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Function-Based Support

Mining the Data for Gold

In this chapter, we will learn the following:

- How function-based support is part of positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS)
- How function-based support is different from status quo
- How to determine when you need to do a full functional behavior assessment (FBA) and when you just need to use research-based interventions

In schoolwide PBIS, there are three levels of support provided to students within a school. At the first level, universal or primary supports are offered to all students. In many cases, approximately 80% of the students will need the universal supports in the school and classroom and that will be enough to sustain appropriate behavior. These students will visit the office zero to one time the entire year. In the next level of support, about 10% to 15% of the students will need secondary or targeted group interventions as well as the universal or primary interventions. These students will visit the office two to five times the entire year and may need frequent booster shots to maintain behavior at this level. Approximately 5% of the student population will require tertiary or intensive interventions as well as the universal or primary interventions and possibly some secondary or targeted group interventions. These students will visit the

office six or more times during a school year. This book is going to focus on the students who require this tertiary or intensive support.

It is important to note that students will move through these different levels of support depending on circumstances. For instance, a student may begin the year requiring only primary or secondary supports, and when situations at home change, the student will require the additional tertiary-level supports for a short time. Each student will be different, and the design of each level of intervention will be unique to that student based on the data presented.

SCREENING STUDENTS

So how do we go about deciding which services a student requires? There are two major methods for determining the level of service needed for each individual student. Many of the schools currently implementing schoolwide PBIS use a program called the School-Wide Information System (SWIS; www.swis.org). This website gives the school instantaneous access to data that have been entered into a web-based program. The team can enter this program and obtain graphs for many scenarios, such as the following:

- Average office discipline referrals per day/per month
- Problem behavior
- Location
- Time of day
- Referrals by student

Teachers can request to have their class data run and graphed for any length of time, such as previous month, year to date, or by the week. Using these data, teachers can view the levels of discipline referrals (0–1, 2–5, or 6 or more) for their students.

This information is quite useful to the school as a whole, but the interesting information gleaned for classroom teachers is the ability to look at things such as the following:

- Patterns of behavior for individual students
 - Time of day
 - Possible motivation
 - Location where the student typically engages in inappropriate behavior
- Patterns for types of incidents
 - Are other students involved in the referral with them?
 - Are there particular adults that seem to be the focus of the student's behavior?
 - Are there particular consequence patterns to the behavior?

Universal screening is another useful tool for determining which students require targeted or secondary intervention and which students require intensive or tertiary intervention. Universal screening can be completed using formal or informal screening tools. Using a modified version of the screening tool developed by Texas A & M professors (Burke et al., in press), we take the behavioral expectations of the school and list them in a row across the top of a table, and then list the class roster down the first column. Teachers wishing to do a universal screening of their class would then rank the students on the student’s ability to perform the behavioral expectations using a Likert scale score of 1 = never and 5 = always. Figure 2.1 shows an example of what this type of scale might look like.

Figure 2.1 Universal Screening

Respect	Others	Community	Knowledge	Self	Total
Anna	5	4	5	5	19
Bob	4	3	3	5	15
Eve	4	5	5	4	18
Gig	4	4	3	4	15
Hannah	2	1	1	2	6
Izzi	3	4	2	3	12
Lil	5	5	5	5	20
Mim	1	1	1	1	4
Noon	5	4	5	5	19
Pip	4	3	2	3	12
Sis	5	4	5	5	19
Tot	4	4	5	5	18
Viv	4	4	4	4	16

The next step is to put this chart into ascending order according to the total points. This will show who needs tertiary and who needs secondary supports added to their universal supports. Figure 2.2 shows the scale after reordering.

Those students with a total between 16 and 20 scored 80% or higher on behavioral expectations, so they would most likely only require the universal supports. Students totaling between 12 and 15 points are scoring 60% or

Figure 2.2 Universal Screening Sorted by Support Levels

Respect	Others	Community	Knowledge	Self	Total
Mim	1	1	1	1	4
Hannah	2	1	1	2	6
Izzi	3	4	2	3	12
Pip	4	3	2	3	12
Bob	4	3	3	5	15
Gig	4	4	3	4	15
Viv	4	4	4	4	16
Eve	4	5	5	4	18
Tot	4	4	5	5	18
Anna	5	4	5	5	19
Noon	5	4	5	5	19
Sis	5	4	5	5	19
Lil	5	5	5	5	20

higher on behavioral expectations, so they would most likely require the targeted group supports in addition to the universal supports. Those students scoring fewer than 12 points are below 60% on behavioral expectations, and therefore, they may actually require a full FBA or intensive supports. This book will focus on those students who require the intensive supports.

A more formal universal screening tool is the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD) by Walker and Severson (1992). The SSBD has 32 critical elements on which all students in the class are scored using yes/no questions. For example, "Does the student display aggression toward objects or peers?" If the student received five or more points, out of the 32 possible, the student is immediately referred for a FBA. If the student scored one through four points on the critical elements portion of the test, the student needs further screening for adaptive behaviors. If the student's adaptive behavior score is 30 or less, the team can stop assessing and apply secondary or targeted group interventions. If the student's adaptive behavior score is more than 30, then the teacher answers a second set of questions about maladaptive behavior. In this subset, there are 11 maladaptive questions using a one to five Likert scale. If the student scores 34 or less, then the teacher can apply secondary or targeted group interventions along with the universal supports. If the student scores 35 or more, then the student needs to have a full FBA.

Some other formal screening tools that are available include the following:

- Achenbach's Manual for Child Behavior Checklist Behavior Screener (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991)
- Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BASC-2 BESS, Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2007)
- Social Skills Rating System (SSRS, Gresham & Elliott, 1990)
- Student Risk Screening Scale (SRSS; Drummond, 1993)

These screening tools will assist the classroom teacher in determining which students might require additional supports in the form of intensive interventions.

GATHERING DATA

When teachers use data to make decisions, the decisions are evidence based. Decisions should be based on data and not a "gut" feeling about behavior. The universal screening tools help prevent too many referrals to the behavior support team (BST). When too many students are referred to the behavior support team, it bogs down the system and causes a traffic jam in available assistance to those students who really need intensive interventions. Once a classroom teacher has determined a student needs to have a full FBA and requires intensive services, then the teacher must prepare for a presentation to the BST.

As we learned in Chapter 1, tiny events can set a behavior in motion. Classroom teachers need to collect some preliminary data to look for those tiny events called antecedents. If you do the FBA yourself, or if you take your student to a formal BST in the school, you will want to be able to delve into useful data. As behavior specialists, we have had many people give data on a student that stated, "The student hit 137 times." Knowing that a student hit 137 times is not very useful for determining the function of the behavior or the intervention that will successfully dissipate the manifestation of that behavior. A lucrative data sample will give the teacher or BST ample data to mine for the gold that is hidden within it.

Unfortunately, no tried and true amount of data will tell the team or teacher the function of the behavior. Sometimes, a simple 30-minute data sample paired with interviews will be enough information. Other times, anecdotal notes paired with antecedent behavior and consequence data will do the trick. This book is intended to help the classroom teacher determine which data piece will be most beneficial in a tertiary PBIS. If the classroom teacher is able to collect the data, the data will be relevant to what is really going on in the classroom.

It is important to remember that in schoolwide PBIS, the level of support given to these students whose behaviors impede their learning would

include the universal supports available to all students, possibly the targeted interventions available to students needing targeted group interventions, and, from time to time, the intensive supports suggested in this book. Behavior can increase if the wrong interventions are employed; therefore, this book will attempt to help classroom teachers determine when and what data they should collect to make the best decisions for their students.

Once it is determined that a student requires an intensive intervention the teacher will need to determine the following:

1. What behavior needs to be targeted for change?
 - a. This needs to be defined in measurable terms.
 - b. This needs to be defined in observable terms.
2. What data will be collected?
3. Who will collect the data?
4. How long will the data be collected?
5. Will the teacher require someone to help him or her analyze the data?
6. Will the teacher require the assistance of someone to help develop an intervention based on the function of the behavior?
7. What interventions will be employed?
8. Who will be involved in carrying out the interventions?
9. How long will the intervention be carried out?
10. Will intervention data be collected and by whom?
11. How will the intervention be faded?
12. Will follow-up data be recorded?
13. What will determine success?

All of these questions are answered in this book and are a large part of data-based decision making, which is an integral part of PBIS.

PBIS

If a school is participating in schoolwide PBIS training, the first year they formed a universal support team. This team consisted of a representative staff member who attended two or more days of initial training and helped develop the core concepts of PBIS within the school setting. Typically, the

schools develop three to five behavioral expectations that are positively stated and easy to remember. The team then begins building a matrix that is later developed by the entire staff, labeling what each of the behavioral expectations looks like, sounds like, and feels like in all nonclassroom settings. The behavioral expectations are then taught and imprinted by modeling, practicing, and praising (TIPP). Students are later “caught” exhibiting the behavioral expectations and given slips of paper labeling their appropriate behavior. Shores, Gunter, and Jack (1993) state that behavior can be improved by 80% just by pointing out what one person is doing correctly. If these principles are employed consistently by at least 80% of the staff, then 80% of the students will only require universal-level supports. If these principles were not taught, imprinted, practiced, and praised, then there would be more students requiring tertiary-level supports. This is why the first year, at least, is devoted to developing capacity and fidelity to implement the universal rigor of PBIS.

The second phase of PBIS focuses on targeted groups of individuals who require booster shots of support. A team of PBIS representative staff attends one day or more of training in secondary level or targeted group interventions. These interventions will be employed for the 20% of the students who receive more than two office discipline referrals during the year. These interventions could include check-in/check-out or the behavior education plan (BEP). The third phase of PBIS, which this book focuses on, is for the approximate 5% of the student population who do not respond to the interventions employed at the universal level or the interventions at the targeted group level. A third group of representative staff from the school attend one day of training or more to learn how to assist the staff in simplified tertiary interventions within the classroom. These interventions will include data collection and a focus on data-based decision making through direct observation. Research indicates the 5% of the student population requiring tertiary interventions would be much higher if the first two levels of intervention were not already in place.

PBIS is very much a research-based, schoolwide system change. All decisions are guided by what the data support. PBIS is not a canned program where all schools implement the same interventions on the same types of students. There are more than 10,000 schools implementing this system, and absolutely no two schools are implementing it exactly the same way; however, all schools implementing with fidelity to the system change process are experiencing similar results. Most schools see a 20% to 80% decrease in office discipline referrals. Many see as high as 60% to 80% within the first three years.

Much like sifting through rocks to find the gold, sifting through the data allows the educators to determine what is of high value to changing behavior and what has no merit attached to it. Mark Twain tells us, “Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results, is

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the definition of insanity.” If a child has been in time-out or lost recess 137 times in one year, then what makes us think the 138th time will be the time the child makes the connection and stops the behavior? If we keep doing what we’ve always done, we will always get what we always got. If we mine the data for the gold that is hidden, we will be able to develop proactive plans that can be carried out with fidelity, and we will definitely be able to illustrate progress by showing a decrease from our baseline disciplinary referral score.