

Preface

The first edition of *Preventing Problem Behaviors*, published in 2002, evolved from a group of research projects funded by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to prevent serious emotional disturbance in school-aged children. It was an outgrowth of a collaborative design team comprised of representatives from the funded projects and spearheaded in large part by Pam Kay. In addition to the book, the collaboration resulted in much-appreciated collegiality, several published monographs about effective school practices in the prevention of behavior problems, panel presentations at OSEP Project Director’s meetings in Washington, D.C., and some wonderful professional development exchanges over dinners in Georgetown. Design team membership also provided a “home base” at professional meetings—particularly for those new to special education research and writing—and a substantial opportunity to get to know and collaborate with researchers from a diverse group of universities around the country.

Pam was a primary driving force behind the group. She was full of ideas that made any time spent with her very beneficial. She also was a tireless advocate for children and families. The mother of two boys with disabilities herself, she always found ways to balance professional and family responsibilities without shortchanging or upstaging either. We valued our professional and personal associations with Pam and were deeply saddened by her untimely passing in 2007. We thought it only fitting, therefore, to dedicate this edition of *Preventing Problem Behaviors* to Pam, who was an inspiration to us in planning it and in seeing it come to fruition. She took great pride in the first edition of the book, and we share the second edition as part of her legacy.

One of Pam’s most cherished causes was making sure that education professionals attended to the needs of students with emotional and behavioral problems. Along with many school administrators and professional colleagues, she was concerned about the frequent shortage of resources and expertise in school settings and an inability to provide needed interventions for these students (issues also cited by the Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health). Pam was especially troubled when older students, in particular, who presented emotional and behavioral challenges seemed to become “the unwanted” in their school systems. Her passion for making sure that efforts encompassing prevention and intervention were a top priority in all schools was inspirational to everyone who knew her.

With these memories of Pam in mind, we developed the second edition of *Preventing Problem Behaviors* to (a) keep the spotlight on the array of strategies and interventions that teachers and administrators can use to serve students who present challenging behaviors and (b) continue her efforts to support and improve the quality of education for *all* students. As the education profession increasingly acknowledges the prime importance of social-emotional learning programs, along with a focus on academic learning and accountability, we are optimistic that the preventive, research-based approaches described in this book will provide a broad perspective on important issues, promote

Introduction

Changing the Lives of Students With Problems

Current prevention science offers opportunities to address problems effectively with interventions at different levels of intensity and support. If a student is not making adequate progress, decision-making teams should consider whether the interventions were implemented with fidelity. If not, additional support should be provided or intervention plans revised to match better the context of the classroom and the teacher's ability to respond effectively. While these efforts offer great promise, "it is untrue and misleading to claim that we currently have a necessary and sufficient knowledge base to guide the[ir] implementation . . . across all grades, for all academic [and behavior] skills, in all content areas, for all children and youth" (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007, p. 134).

The prevention practices described in our book are based on the premise that early response to problems can lead to better outcomes for students. These efforts should be built into the school's general education program, and they should be accessible to all students. They address four areas: Foundations, Intervention, Collaboration, and Evaluation (see Table 0.1).

Table 0.1 Evidence-Based Prevention Practices

Area	Practice	Chapter
Foundations	Preschool Behavior Support	2
	Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support	3
Intervention	Cognitive-Behavior Interventions in School Settings	4
	Social Skills Instruction and Generalization Strategies	5
	Conflict Resolution, Peer Mediation, and Bullying Prevention	6
	Classroom Interventions and Individual Behavior Plans	7
Collaboration	Effective Home-School Partnerships	8
	Community and Interagency Partnerships	9
	Culturally Responsive Teaching	10
Evaluation	Monitoring Student Progress and Evaluating Prevention Practices	11
	Building and Sustaining Effective Prevention Practices	12

IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING SOCIAL SKILLS IN PRESCHOOL

Current educational practice and policy focus heavily on academic achievement. Performance on high-stakes tests is used as a benchmark for quality in school, district, state, and national comparisons. Of course, academic success is only one element of learning in preschool and other educational programs. As Knitzer (2002) pointed out, key findings from research illustrate that policy makers and practitioners should invest in improving the social and emotional skills of young children for the following reasons:

- The earliest years set the stage for lifetime emotional skills, competencies, and problems.
- Many young children are not developing the emotional skills that they will need to succeed in school and be productive members of society.
- Achieving the national policy goal of school readiness for all children requires paying more strategic attention to early social, emotional, and behavioral challenges as well as cognitive and physical development. (p. 3)

Evidence from early childhood programs, such as Head Start, illustrates that becoming more effective at dealing with emotional and social behavioral issues is among educators top needs for training and technical assistance (Buscemi, Bennett, Thomas, & Deluca, 1995; Huffman, Mehlinger, & Kerivan, 2000; Peth-Pierce, 2000; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Furthermore, most teachers agree that “readiness to learn” and “teachability” are “marked” by abilities to exhibit and sustain positive social behaviors (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). Table 2.1 summarizes appropriate and problem behavior of young children.

Table 2.1 Categories and Descriptors of Appropriate and Problem Behavior of Young Children

Category	Descriptors
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interacting with toys, materials, or others without frowning, showing fear or sadness, crying, or whining; observing others; face showing interest or even smiling
Discontent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crying • Fussy • Silent distress • Verbal distress • Clinging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audibly crying with tears; loud, intense sounds accompanied by mucous from the child’s nose • Whining or making noises that seem to communicate unhappiness; tears not present. May appear to be asking for attention. • Frowning, scowling, or looking as if about to cry; appearing fearful, anxious, or sulking • Saying things that indicate distress or unhappiness • Holding onto an adult staff member (e.g., grabbing and holding onto the leg of an adult); clinging to the adult while being held (holding on more tightly than when relaxed, burying head in adult’s shoulder to avoid eye contact)
Problem Behavior <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggression • Destruction • Noncompliance • Social withdrawal/ isolation • Territorial infringement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hitting, kicking, biting, pushing others (peers or adults), or verbally threatening others • Throwing, kicking, breaking, and banging toys/ materials in ways other than their prescribed use, with the intent to destroy or with the inferred intent of anger • Not following an adult request and displaying defiant behaviors verbally or nonverbally • Not being in close proximity to others, not interacting with others or with toys, or appearing to be avoiding or moving away from others • Taking another child’s toys or materials or getting in another child’s space

Table 5.2 Steps in Teaching Social Skills

1. Define the skill for students.
2. Model the skill.
Use this sequence: example/nonexample/example.
Include students in the modeling.
3. Use role-plays; have students rehearse the behavior.
Practice a few times in front of the whole group and a few by twos, with each student in the class having a peer partner.
4. Review the skill, provide practice opportunities, and give feedback.
Have students practice in small groups during a natural social activity (academic game, free-time activities).
Monitor and supervise during the social activity, giving feedback to individuals on their performance.
5. Summarize the group's performance.
Select partners to demonstrate successful examples of skill use.
6. Plan for generalization: assign homework.
Include suggestions for using the skill in natural settings.
Provide visual prompt card with steps in using the skill.
Provide a process for teacher, peers, and families to report success.
7. Support use of prosocial skills in natural settings, using prompting, incidental teaching, feedback, and reinforcement of skills throughout the school day.

A second objective of a social skills lesson is that students will transfer or generalize their learning, remembering the lesson and performing the skills in natural settings. Typically, the use of adult prompting and feedback in those settings and visual reminders such as posters are recommended to promote generalization to natural settings. Figure 5.1 illustrates these features: a poster for teaching children to “ignore inappropriate behavior of peers,” a point chart for acknowledging the use of this and other skills, and an abbreviated script to teach the lesson. A current research study investigating the program teaching this and other prosocial classroom skills in 24 classrooms shows that students with behavior risks who are participating in the intervention increased their on-task behavior and decreased disruptive and antisocial behaviors compared to students at risk in nonintervention classes (see Figure 5.2 on page 81).

Regarding the Skillstreaming curriculum, McGinnis and Goldstein (1997) described several key variables for effective modeling:

- Use at least two examples for each skill demonstration. If a skill is used in more than one group session, develop two new modeling displays.
- Select situations relevant to students' real-life circumstances.
- The model (i.e., the person enacting the behavioral steps of the skill) should be portrayed as a youngster reasonably similar in age, socioeconomic background, verbal ability, and other characteristics salient to the youngsters in the *Skillstreaming* group.

Example: Classroom Management Observation and Plan

Ms. Tomaz is a third-grade classroom teacher with seven years of teaching experience at Sunset Elementary. She has received positive yearly evaluations from her principal, which typically have included a few comments about improving her classroom management approaches. Until this year, however, Ms. Tomaz has never had specific goals or activities for improving her management skills.

She and another teacher agreed to use some collegial support and supervision around management procedures. With the principal's agreement, they planned observations of each other's classroom for two hours. The principal substituted for the teachers so that they could visit and observe in each other's classroom. The teachers used Table 7.1 during their observations so that they could specify a few items for improvement and develop a plan of action to help each other.

The observing teacher concluded that Ms. Tomaz had discussed and taught social expectations and had a daily schedule, but communicated these only verbally in class. There were no posters or other visual reminders in the room about their Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support program. The observer recommended that the program poster with its social expectations be posted and that a daily schedule be written on the classroom whiteboard. This would give the students and the adults in the room a place to look at and review these items throughout the day when necessary. It would also give Ms. Tomaz referents for students who were misbehaving. She could ask the students to refer to the expectations or schedule to identify what they should be doing at the specific time. The students could respond, make commitments to show expected behavior within the scheduled activity, and then get back to the activity.

This type of reminding about social expectations through posted visual material is helpful in improving classroom management. While this is a brief and straightforward example, one can see that many possible recommendations can come from classroom management observation. Teachers and administrators should use the information to develop goals that are achievable within the classroom, without overwhelming a teacher with too many goals at any one time.

TIER II BEHAVIOR PLANS FOR STUDENTS

Even when teachers have developed a strong, systematic approach to classroom management, some students will need additional behavior supports and interventions. Following an SPBS model, these students are considered to be a targeted group who are at risk of school failure due to their behavior. These students show consistent and somewhat enduring behavior problems. Sometimes this is evident through teacher discussion and nomination. That is, teachers often know in a comparative manner when a student is not meeting classroom and school expectations. They will then refer the student to a school student support team meeting to review progress and brainstorm ideas in the classroom.

Systematic Identification of Tier II Students

Systematic approaches for identifying students for Tier II interventions have been developed over the past 20 years. The two most common approaches are *systematic screening* and *frequency of office discipline referrals*. Walker and Severson (1992) devel-