of young children birth to five, reducing the use of inappropriate discipline practices, promoting family engagement, using data for decision-making, integrating early childhood and infant mental health consultation and fostering inclusion.

<https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/index.html>

More information on positive, proactive approaches to supporting the behavioral needs of children with disabilities is available from the [U.S. Department of Education](#) and a companion [resource page](#), which includes an eight-part TA Resource Guide series and an archived video summarizing the Department's guidance and its main principles.

This document contains resources collected from OSEP-funded technical assistance centers that are provided for the user's convenience to assist in implementation efforts. The inclusion of these materials is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject-matter experts. The opinions expressed in any of these materials do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education (Department). The Department does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these materials.

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