



THE PARAPROFESSIONAL CONNECTION®

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SUCCESS MOMENTUM

Students who don't have regular opportunities for success gradually lose confidence in themselves and eventually give up or begin acting out. One way to develop a positive cycle is to have students start within contexts and routines that they are currently successful and easy for a student. Once the student is engaged and confident in an activity, then you can introduce a new or difficult task. This is called using behavioral or success momentum. You may have to use previously mastered skills or tasks as a starting point. It is easier to continue working when you are already started and are feeling good about your abilities. It is difficult to get started when you see a new or challenging task. Think about yourself with exercising or chores. It can be hard to get started but once you are on the walk or cleaning the house, you can keep going for longer than you may have originally planned. Students who struggle in a particular area, whether academically, behaviorally or socially, need more opportunities to be successful, not less. You can play a key role by providing more opportunities for success to raise student confidence and progress.

"Success is like a snowball...you have to get it going and the more you roll in the right direction the greater it gets." Steve Ferrant

Discussion Topics

- Think about the various students that you work with. What skills are easy for them? What skills are more challenging?
- Share with your team what you notice and plan how you can use the easy to do activities to help build that success momentum.

WHAT IS A BIP? BSP?

Yes, there are more acronyms and plans that support students. Another plan that may be important for you to be aware of and understand is the Behavior Intervention Plan or BIP. The plan may also be called a Behavior Support Plan or BSP. BIP's can be created for students with IEP's or for general education students that have behavior needs. Not all students with an IEP will have a behavior plan as it is based on need, but when a student has one it is a key piece of information for you to have to support a student. If you work with students with challenging behaviors, ask the teacher if they have a BIP and if you can see it, so you can support the plan. If you have seen the BIP, but do not understand parts of it, ask questions so you can support the plan.

The goal of a BIP is to provide a consistent and proactive approach to help students who have behavior challenges that are impacting their learning and access to the school activities. The focus is on teaching alternative behaviors to meet the child's needs and serve the same function as the behavior of concern. The BIP should include the following:

What is happening with a clear definition of the problem target behavior of concern. The student may have many challenging behaviors, but typically you prioritize the plan to address the most concerning ones first. For example, physical harm may take priority over work completion.

Why it is happening based on information and data that has been gathered to make an educated guess about the function or reason for the behavior. Common functions of behavior are gain or avoid attention, sensory, escape or tangibles (objects/things).

What can be done to decrease the likelihood of behavior. This would include strategies to set the student up for success. They are often called setting event or antecedent strategies. This could be providing specific seating, accommodations to the environment, having a visual schedule or consistent routine. This is definitely an area that a paraprofessional would provide support to the student and should know the plan.

What the student needs to learn or alternative/replacement behaviors are what we should be teaching to the student. Do they need to learn to take a break or ask for help? Do they need to learn more functional communication skills? This is another area that you should support based on guidance from the teacher. Students should receive reinforcement for using the new, more acceptable behaviors and you may be providing the reinforcement.

How to respond to the behaviors which may be part of a crisis plan. If the behavior of the student has the possibility of causing harm, then there should be a crisis plan regarding how to keep the student, yourself and others safe.

Is it working should be based on data collection and related to a reasonable goal for the student to reach. You may be asked to collect the behavior data.

MORE OPPORTUNITIES

Language development is connected to lots of repetition, exposure to vocabulary and sentence structure related to familiar items, routines and activities. Creating communication opportunities can be critical in child development. Routines are great to teach this due to the predictable sequences with predictable vocabulary that occur frequently. They create structures that support children with building language and vocabulary which can create opportunities for learning communication skills.

If you think about the simple routines throughout the school day, you can find many opportunities to increase spoken language, use of their AAC communication device or independence with routines. Look at the routines of the school day to practice a variety of communication functions. The top reasons for early communication are to make a choice, make a request, refuse, respond to a question, comment, gain attention, greetings and share feelings.

Every day begins with arrival which includes greetings and an opportunity to learn names. There may be a feelings check-in or a chance to share or comment about recent personal events. If possible, the AAC device, low-tech communication system or switches should be personalized to include preferred people, items and activities that the student likes to increase participation.

Every day likely has at least one mealtime whether breakfast, snack or lunch. This is another routine that has opportunities to make choices, make requests, refuse, comment or ask for help. Think about a child wanting a snack when they are just learning to talk. The child may whine or point at the refrigerator or the pantry. Then, an adult might say, "Are you hungry?" or "Do you want a drink?". The answer may be an increase in the request, maybe taking you to the pantry and trying to open it or an attempt to say "drink". The adult may respond with showing the child a choice of two items like a cup with milk or a box of crackers. The child might reach for the item that they want. Then the adult says, "You want the milk. Say 'I want milk'." This same routine can happen for a child that is learning to use an AAC device to communicate with the addition of modeling on their device. Just like you model verbally by saying, "I want milk." You can point to the icons on their device to show them just the vocabulary word, "milk" or say the whole sentence.

Completing academic tasks is another common routine. It is easy to create communication opportunities to make choices like "what color do you want?" or "who do you want to sit by?". You can also sabotage by not having the materials available that are needed to complete the task like they need to cut something out, but don't have scissors. This creates an opportunity to request the item.

Providing more opportunities to communicate does not take a lot of planning or materials. It does take awareness and creativity. Just think about the routines and language that you use frequently and use them to create opportunities for communication.

DO THIS, NOT THAT

Did you try some of the questions and phrases from last month's issue to help de-escalate students? There are also a variety of environmental and physical responses that you can use to defuse an anxious or challenging situation.

"Students are not giving us a hard time, they are having a hard time." -Jen Alexander

The first key is to remain calm even if you are not. Slow yourself down to avoid getting worked up. Think about the skills you have to respond and make a plan. Lower your voice and keep a neutral expression. There are times when it a very quick response is necessary due to safety, but often you have a little time to thoughtfully respond.

Give Space: When an escalated or anxious student is asking for a break with their words or their actions such as sitting on the floor, under a table or leaving the room then providing space or a break can be calming. When you give the person space and respect personal boundaries, you protect yourself by remaining out of their reach. You give yourself time and space to move away if the individual becomes physical. Another way to give space is to ask the person to take a walk with you to a different location or come get a drink of water. This gives the person an "out" and removes the audience which helps keeps peers safe and keep learning. It also avoids a potentially embarrassing situation for the student. Discretely calling for another adult in case you need support helps provide space if we can monitor from a distance.

Be Positive: Change the subject to a positive one. Remind the student of a previous success especially the times they have used any of the coping strategies you have been teaching to help them with their behavior. These strategies could be using a break space, using sensory tools or calming breathing techniques. Encourage the person that they can make a positive choice. Distract with a positive photo, person, song or story that they like. If the student is showing signs of calming or responding to your directions, then praise the small steps and coach then with positive remarks. For example, "thank you for taking a walk with me" or "I like how you are taking deep breaths".

Do An Activity: Offer a calming or sensory tool. It could be a fidget or item to hold or squeeze like a stress ball. It could be something repetitive like counting aloud, jumping on a mini-tramp, coloring, drawing or making a puzzle. It should not be a favorite or highly preferred activity for that student. Do not take items or personal property away from the student. You can ask for the item or ask them to put it in a "safe" place, but if you suddenly take it away it may make the situation worse.

A good way to remember these tips is to go to the **SPA**. A visit to the spa is relaxing and provides a quiet **space**, is **positive** and has a calming **activity**.

