

# Adapting the Behavior Education Program for Preschool Settings

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In the past decade, researchers and interventionists have applied the principles of positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS) to early learning environments, such as preschool classrooms, childcare centers, and Head Start. The translation of PBIS to early childhood classrooms has evolved so that we now know much more about how various strategies need to be adapted for young children and early learning contexts. For example, we know that preschool children benefit from having very simply stated classroom rules, that PBIS efforts with young children should involve collaboration with families, and that some strategies, such as the use of tokens or external reinforcement, may not fit within the developmentally appropriate practice framework early childhood teachers use (Stormont, Covington-Smith, & Lewis, 2007).

Research thus far on program-wide PBIS has included the implementation of PBIS in Head Start classrooms, childcare centers, and state-funded preschool classrooms. These efforts have focused on implementing Tier 1 or universal supports for all children (Benedict, Horner, & Squires, 2007; Stormont et al., 2007) and Tier 3 or individualized interventions for particular children who exhibit challenging behavior (Duda, Dunlap, Fox, Lentini, & Clarke, 2004). Very little work has yet been done on adapting secondary or targeted interventions for preschool classrooms.

The most researched targeted intervention that is used in schoolwide PBIS is the Behavior Education Program (BEP; Crone, Horner, & Hawken, 2004). The BEP is a daily check-in and check-out system in which students receive extra attention for positive social behavior throughout their school day. This

extra attention is intended to prevent challenging or disruptive behavior for children who require additional support to be successful in school but who do not require intensive individualized interventions. The BEP's generality makes it continuously available for students who need it and possible for teachers to start a student on the BEP quickly, once he or she is referred for the intervention. In addition to its efficiency, the BEP has a growing research base to support its use as a targeted intervention (e.g., Fairbanks, Sugai, Gardino, & Lathrop, 2007; Filter et al., 2007).

The BEP involves several core components, including (a) check in with an appointed adult at the beginning of the school day; (b) a points sheet (daily progress record) with behavioral expectations and a scoring system; (c) repeated check-ins with teachers throughout the day to receive points and positive feedback; (d) check out with the appointed adult at the end of the day to tally points; (e) reinforcement for goals met in the form of activities, privileges, and/or preferred items; (f) family involvement with points sheets sent home each day to be signed and returned to school the next day with the student; (g) frequent evaluation of BEP data by the PBIS leadership team to review progress toward behavioral goals; and (h) referral of new students to the BEP using data from office discipline referrals (Crone et al., 2004).

There are several aspects of the BEP program that must be adapted for it to be effectively and appropriately used in the preschool classroom (Hawken & Johnston, 2007). First, the numeric scoring system on the daily progress record should be changed to a simplified

graphic system such as the one suggested by Hawken and Johnston using happy, neutral, and sad faces. Second, feedback typically provided to a student on a BEP that occurs at the end of each academic period may be given to young children in between each change in classroom routine (e.g., circle time to snack time) in a preschool classroom. Finally, another suggested change involves eliminating the use of tangible reinforcement in a typical BEP program. Early childhood teachers may prefer to use reinforcement in the form of activities and privileges (e.g., walk around the school, line leader for the bus) instead of tangible items when a child has attained her or his behavioral goals. This change may be a better fit for teachers who use developmentally appropriate practice in their classrooms.

The following case study provides an illustration of how a modified version of the BEP, the Thumbs Up program, can be used as a targeted intervention in a preschool setting. Following this illustration, we describe additional potential modifications to the BEP that may be appropriate for early childhood contexts. Lastly, we discuss potential future directions for research and practice in adapting the BEP for young children.

## Case Study

Gregory is new to the Edgewood Pines Early Childhood Center. The center has four classrooms total: two that are half-day and two that are full-day Head Start programs. Under their preschool director's guidance, the center is in its 3rd year of implementing program-wide PBIS. Edgewood Pines has program-wide rules that guide teacher and child

behavior, which include "listen to others," "be a good friend," and "be a team player." Each classroom has a rules poster that includes text and visual pictures of children acting out the rules. Preschool teachers review the rules with children during circle time with examples and nonexamples, provide opportunities for the children to practice the rules, and reinforce the rules throughout the day when situations arise. All of the preschool teachers also use a teaching matrix to further translate the rules into routine-based behavioral expectations (see *Figure 1*). Other Tier 1 universal supports that Edgewood Pines teachers have implemented include the use of visual schedules, organized transitions, and the use of frequent positive communication with children and their families to develop encouraging and collaborative relationships.

After 2 weeks of observing Gregory in the preschool classroom, his teachers, Mr. Hughes and Ms. Valencia, have noticed and documented that Gregory engages in inappropriate social behaviors, such as yelling at other children, taking their toys, hiding toys and other children's belongings, and crying. He's had an average of 23 instances of misbehavior per day, even with the universal supports in place. Mr. Hughes and Ms. Valencia try to do brief rehearsals of the classroom rules with Gregory following each instance, but this is taking too much of their time away from class instruction. They decide to start Gregory on the Tier 2 targeted intervention, the Thumbs Up program, which is being used with three other children at Edgewood Pines.

The Thumbs Up program involves six key steps. First, Gregory checks in with the center director, Ms. Wickham (or "Ms. W"; Step 1). Ms. W gives Gregory a blank Thumbs Up sheet and reviews the rules with him (see *Figure 2*). She asks Gregory questions to ensure that he knows what is expected of him in each of his classroom routines. Ms. W also

reviews Gregory's goal, which is to get more thumbs up than thumbs down at the end of the day. Ms. W asks Gregory if he has his Thumbs Up sheet from the previous day. If Gregory has this in his backpack, they review it and discuss how he did and what changes he might want to make in his behavior today. Ms. W reminds Gregory that he will be able to choose a special activity if he has a thumbs-up day.

Next, Gregory takes his Thumbs Up sheet to his classroom and gives it to Ms. Valencia (Step 2). Ms. Valencia uses a timer on her watch to remind her to check in with Gregory right before each change in routine for approximately 30 s. When she checks in with Gregory, Ms. Valencia circles either the thumbs-up or thumbs-down picture for the preceding activity and gives Gregory verbal feedback about the specific behaviors he engaged in (Step 3). If Gregory receives a thumbs down, Ms. Valencia also reminds Gregory of the behavioral expectations. At each feedback session, Ms. Valencia also tells or asks Gregory about the classroom routine that is coming next and the expectations for that routine. After the last centers of the day, Ms. Valencia gives Gregory his last thumbs up or thumbs down. Gregory packs up his backpack with his belongings and goes to Ms. W's office. Ms. W reviews Gregory's Thumbs Up sheet with him and has him count all of the thumbs up and thumbs down that are circled (Step 4). She writes the numbers on Gregory's sheet and then talks to him about whether or not he had an overall thumbs-up or thumbs-down day.

If the majority of his day was positive, Gregory picks from a choice board of special activities that he does in the last 10 min of school before his mom or grandmother arrive to pick him up (Step 5). Possible choices on the choice board are a nature walk with Ms. W around the school, getting to help Mr. Gonzalez (his favorite staff member) dry and stack the clean lunch trays, or doing Starfall

on Ms. W's computer. All of the activities on Gregory's choice board are easily available and based on Gregory's preferences and interests. If Gregory does not earn enough thumbs up for his special activity, he spends the last 10 min of school writing in his journal, reading a library book, or sitting and waiting, which are all neutral (neither especially positive or punishing) for Gregory. Gregory's Thumbs Up sheet is sent home with Gregory's mom or grandmother with the reminder for them to review it and return a signed copy with Gregory the next day (Step 6).

After just 1½ weeks of Gregory being on the Thumbs Up program, his preschool teachers have noticed and documented that Gregory is engaging in more rule-following behaviors. His disruptive or inappropriate behaviors have decreased to just one to two instances of misbehavior per day and no instances in the past 3 days. Gregory is excited each day to check in with Ms. W at the beginning and end of the school day and enjoys earning his special activities for having thumbs-up days. Gregory's family is appreciative of the extra positive input that they are now receiving. The sheet also has been influential for family members who have started reminding and reinforcing Gregory for listening to others and being a team player at home. The use of this targeted intervention appears to have increased specific social behaviors for Gregory with limited teacher time and attention. Three months later, Gregory is maintaining good classroom behavior and interacting more positively with his peers. Ms. W has faded Gregory's reinforcement to a special activity just on Fridays when he has a thumbs-up week. Gregory's teachers still enjoy using the targeted intervention and feel like they prevented a situation in which Gregory's problem behaviors may have escalated, warranting a Tier 3 intensive and individualized intervention.

Figure 1 TEACHING MATRIX FOR EDGEWOOD PINES PROGRAM-WIDE RULES

	<b>Arrival/Centers</b> 	<b>Circle Time</b> 	<b>Snack</b> 	<b>Outside Play</b> 	<b>Centers/Clean Up</b> 
Listen to others 	Follow directions	Listen when others are talking Raise my hand	Follow directions	Follow directions	Follow directions
Be a good friend 	Join play nicely Share toys	Sit on my mat Keep my hands and feet to myself	Pass food and drinks to my friends	Join play nicely Take turns	Join play nicely Share toys
Be a team player 	Put my things in my cubby Clean up my toys	Participate Put my mat away	Use my manners	Treat equipment nicely Put balls and bikes away	Clean up my toys Pack up my backpack

Figure 2 THUMBS UP SHEET FOR GREGORY

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

	Arrival/Centers	Circle Time	Snack	Outside Play	Centers/Clean Up
<b>MY RULES</b>					
Listen to others 	 	 	 	 	 
Be a good friend 	 	 	 	 	 
Be a team player 	 	 	 	 	 

How many  ? \_\_\_\_\_ How many  ? \_\_\_\_\_ Was it overall a  OR  day?

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Other Preschool BEP Applications

There are alternative ways that the BEP may be modified and used as a targeted intervention in early childhood settings. For example, the preschool program may elect to have teachers provide feedback and attention at regularly timed intervals (e.g., every hour) rather than between changes in classroom routines. This alternative may be easier to implement, as changes in classroom routines in early childhood settings can require significant teacher attention to direct all of the children through the transition. Providing attention at an alternative, but regular time, such as at the top of the hour when signaled by a watch or timer, may be more manageable for preschool teachers.

Another potential adaptation to the BEP program for young children may include the use of graphic images for the child to color in for each interval of positive behavior, thereby eliminating the use of negative graphic images (e.g., sad face, thumbs down) on the BEP daily progress record. One possibility for such an approach is a Super Star daily progress record, in which the child has a targeted number of stars that he or she is attempting to earn for the day. When the teacher checks in with the child at the regularly scheduled feedback session, the child would color in the star if she or he engaged in positive behavior. A star would not be colored in if any inappropriate behavior was exhibited in that time period. This simplified version in which only images that are colored in are counted (as opposed to different faces or different thumbs) may be easier for some young children to understand and follow.

Finally, as noted in the case study at Edgewood Pines, most early childhood programs make decisions regarding PBIS implementation at the classroom level (i.e., among the classroom teachers), with guidance and approval from the preschool director. For targeted interventions to

be implemented effectively and efficiently program-wide, a PBIS leadership team should be established that oversees the use of all levels (universal, targeted, and individualized) of PBIS interventions in the center. This leadership team would develop the particular strategies of the BEP to be used in the preschool program, train teachers on its use, develop data-based decision-making rules for moving children on and off the BEP program, and monitor and evaluate behavioral data for children on the BEP program.

### Discussion

The BEP is an efficient targeted intervention that may be adapted and used with young children who would benefit from extra teacher attention and feedback on their social behaviors. The case study presented highlights how specific features of the BEP may be adapted for a preschool-aged child and the specific organizational structure of a preschool setting. With creative problem solving and attention to developmentally appropriate practice, the BEP is an appropriate Tier 2 intervention that may be used within an early childhood program's PBIS efforts.

Regarding future research into the modified BEP, the current paucity of literature on targeted interventions for young children warrants beginning investigations with a single case design (e.g., multiple baseline design across children or centers). Whether or not an effective, modified version of the BEP can be applied and used in a preschool program is the first research question to evaluate. It may then be appropriate to ask whether a modified BEP program, such as the Thumbs Up program, may be appropriate for young children in kindergarten or first grade. Further research questions and areas for practical applications of the BEP in preschool include whether certain adaptations (e.g., use of two versus three choices for feedback) are more effective than others, methods

to assess young children's understanding of the BEP, and guidelines (e.g., number of behavior incidents) for making data-based decisions about when young children may benefit from the BEP. Research is clearly needed in this area of program-wide PBIS as the field moves forward with implementation of PBIS in increasing numbers of early childhood settings.

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