



Program-Wide Positive Behavior Support:
Supporting Young Children's Social-Emotional
Development and Addressing Challenging Behavior

Program-Wide Positive Behavior Support: Supporting Young Children's Social-Emotional Development and Addressing Challenging Behavior

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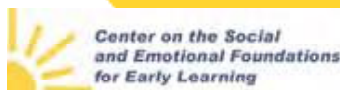
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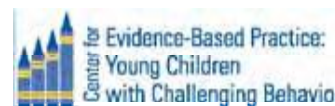
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Center for Evidence-Based Practices:
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Our Story

The staff members of Southeast Kansas Community Action Program (SEK-CAP) Head Start were not happy in their work environment. They felt that their ability to teach and provide a nurturing classroom environment was compromised by the levels of children's challenging behavior they confronted on a daily basis. Teachers complained that they spent the majority of their day "putting out fires" instead of teaching. Supervisors and program managers were constantly engaged in crisis management rather than mentoring staff and supporting program development.

Linda Broyles, the Director of SEK-CAP, contacted Susan Jack, an early childhood behavioral consultant, to see if there was a training or workshop that would help her teachers and program staff. Susan thought she could help, but a workshop was not what was needed. She advised SEK-CAP to adopt a program-wide model to promote children's social competence and address challenging behavior. The training of staff would be an essential piece of the effort, but much more would be needed for sustained change to occur.

The implementation of a program-wide model involved change on all levels including policy, administrative practices, allocation of resources, relationships with community partners, staff training, ongoing professional development, ongoing technical assistance, staff support, classroom practices, and partnerships with families. This effort began in February of 2001 and continues today. SEK-CAP refers to this effort as Positive Behavior Support (PBS). In this report, you will find information on the elements of the model, the adoption process, and the outcomes experienced by SEK-CAP.

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) describes a process for addressing children's challenging behavior that is based on an understanding of the purpose of the behavior and a focus on teaching new skills to replace challenging behavior. Over the last 20 years, there has been an accumulation of evidence that the use of PBS can result in decreases in problem behavior and assisting individuals with challenging behavior and their families in achieving their desired lifestyle. Early applications of PBS focused on the development of behavior support plans to help children and adults who had challenging behavior. In the last 10 years, the implementation of PBS has expanded to include school-wide and program-wide applications. In school- and program-wide PBS, all of the staff work together to ensure that children understand behavior expectations, receive instruction in social skills, and those with the most persistent problem behavior receive individualized assistance. The SEK-CAP model represents one of the first program-wide applications of PBS within a Head Start program.

"By having this program, it is helping daily. More children are successful."

Problem Behavior in Preschool: A National Issue



Social Competence is Essential to School Readiness

In recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on the importance of preschool programs in preparing children for success in school. In thinking about school readiness, many people quickly identify that early literacy and math skills will be important to a child's school success and may not realize the equally critical importance of social competence.

There is a growing body of research that demonstrates the importance of social competence to later school success (Raver, 2002; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004). Learning is a social process. Young children who are disruptive, who have problems following directions, who do not work well with peers, and who have difficulty controlling emotions are much less likely to be successful in school. If children have disruptive behavior in school, they are less likely to develop relationships with peers, receive less positive feedback from their teachers, spend less time on-task, and receive less instruction.

The following social skills have been identified as critical to a child's success in school:

- Getting along with others
- Following directions
- Identifying and regulating emotions
- Thinking of solutions to conflict
- Persisting on a task
- Engaging in social conversations
- Engaging in cooperative play

Source: Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior (www.challengingbehavior.org)

Headlines in 2005 provided some shocking information. Preschool children were 3.2 times more likely to be expelled from public preschool programs than students in K-12 programs (Gilliam, 2005). In the last decade, research on outcomes for children with severe problem behavior and behavior disorders has demonstrated that "early childhood is a critical period for the onset of emotional and behavioral impairments" (New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003, p. 57). Prevalence studies indicated that 10-15% of young children have mild to moderate behavior problems (Campbell, 1995) with higher rates expected (15 – 30%) in children who live in poverty (Qi & Kaiser, 2003). Research has demonstrated that behavior problems identified during the preschool years often persist and that adolescents identified as having emotional disturbance have a history of problem behavior that began during the preschool years (Campbell & Ewing, 1990; Dishion, French, & Patterson, 1995; Moffitt et al., 1996).

"We had one child whose behavior was extreme to the point that [others] working with the child were using restraint...and it went against everything that all of us felt. If you were to touch him, it would increase his aggression. PBS taught us that we were increasing his fear. He was afraid so he was acting out. So, when we started looking underneath his behaviors.... we changed our environment and the behavior went down...we switched him to an afternoon class because he was always cranky....All of his behaviors stopped, all of them...He is a completely different child."

The Research on PBS: An Evidence-Based Approach

A promising approach for delivering early behavior prevention and intervention efforts within early childhood programs is through the use of a program-wide system of Positive Behavior Support (PBS) (Fox & Little, 2001). PBS has been identified as an effective practice for preventing and addressing the problem behavior of students in K-12 programs. School-wide PBS provides a systemic approach to the promotion of appropriate behavior, prevention of problem behavior, the use of data to understand issues related to problem behavior, the adoption of evidence-based intervention practices, and a focus on the instruction of social skills (Taylor-Greene et al., 1997; Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000).

Demonstrations and evaluations of the school-wide PBS model in over 1,000 schools across the nation have resulted in impressive outcomes. The implementation of school-wide PBS has resulted in decreases of incidences of problem behavior (Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998; Sadler, 2000; Turnbull et al., 2002); reduction in office referrals for problem behavior (Nakasato, 2000; Nelson, Martella, & Martella, 2002; Turnbull et al., 2002); reduction of in-school and out of school suspensions (Turnbull et al., 2002); and reduction in school expulsions (Sadler, 2000).

This booklet includes a description of the outcomes SEK-CAP experienced when they translated and implemented this model in an early childhood setting.



"The child had been expelled from several preschools because of his history of hitting, biting, spitting, and running away. He engaged in many of those behaviors when he first came to our Center. Through the use of PBS by our entire team we have seen important changes.

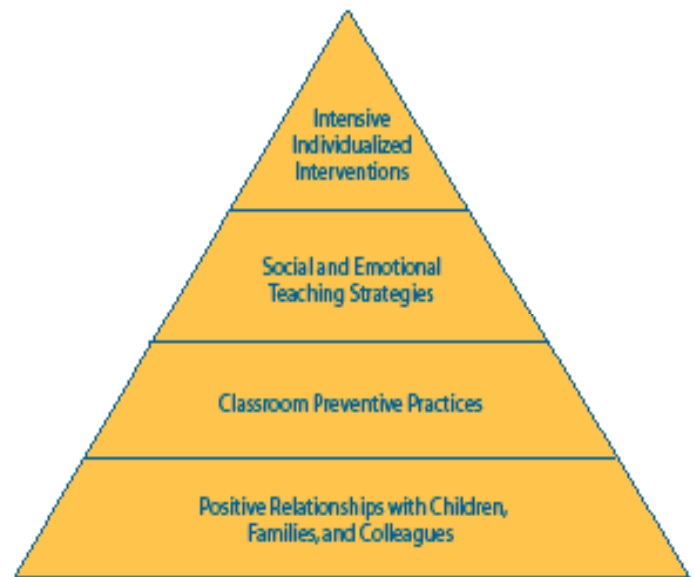
The child rides the bus to school without incident, gives all the staff a big hug in the morning, and tells us that he loves coming to school and playing with his new friends."



The Teaching Pyramid: Promoting Social Competence and Addressing Challenging Behavior

The PBS initiative involved the adoption of a new approach for facilitating the development of children's social competence and addressing challenging behavior. The program has adopted a framework for classroom practices that has been described as The Teaching Pyramid (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003). This framework involves four levels of classroom practices that represent prevention, promotion, and intervention.

The first two levels of the pyramid describe classroom practices that are essential for the prevention of challenging behaviors and the promotion of social competence in all children. At the foundation of the pyramid is the development of positive relationships with children, families, and staff. The second level is the use of classroom practices that prevent problem behavior, support the engagement of all children, and support the development of social skills. For many children, these two levels of classroom practices may be all that is needed to support their healthy social-emotional development.



The Teaching Pyramid Model

From: Fox, L., Dunlap, G., Hemmeter, M. L., Joseph, G. E., & Strain, P. S. (2003). The teaching pyramid: A model for supporting social competence and preventing challenging behavior in young children. *Young Children*, 58 (4), 48-52.

"What's the rock in his shoe?
Let's get out the rock. It's not
'let's fix your kid.' It's a whole
different way to look at it."

However, some children may have or be at risk for social and emotional delays. These children need intentional instruction in social skills, social problem solving, emotional literacy, friendship development, and anger management. The next level of the pyramid, social and emotional teaching strategies, addresses the needs of these children.

The top level of the pyramid includes the use of individualized positive behavior support interventions for children who have the most persistent challenging behavior. Even when all other levels of the pyramid are in place, some children will need an individualized behavior support plan that includes prevention strategies, the instruction of replacement skills, and guidance on how to respond to problem behavior so that it is not maintained.



The Adoption of PBS

The purpose of the SEK-CAP PBS initiative was to establish internal expertise in using multiple strategies to promote positive behavior in all children. To achieve this goal, a comprehensive staff support plan was put into place to enable staff to develop the skills to address challenging behavior in children served by its program. This plan includes three key elements that ensure the ongoing success of the initiative: administrative commitment and resources, a comprehensive training program, and ongoing technical assistance. The following sections highlight each of these elements.


Administrative Commitment and Resources

The SEK-CAP Head Start administration and management team have adopted the program-wide model into the multiple layers of their program. Significant resources in the form of money, staff time, and effort have been devoted to developing the model in SEK-CAP's 0-5 program. Administrative budgets have been re-aligned to allocate resources for training, consultation, materials, and curricula. Over time, the project has expanded to include other program areas,

such as Early Head Start and the home visiting program, and the inclusion of community partners. Without this long-term commitment of the SEK-CAP leadership, the PBS initiative would not be successful. Instead, the program is recognized as a leader in the region for its adoption of program-wide model of positive behavior support.

The following administrative strategies were used to ensure the adoption, implementation, and sustainability of the program:

- Collaboratively building a vision and setting expectations
- Seeking and valuing the input of all stakeholders
- Identifying performance goals
- Dedicating time to an ongoing process
- Using data to make decisions and monitor progress
- Using a collaborative decision-making/problem-solving process
- Fostering a climate of risk-taking
- Identifying and implementing evidence-based practices
- Refocusing resources to support promotion and prevention



"It's everywhere. It's an expectation... We were taught those expectations, and we were all expected, you know, to use soft touches to each others hearts. To be supportive and encouraging."

Comprehensive Training Program

SEK-CAP Head Start professional development plans have been re-designed to address the need for comprehensive PBS training for all staff. A PBS leadership team has been established to identify the training needs of staff and to plan in-service time across the program year. Initially, classroom teaching staff were trained in the core components of the teaching pyramid and how to implement these strategies in their classrooms. Refresher trainings were provided at regular intervals to address any challenges they faced or to update information. Over time, training has been extended to include:

- All center-based staff;
- Home visitors;
- Child-care partners;
- Family members;
- Community-based professional staff; and
- PBS facilitators.



"Everyone has been a part of the culture change from classroom staff to secretaries."



"We really have a team now."

Ongoing Technical Assistance

The final component of the PBS project is the provision of ongoing support to staff as they work to implement the project's components. The leadership team works with a PBS consultant to problem solve, plan training, and review individual PBS plans. PBS facilitators work with center-based teams to identify their current status with PBS and to develop a PBS Implementation Plan. Teams are also supported as they develop individualized interventions for children with the most severe problem behavior. Finally, ongoing technical assistance may be targeted to staff in need of more support, to provide outreach to families, and for working with collaborators. This ongoing relationship has been essential to the success of the project; its key features include:

- Open, regular communication
- Team-based approach
- Data based decision making
- Solution orientation

Implementing the Pyramid

Classroom Rules

Providing consistent behavioral expectations to children is an important preventative practice in the program-wide PBS model. Prior to training in PBS, Head Start centers set their own expectations or rules for classroom behavior. These rules ranged in number from 3 to 12 across classrooms with a total of 26 different expectations for the program. With training, center staff developed 3 expectations for the program and could add up to 2 more rules customized for their classrooms. These program-wide expectations are:

- We use walking feet.
- We take turns.
- We use soft touch.

*"It's the childrens' rules,
and they own it now."*

Building Relationships

The development of relationships is at the core of the teaching pyramid model. The fostering of positive, reciprocal relationships with children and their families is absolutely essential. These relationships serve as the foundation for all interactions, support, and teaching opportunities. However, the notion of building relationships extends far beyond the concept of teacher-child or teacher-family relationships. In SEK-CAP, program staff regard the development of relationships with each other, outside consultants and resource providers, and the community as a critical investment.



Teaching Social Problem Solving

The children were eating snack. Sammy called another child a name in a playful, teasing voice. The classroom assistant told the child to, "Tell Sammy how that makes you feel." The child said, "When you call me names, it makes me sad". Sammy responded, "I am sorry. Do you want to build blocks after snack?" This is an example of social problem solving.

In the SEK-CAP program, all classroom staff are focused on teaching children the emotional and social skills they need to express their feelings, solve conflicts with peers, and develop friendships. In each of the classrooms, teachers carefully plan activities (sharing books, discussions, art projects, songs, etc.) that help children learn these concepts. Most importantly, all of the classroom staff look for moments throughout the day when they can guide children to use these skills in their interactions with adults and peers.

Meet Charles

Charles is a child attending Head Start Center B. He attends the morning class and is transported to a child care center for the afternoons. Charles engaged in problem behavior across the day (preschool & child care). The primary behaviors of concern included: physical aggression (biting, hitting, kicking, and pushing), leaving an activity without permission, and being oppositional when told to do something or denied permission to do something. Teaching staff reported that this happened 7 to 8 times per day and lasted up to an hour if allowed to escalate. A PBS team came together to develop a behavior support plan for Charles. The team decided on several different strategies designed to prevent the problem behavior from happening and to teach Charles new skills to replace his problem behavior. These strategies included:

- Reading Social Stories to prompt expected behaviors
- Providing cues and prompts about upcoming activities
- Providing positive attention and feedback for appropriate behavior
- Using a picture schedule
- Asking for a break from group time
- Using problem solving strategies
- Using feelings cards to express his feelings

Once these strategies were in place, Charles's teachers reported no further behavior problems in the classroom. He was able to participate in classroom activities and learned valuable friendship skills to help him interact with his peers.

"You have to look and see where the behavior is coming from."



From the Director

SEK-CAP Head Start is not an isolated entity. We work with a variety of community partners to produce optimal results. Families live, work, and play within an entire community not within one program or organization. Therefore, it is important to build consistent supports within the family's daily community contacts. We have provided our childcare, school, and mental health partners the opportunity to experience all of our PBS training in an effort to have a shared understanding of what works when working with a family. It seems senseless for a family to have several family goal plans to meet the requirements of each agency when we can all work together to develop one family-centered plan that addresses each of the family's strengths and needs. By coming together with continuity of care and self-sufficiency in mind, resources can be allocated by multiple agencies to support the family. By teaching children to strengthen their social skills, those children become more welcome members of the community. When the family can help their child learn to self-regulate, the family is more able to participate in the community. It is also very important to share successes with community partners. If we happen to find a system of supporting children and families that works, we should be good neighbors and share the news with the rest of our early learning community.

*Linda Broyles
Director, Early Childhood Programs*



"We try to have the families' input on how they can use PBS at home to better their situation and ours too. It's like a joint effort."



Key Partnerships

Throughout this effort, SEK-CAP has relied on meaningful partnerships with families, child-care providers, mental health teams, and special services staff to extend this work beyond the classrooms. We have accomplished this through joint training opportunities, planning/problem-solving, and team-based support for individual children. Families have been asked to participate in family-focused training programs as well as being members of the collaborative team that will develop support plans for their children.



Taking It Home

Educators understand that you cannot change a child until you are able to affect change in the child's environment. SEK-CAP realizes the pivotal role of the parent as the child's first and most important teacher. In order to ensure that the program is working in partnership with families, SEK-CAP has implemented the following program practices:

- Prior to the child receiving any kind of services, a home visit is conducted to familiarize families with the program and the PBS project. Families are given a brochure that describes the PBS project.
- During the initial home visit, the home visitor asks the parent or caregiver for information about the child. This includes finding out what makes the child special, what the child enjoys doing, how the child plays, and if the child has any challenges with behavior.
- Families who receive only home visiting services are encouraged to visit classrooms and participate in socialization activities in order to observe their child and other children in a social situation.
- SEK-CAP uses the information provided by the family to prepare for the child's transition to the classroom. They try to ensure that the environment will offer activities and toys that the child prefers to help the child and family feel comfortable from the beginning of the school year.
- In the home visiting program, Family Educators provide suggestions to families on a weekly basis. They assist families in developing tools and activities to promote their child's social competence and address challenging behavior.

A Celebration of Success

Meaningful Program Outcomes

Ongoing monitoring and evaluating have documented the following outcomes as a result of adopting program-wide PBS:

- Reduced referrals to outside experts
- Elimination of time-out as a practice
- Improvement in overall program quality
- Increased use of comprehensive strategies and team planning
- Changes in individual interventions
- A 50% reduction in staff turnover
- Improved staff satisfaction

Sources of Data: Classroom Observations, Head Start Center Observation Form, DEC Recommended Practices Program Assessment, and the Early Childhood Environment Classroom Rating System (ECERS).

Outcomes for Children: An Investment in their Future

The PBS initiative has resulted in life-changing outcomes for children.

- The number of children identified as having challenging behavior and referred for mental health services has decreased.
- Children understand and follow behavior expectations.
- Children support each other in following classroom expectations.
- Children are able to transition from one classroom to another without difficulty.
- Children adjust to the classroom more quickly.



Outcomes for Program Staff

The adoption of program-wide PBS has resulted in important outcomes for program staff.

- Staff view themselves as having the skills to better support children in Head Start classrooms.
- Staff have the tools to address the individual needs of children with behavior challenges.
- Staff work collaboratively with mental health professionals to teach children social and emotional skills.
- Staff look to each other as sources of additional information and support.
- Staff can demonstrate the fundamental elements of PBS in their classrooms.
- Classroom staff feel a stronger sense of support by program managers and supervisors.
- Staff are more confident in their interactions with families and children.

Sources of Data: Staff Satisfaction Survey, Staff Interviews, Focus Group Evaluation Report



What our Teachers are Saying!

"Our children are problem-solving on their own and listening to each other. It's great to hear a child say to another, 'Tell him how you feel!'"

"The children are learning to express their feelings and needs with words rather than aggression."

"When he started to hit me, I said, 'Hands were not for hitting, but were for hugs and high fives and tickling.' He actually crawled in my lap and gave me a big hug. I took advantage of the moment to tickle him, and I actually heard him really laugh for the first time. When I went to leave, he opened the door for me and gave me a high five. It is those kind of days that make me love my job."

"In my class we give the children a 'thumbs up' or 'high five' for following the rules. Now, they do it for each other."

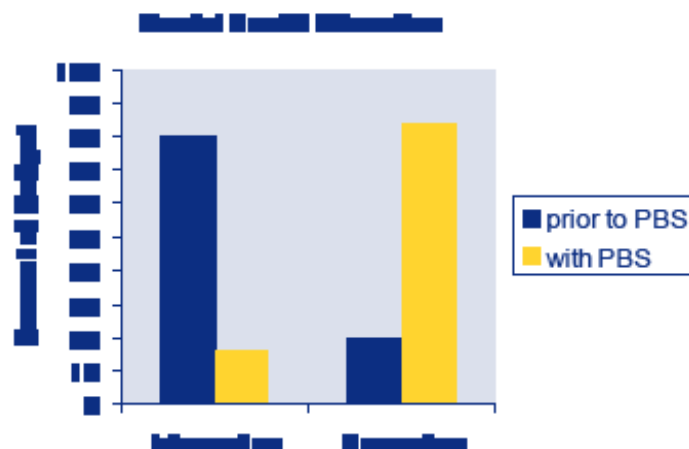
"Since adopting PBS, we have more fun, more teaching time, more parent involvement, and better collaboration."

"It was difficult at first, but the more you use it, the better it is, and it is life changing."



A Change of Focus

The role of mental health consultants with SEK-CAP has drastically changed over the course of this initiative. Prior to PBS, most of the money the program spent on mental health services was devoted to intervention. Now, mental health dollars have shifted to prevention with just a small portion dedicated toward intervention. Mental health providers are actively engaged in supporting the social-emotional development of Head Start children through skill development and ongoing instruction.



Moving Forward, Continuous Improvement

At the time of publication, the SEK-CAP PBS initiative had been in operation for four years. During that time the program met its initial goals of building program expertise, decreasing episodes of child challenging behaviors, reducing referrals to outside experts, and improving staff satisfaction. There are, however, still areas to be addressed in order to sustain and build on those successes. Using the PBS approach on a daily basis is hard work. The program team must be aware, tuned in, and armed with resources throughout the day. The team wants to ensure that there is a transfer of their learning to others in the early childhood field. In SEK-CAP, program staff members feel that PBS is and must remain at the core of what they do. They believe that they have learned from their mistakes as well as their triumphs. Their commitment to continuous improvement and innovation is based on their core belief that children are their greatest natural resource. With that in mind, their future plans include:

- Offer PBS training to every enrolled family
- Offer a class on PBS for college credit at a local community college
- Host university student teachers in SEK-CAP classrooms
- Develop an internal PBS accreditation process
- Conduct community-wide PBS strategy sessions
- Conduct joint training with partners with a focus on public schools and support services
- Become a training site for other early childhood programs; Share the “good news” that PBS works!

Partners in Excellence: SEK-CAP Head Start and the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning was funded by the Head Start and the Child Care Bureaus in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families to build the capacity of child care and Head Start programs to improve the social and emotional outcomes of young children. One activity of the Center was to identify Partners in Excellence (PIE) teams who would work with the Center to demonstrate the use of effective practices and serve as models to other programs and communities. SEK-CAP was among the six teams that were selected from numerous applications to become PIEs. This designation has brought training and technical assistance resources to SEK-CAP. The Center has assisted SEK-CAP in refining and evaluating the implementation of the model, providing consultation and resources to assist the program, and disseminating the success of SEK-CAP to other Head Start and Child Care programs.



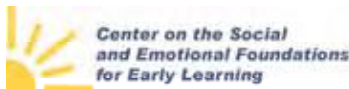
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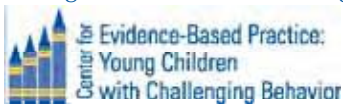
For more information on the implementation of this model, see these resources:

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning



www.csefel.uiuc.edu

Center for Evidence-Based Practices:
Young Children with Challenging Behavior



www.challengingbehavior.org

Southeast Kansas Community Action Program (SEK-CAP) was established in southeast Kansas in 1965. SEK-CAP serves twelve counties in rural, southeast Kansas. The mission of the organization is to unite staff, individuals, families, and community partners to provide quality comprehensive services through compassionate, respectful relationships. SEK-CAP is a part of a national community action network of over 1100 agencies working to serve our most vulnerable citizens who live in poverty.

For more information on the organization contact:

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