

## Partnering with Families to Support Collaborative Behavior Planning

The temperature has dropped overnight and it will take a few extra minutes to get the walk cleared and the car defrosted. As you bundle the toddler in her snowsuit, your third grader reminds you it is a field trip day and he needs a sack lunch. Your middle school daughter needs a check for picture day and is having a meltdown because her hair didn't work. And now you can't find the car keys! Welcome to parenthood. You have an early morning behavior plan meeting at school and you arrive slightly flustered and several minutes late. As you begin to discuss setting events and predictors which impact the student's organization and success in school, you have an AH-Ha moment – you too may need a predictable, proactive routine to get a positive start on your day! And for the plan you are developing to be most effective, you need to work collaboratively with the family to maximize success.

In the last issue of *Connections*, I outlined the Competing Pathway Behavior Planning Process. The 8 steps identify the setting events, predictors and reinforcing consequences which maintain problem behavior. This allows us to identify proactive interventions to minimize the challenging behavior while identifying teaching strategies to target alternative replacement behaviors.

The Colorado School-wide Positive Behavior Support Initiative provides training to PBS and BEST teams across the state to understand and implement this process to increase the social and academic competence of Colorado students. One of the critical components of Colorado School-wide PBS is collaboration with families in a 3 tiered intervention model. Colorado has received national attention for our "Behavior Change is a Family Affair" training modules that are available to families and staff at established PBS schools. Originally Shirley Swope from PEAK Parent Center and I developed the training module, but now Jessica Krueger, our PBS Coach Mentor and experienced Colorado Coaches are now also facilitating these 4 hour workshops where families and staff "map out" a behavior change plan and collaborate to promote positive behavior and consistency in home and school environments.

We know that behavior does not occur in isolation but is an interaction of the adult, the student and factors from the environment. Each student also has pre-existing tendencies or conditioned responses that increase the likelihood that challenging behavior will interfere with academic success. Actively involving families in the behavior planning process will provide the team with additional information and insights and will result in a more effective plan. While many families are included in the Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) process, if a parent understands the competing pathway process, they can help identify predictors or triggers that may "set up" the student for a difficult day. On the other hand, if parents understand the connection of events and factors which affect their child, they can work with the school to implement routines and simple strategies which will minimize the student's issues and behaviors.

Let's look at Rose as an example. Rose is a seventh grade student who has been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. She is most anxious at school on days when there is an unannounced quiz or there is a substitute in one or more classes. We also know that she takes notes slowly and gets upsets when the teacher verbally outlines the content of the next exam. Within the school setting, we can certainly work with teachers to have a

“check in” with the counselor to go over the daily schedule if there is a substitute and to let her know there will be a ten point quiz in Algebra. The Language Arts teacher has found that providing a note-taking outline has actually been very effective for ALL students for test preparation. And the social worker has been great working with Rose to develop self-advocacy skills in asking for help and letting staff know when she is anxious. She has even made several friends in the small weekly group that are now calling her at home. Sounds like a great plan! Mom was very pleased when the staff explained it and took a copy home.

The school staff are concerned though because Rose seems more anxious the last couple of weeks. She is not doing as well academically and has asked to go to the clinic multiple times. Rose asked to be taken out of the group and has not returned phone calls from her friend.

Mom has called and asked to talk to the counselor because she has seen a change in behavior at home. Rose does not want to go to school and is getting into arguments with mom about homework. The talk with mom sheds some light on the recent issues. Rose is currently taking a class at the Red Cross to become certified for babysitting. The class is lecture based and Rose has to take notes throughout the hour. Mom was unaware that this was an issue and Rose did poorly on a quiz. After talking to the counselor, mom understands that Rose needs to talk to the teacher about notes and quizzes so she can advocate for herself. Another issue that came up is that one of the girls has been calling and asking Rose to go away with her family for the weekend. Rose wants to go but is very anxious so she is avoiding phone calls and asked to quit the group where she has contact with her new friend. Mom has gained a better understanding of Rose’s reaction to new situations and is better prepared to support her at home and in the community. She will use the strategies that Rose has developed at school to assist her in the Red Cross class. Mom will talk to Rose about inviting her friend and her mom over to get to know them and talk about the weekend trip. Mom will also go over Rose’s planner with her to check test and assignment dates so they can post them on a large home calendar. This will help Rose plan her studying and anticipate tests proactively.

As a result, Rose is less anxious, more positive about going to school and wants to stay in the group. It is a win-win for all: family, school and student. And mom now understand the triggers that “set up” Rose’s anxiety.

Involving parents in the behavior change process is not only best practice; it is addressed in both No Child Left Behind and IDEA. NCLB (<http://www.ed.gov/nlb/>) requires parents to become more involved in their child’s education and requires schools to provide information to help parents make informed educational choices for their child. IDEA 2004 is designed to enhance parent involvement and outlines positive behavior supports to assist students. There has been much research on the relationship between parent involvement and academic achievement. “Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect their children. Partnerships work best when there is a mutual respect and each partner can participate in the decision making process. When schools view parents as partners and engage them in the decision making process, they realize higher levels of academic achievement” (DuFour and Eaker, 1996).

As part of our “Behavior Change is a Family Affair”, parents reframe challenging behaviors into positively stated replacement behaviors. They then map out a “mini” competing pathway and identify ways to positively acknowledge steps toward improved

behavior as it can be a long process. They also identify ways to align their routines and expectations with the schools so that they share common language and expectations.

For staff we have identified 10 tips for engaging families in the behavior planning process:

1. Create opportunities to collaborate and partner with families. This can be done individually or in small groups.
2. Remember we are all in this together. Remember to treat all members of the planning group as equal members on the team.
3. Set up 2 way communication with the family. Remember each family is different. Email is best for some while back and forth books or phone calls work with others. Try to find a time that works for both of you.
4. Approach behavior planning as a “needs based” model. Help parents understand that behavior is a way of getting needs met and our job is to find a more appropriate way for the student to get needs met. Parents need to understand the process and the concept of behavior change to collaborate with schools.
5. Understand and respect cultural differences. This is critical for successful partnerships.
6. Provide specific education programs to increase parents’ understanding of positive behavior support strategies. (Contact Kiki Mc Gough at [mcgough\\_k@cde.state.co.us](mailto:mcgough_k@cde.state.co.us) for information on upcoming PBS parent trainings.)
7. Encourage creative thinking and risk taking. Some of the best plans don’t fit inside a box.
8. Help parents understand what needs their child’s behavior is addressing. What does “he needs attention” really mean?
9. Help parents understand how to reframe challenging behavior as a positively stated alternative. “I wish she would stop yelling at me!” to “I wish she could let me know she is angry and needs some time to calm down before we talk.”
10. Provide tools, contact examples, checklists and reinforcement ideas for parents to use at home.

And remember, as parents and as professionals, we all have rough days!

Please visit the Colorado PBS website at [www.cde.state.co.us](http://www.cde.state.co.us) or the Center for Positive Behavior Supports and Interventions at [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org) for more information on PBS and collaboration with families.

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