

## POSITIVE BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS

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21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (CCLCs) provide interventions and supports that aim to increase the academic and social successes of children and youth who are underperforming or economically disadvantaged. The effectiveness of these interventions and supports is highly dependent on the ability of the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC staff to manage students' behavior—learning motivation, attention and task persistence, problems with conduct, etc. However, children's behavior in the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC setting may be more taxing than in the regular classroom setting for a number of reasons:

- Children may experience fatigue after limiting their body movement for many hours during the regular school day, or may perceive the after-school setting as being a “play” environment as opposed to an academic environment, which both impact a child's ability to focus attention and follow directions.
- Children are typically expected to transition from a same-age environment to a multi-age environment which can often be difficult for younger students who may not be developmentally equipped to interact with older students.
- Children may experience an inconsistency in the rules and consequences that often occurs as a result of the disconnect between school and after-school discipline structures and the fact that 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC staff may not have the same “tools” at their disposal (e.g., sending a student to the principal) as do teachers during the regular school day.

Given the unique set of behavior management challenges that face 21<sup>st</sup> CCLCs, it is important that staff are supported in their efforts to minimize behaviors that detract from program activities and maximize behaviors that increase the amount of time spent on-task in 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC interventions.

### WHAT DOES RESEARCH TELL US ABOUT POSITIVE BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT?

Why do children misbehave? This question can be answered in two different ways: (1) children behave if they *want* to, and (2) children behave if they *can*. The first response reflects a “coercion” perspective, wherein adults “manage” children, and children are expected to follow adult instructions without question because the adult is in control. From this perspective, if the child does not behave, then the adult (parent/guardian, teacher, caregiver, etc.) is considered to have a deficit in his/her behavior management skills.

The second response, more in line with today's thinking, reflects a “transactional” viewpoint, wherein the *interaction* of the child and adult influences positive or negative behavior patterns. In other words, the characteristics of the child influence the adult's response to the child's misbehavior, and the adult's response influences the child's further actions. From this perspective, if the child experiences behavior difficulties, then both the adult and the child must change their patterns of interaction. The transactional perspective has led to an emphasis on positive adult-child interactions and positive behavior management.

#### Suggestions for Managing Certain Problem Behaviors

- *Hyperactivity*: Allow plenty of time for bodily movement. Assign a non-punitive time out to a child that needs a break (e.g., send on an errand).
- *Attention Problems*: Use a timer when there is a need to be focused. Set the timer for five minutes and allow a break or a favored activity when the timer goes off. Gradually increase the number of minutes on the timer.
- *Non-Compliance*: Avoid power struggles. Allow choices and be sympathetic.
- *Aggression*: Have a safe room or location and a readily available “cool off” pass. Teach children to identify their physical feelings of getting angry so that they can use the pass before lashing out. You may also need to teach deep breathing while counting or other strategies for calming down.

The OSU College of Social Work partners with the Ohio Department of Education to provide technical assistance and support to 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grantees in Ohio. For more information, please contact Dawn Anderson-Butcher; [anderson-butcher.1@osu.edu](mailto:anderson-butcher.1@osu.edu) and/or Diane Schneider-Farmer; [diane.schneider-farmer@ode.state.oh.us](mailto:diane.schneider-farmer@ode.state.oh.us).

## POSITIVE BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

**Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS).** Schools are moving beyond the “punishment” of children with problem behaviors to the active building of prosocial behaviors and supportive environments that *prevent* misbehavior. PBIS is a research based approach that focuses on teaching children positive behaviors in the same way that academics are taught. For example, a child who continues to hit others when angry must be taught skills for regulating emotions and expressing anger appropriately. Key outcomes associated with PBIS are reduction in rates of suspensions, decrease in expulsions, decrease in office referrals and time outs, increase of time in academic settings or least-restrictive settings, and increase in academic achievement, even for those students diagnosed with an emotional disturbance (Colvin, Kameenui, & Sugai, 1993; Colvin, Sugai, Good, & Lee, 1997; Lewis, Colvin, & Sugai, 2000; Nelson, 1996; Todd, Haugen, Anderson, & Spriggs, 2002). Three potential strategies around positive behavior management include collaborative problem-solving, positive relationships, and choice theory.

**Collaborative Problem-Solving.** This approach, known as Collaborative Problem Solving, is based on the premise that many children have not yet developed the necessary cognitive skills (e.g., frustration tolerance, flexibility, planning and organization, and problem solving) to be able to act appropriately. Adults, therefore, need to perform these cognitive tasks *for* children until children learn these thinking skills through repeated modeling and practice.

There are three steps involved in collaborative problem solving:

- 1) Empathy and reassurance
- 2) Problem definition
- 3) Invitation

When a child raises a concern, or if a child is having difficulty in a situation, the adult provides empathy. (For example, “I notice that you don’t seem to enjoy our reading time. What’s up?”) The child’s concern is repeated by the adult in the child’s own words (problem definition), and the adult provides further empathy and reassurance and avoids making any judgmental remarks. At this time, the adult states her own concern. In other words, a problem does not exist until both the adult and child concerns have been voiced. Finally, the adult invites the child to work together to solve the problem. Solutions should be feasible and mutually satisfying.

**Positive Relationships.** Positive adult-child relationships are one of the most frequently reported protective factors in overcoming “risk,” and children who have warm, positive relationships with adults in school demonstrate better social adjustment than those who lack a positive adult connection. Within the adult-child relationship children can learn appropriate ways to express and understand feelings, cope with stressors, and change negative thinking patterns.

**Key Outcomes:**

- Increase likelihood of eliciting on-task behaviors
- Decrease likelihood to have conflicts with students or to be physically attacked

(Center & Callaway, 1999; Espin & Yell, 1994)

**Choice Theory.** Often we brand children with chronic behavior problems in a way that is not at all positive: “destructive,” “delinquent,” “deviant,” and “difficult,” are labels that place blame on children and actually allow them to avoid taking responsibility for their behaviors (Gallagher, 1997). It is important to remember that all behaviors—even those that are unacceptable—serve some purpose for the child, and in some way are fulfilling the child’s need. Forcing children to comply with an “adult version of the world” will lead to resistance (Maag, 2000), but offering choices to children allows them to maintain control and requires they take responsibility for their actions. Choice Theory (Glasser, 1992) emphasizes that children’s behavior is more positive when adults in schools create environments in which students have the opportunity to fulfill their needs by making appropriate choices. Negative requests of children’s behavior (e.g., “Shhhhhh!”), questioning (“Is that what you are supposed to be doing?”), and preaching tend, on the other hand, to escalate negative behaviors. The premise is simple: we always choose to satisfy our needs. Therefore, if a student finds learning and participating satisfying, they will be motivated and engaged in the activities that are offered.

**Key Outcomes:**

- Increase academic gains
- Increase in on-task behavior
- Reduce aggressive behavior

(Maag, 2000; Gallagher, 1997; Glasser, 1992)

## WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Managing problem behavior in any setting is most effective when a positive approach, as opposed to a punitive approach, is emphasized. It is critical that adults keep in mind that children who exhibit chronic behavior problems are children who simply lack the requisite skills that are needed for behavioral and emotional self-regulation, and are exhibiting unwanted behaviors in order to meet a need. In the same way that we no longer send children to the corner to sit when they fail to perform adequately on academic tasks, we should no longer exclude children from the learning setting who fail to live up to our behavioral expectations. We model important behaviors, teach new skills and ways of thinking, and provide choices in order to help students meet behavioral demands.