

EVER GREATER NUMBERS of young children are experiencing problems from the first moment of their contact with the schooling process—even toddlers in pre-K settings. Positive behavior support (PBS) offers great hope for fostering the school success of all students, especially those who are challenged by the normal demands of the schooling process.

According to a recently published study by Yale University, preschoolers are four to five times more likely to be suspended and expelled than are older students.¹ Also, we are seeing more young children placed on medication designed to control their behavior. Experts differ on the reasons for these disturbing



One of its greatest strengths is that PBS teaches clear behavioral expectations for student behavior in every school setting—the classroom, cafeteria, hallways, bus stop, playground and so on.

developments. However, it seems clear that many school settings are not able to accommodate the range of behavioral diversity that children and youth are now bringing to their schooling experience.

The key ingredients of school success have not really changed much over the years. Teachers and schools are expected to socialize children and youth to the reasonable demands of schooling so the teaching-learning process can occur and students can develop positive relationships and learn to control and regulate their behavior.

There are two very important social-behavioral adjustments that all students are expected to make in school—teacher related and peer related. Failure in either of these adjustments impairs a student's school success; failure in both can ultimately depress achievement, contribute to school dropout and lead to other destructive outcomes such as delinquency.

A successful teacher-related adjustment requires that the student do certain things and avoid doing other things. For example, teachers want students to comply with directives, cooperate with others, respond to corrections, focus on assigned tasks, listen carefully to the teacher and so forth. They do not want students to disturb others, talk back, be aggressive toward peers, take things that belong to others, lie, cheat, steal or ignore the teacher.

In terms of a peer-related adjustment, peers want others to cooperate with them, be supportive, act independently, be friendly, be a good team player and remain calm. Examples of things that disrupt this relationship are disturbing an ongoing peer group activity, having a short temper, starting fights, seeking help constantly, bragging and being a low achiever. Most students learn these rules, conventions and skills through informal observation but others do not and they have to be taught directly. Students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) are particularly vulnerable to failure in these two critical adjustment areas, and their school success can be impaired as a result.

PBS is a system for creating and sustaining a positive school climate and establishing a culture of competence in which all students can experience success.

Improving School-wide Behavior

One of its greatest strengths is that PBS teaches clear behavioral expectations for student behavior in every school setting—the classroom, cafeteria, hallways, bus stop, playground and so on. Further, all adults in the school look for, recognize and positively reinforce examples of these expectations when they see them in the students' behavior.

PBS teaches the following three core values or rules: (1) be responsible for your actions, (2) be respectful of others and (3) be safe. Specific rules for certain settings are added as needed. For example, on the playground, two good general rules are "be polite and cooperative" and "remember to follow the rules of the playground." Praising students for following these rules can make a real difference on the playground, and doing so in other school settings can greatly improve the behavior of most students.

Teaching and reinforcing PBS rules and core values will have a positive impact for 80–85 percent of all students; however, there will be some students who need more assistance and time in order to behaviorally master them. Small group and individualized strategies can be used to provide this more intensive in-

struction and support to the relatively small number of students.

Currently, PBS approaches are being used in more than 3,000 schools in the United States. Extensive research shows that PBS is widely accepted by educators and that it dramatically improves the discipline level within a school. Typically, the number of disciplinary referrals to the principal's office is reduced by half in the first year of PBS adoption and then shows further decreases over subsequent years of implementation. PBS is one of the most powerful educational innovations of the past two decades. It has great promise for improving the culture, discipline and ecology of school settings and is highly recommended.

Hill M. Walker, Ph.D., is co-director of the Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior in the College of Education at the University of Oregon. He received his doctorate in special education in 1967 from the University of Oregon and has since been involved in applied research. Dr. Walker is a member of CHADD's Professional Advisory Board.

Reference

1 Gilliam, W.S. (May 17, 2005). Prekindergarteners Left Behind: Expulsion Rates in State Prekindergarten Programs. Foundation for Child Development. (http://www.fcd-us.org/PDFs/National PreKExpulsionPaper03.02_new.pdf accessed 6/08/05).



PBS is a system for creating and sustaining a positive school climate and establishing a culture of competence in which all students can experience success.