

Five Recent Examples from the Literature on Individualized Positive Behavior Support

ALAN

“Alan was a 7-year-old boy diagnosed with autism and mild mental retardation. Alan experienced significant visual impairment – he could differentiate between light and dark but could not detect shapes or movement – and communicated verbally. . . . Alan only consumed foods of a smooth texture (e.g., yogurt) and, as a result of his significant food selectivity, had developed an iron deficiency. . . . When Alan was offered nonsmooth foods, he typically accepted the initial bite (most likely because he could not see it) but immediately expelled it. If continued attempts were made to have Alan accept [nonsmooth food], he often exhibited aggressive or self-injurious behavior” (McCartney, Anderson, & English, 2005, p. 19).

Function: Avoid eating non-preferred foods.

Intervention: Escape extinction and differential reinforcement. Researchers modeled for caregivers how to continue to offer different types of foods, alternating bites of preferred and nonpreferred foods while **very gradually** shaping acceptance and not allowing Alan to escape from prompts and requests to try different kinds of foods. However, at first, as soon as even one bite of nonpreferred food was accepted, verbal praise was given and the child was allowed to play with toys. Later, more bites of nonpreferred food were required before reinforcement was given.

Outcome: “Alan started to consume a variety of meats and other previously nonpreferred foods” (McCartney et al., 2005, p. 24). Later, he continued to willingly consume meat and a variety of other foods of different textures.

JOSH

Josh was a 7-year-old boy with EBD who received special education services in a self-contained elementary school classroom. “He could successfully complete the general education curriculum with minimal adaptations; however, his inappropriate behaviors were reported as having a negative impact on his ability to be educated with peers without disabilities. Of specific concern were sniffing materials and other persons, disrupting the materials of others, poking peers with his fingers, throwing objects, repeating words excessively, and being off task” (Stichter, Sasso, & Jolivette, 2004, p. 168). A goal was to make it possible for him to spend some time in a general education classroom instead of all his day in the special education classroom.

Function: Not identified. Instead, structural analysis identified environmental variables that were related to low rates of problem behaviors: high structure, low social interactions, and teacher proximity. Then, a component analysis identified relative importance of the variables.

Intervention: The general education teacher identified instructional activities that provided high structure (clear and specific directions regarding what to do, how long to do it, which materials to use, and what quality of work is expected) and the student's schedule was arranged to allow participation in the general education classroom at optimal times and when paired with a nondisabled peer who had participated with him during the assessments. A consultant provided both the special and the general education teacher with guidelines for planning activities with environmental conditions that would maximize Josh's success. Teacher report indicated that discussions with the consultant were important.

Outcome: "One year [later] . . . Josh was receiving instruction on a full-time basis in his general education classroom, was averaging academic scores in the C+ range, and was requiring only occasional teacher consultation to support his adaptive classroom behavior" (Stichter et al., 2004, p. 175).

CALLIE

"Callie was a 6-year-old female with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), seizure disorder, and developmental coordination disorder. She received no medications to treat symptoms associated with ADHD. . . . [Recently] her physician discontinued her seizure medication due to a lack of seizure activity. . . . Callie did not receive any physical therapy intervention . . . Callie, one of four students in a self-contained classroom, often behaved in ways that disrupted her own and peers' work, as well as the teacher's routine. She also displayed challenging behavior during lunch, snack, recess, and free time. A classwide token reinforcement system . . . failed to improve Callie's behavior. . . . Information gleaned from the teacher interview suggested tentatively two possible types (i.e., functions) of challenging behavior – escape and attention [but the teacher reported that] Callie's behavior was very 'unpredictable'" (Zuna & McDougall, 2004, pp. 19-20). Direct observations indicated more specifically that Callie often hurried to complete academic tasks and sometimes refused to do them. In addition, she was observed to often ask questions or make comments that were inappropriate or distracting (e.g., "Why do I have to do this?" and "My chair is too short" and "Do you have any sisters?"). In addition, she fidgeted excessively (e.g., twirling her hair) during academic tasks. She also frequently tattled on peers. The teacher had tried two types of timeout, having Callie place her head on her desk and sending her to a timeout corner but these had not helped. Callie's behavior was usually appropriate during free time, recess, and snack time.

Functions: Escape from academic work and attention from adults.

Intervention: Four interventions were tried, but this was the one that was continued combined: (a) "DRA [Differential Reinforcement of Alternative] (Miltenberger, 2001) – Positive verbal reinforcement for on-task behavior, plus extinction/no response for inappropriate behavior" with "choice of task and choice of break activity. Choice of task was allowed for all academic seatwork. After completing 3 tasks, a 5-minute break was provided. To ease transitions from break back to work, Callie was asked what she would like to do for her next break. This was written on her assignment as a visual reminder" (Zuna & McDougall, 2004, p. 22)

Outcome: Frequency of problem behavior incidents decreased from an average of 26 per session to an average of 12 per session.

JASON

“Jason was a 10-year-old, typically developing Caucasian boy who attended a fourth-grade classroom . . . He was the tallest child in his class, was well groomed, and appeared to be in good health. Jason made adequate grades (mostly C’s and B’s) and was well liked by his peers. Nevertheless, his teacher considered him to be a difficult child because of his frequent off-task behavior, particularly during independent academic assignments in reading and math . . . [He was] very disruptive . . . talked with other students . . . kicked his seat or the one in front of him . . . wandered around the room. [These behaviors] initially resulted in redirection by the teacher or the instructional aide. Jason usually got back on task after redirection, but not for long. After three or four attempts at redirection, the teacher usually reprimanded him, reminding him of the class rules and the consequences for misbehavior. When reprimands were unsuccessful, the teacher would refer Jason to the office for disciplinary action” (Umbreit, Lane, & Dejud, 2004, p. 14).

Direct observations and a student interview indicated that Jason was capable of doing the work quickly and accurately and that he often “had little to do for a majority of the independent assignment period” (Umbreit et al., 2004, p. 16).

Functions: Escape from academic work and attention from adults.

Intervention: Provide more challenging tasks that match Jason’s ability level.

Outcome: On-task behavior increased from about 50% of the time to about 91% of the time in reading and math and off-task and disruptive behaviors showed a corresponding decrease.

SANDRA

Sandra is a middle school student who has had minor behavior problems for some time but recently has escalated to more serious ones, particularly defiance. She has been sent to the principal’s office for discipline three times recently, once by her geography teacher and twice by her math teacher. When asked to complete tasks by teachers, she says things like, “I’m not doing this today” or “I’ll do it when I’m ready” or “Buzz off.” She reads a magazine instead. This is more likely to happen if she is asked to perform in front of the class (e.g., work a problem on the chalkboard or show where a country is on a map) or work in a cooperative learning group. She does not do this in home economics, reading, or physical education. (from Scott, Liaupsin, Nelson, & Jolivet, 2003).

Function: “Sandra is likely to engage in defiant behavior when asked to work with or in front of peers . . . she ultimately escapes or avoids” working with or in front of peers by “becoming defiant or ignoring directions” (Scott et al., 2003, p. 19)

Interventions: 1. Taught and immediately reinforced a replacement behavior – “use appropriate verbal statements to indicate that she wishes to work in an alternative format . . . [these requests] will be granted immediately” (p. 20)

2. Counseling about anxiety
3. Be a peer tutor in reading

Outcome: After two weeks, only two occurrences of defiance across all classes occurred, and these were in the first few days.

References and Related Reading

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