



Promising Practices

Teaching Students to Self-Manage Their Behavior

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Julieann Benyo, a teacher in Maryland's Garrett County school system, needed help with her middle school classes. She enlisted the assistance of Katherine Mitchem, a professor at West Virginia University. Together, they developed the Classwide Peer-Assisted Management program, which has been implemented in both urban and rural schools with dramatic results.

Benyo and Mitchem presented an overview of their plan at the American Council on Rural Special Education's national conference in March. A research paper on the plan will be published at a later date.

Mitchem and Benyo describe the plan as a sophisticated version of the "thumbs up, thumbs down" feedback many teachers and parents use with young children. The success of the program relies on students' buying into it. This is especially important for students at this stage of development.

Starting with explaining the "ABCs" of behavior, students learn that there is always an *antecedent*, or trigger, for a particular *behavior*. From that behavior, there is a *consequence*. While students may not be able to control the antecedent, they can control their response to it and thereby avoid negative consequences.

For middle school students who naturally want to have more control over their lives, learning that they can make choices about their behavior moves them closer to the independence they want. Role-playing and reviewing real-life examples helps make this information real for the students.

Another key component of the program is to teach students what is considered appropriate and inappropriate behavior:

"What specifically is or is not acceptable to this teacher? What are the expectations for students in this class?" Concrete—even elementary—explanations and examples leave nothing open to misinterpretation. For some students,

this may be their first real opportunity to learn how and why they should behave differently.

Once students understand what is expected, enforcement of the plan is up to them. With a little competitive gamesmanship, pairs of students and larger teams compete to see who can stay on task for the greatest amount of time. The pairs self-evaluate and monitor each other. Points are earned when each pair is on task at the same time, during select intervals. The team with the greatest number of points "wins." Initially some form of reward helps to reinforce the plan. However, over time, "winning" often becomes reward enough.

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Other resources

The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY) 800-695-0285, www.nichcy.org

The Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Centers (The Alliance) 888-248-0822, www.taalliance.org

The National Association of School Psychologists www.naspweb.org/center

The Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice www.air-dc.org/cecp

Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
1761 Alder Street, 1235 College of Education
Eugene, OR 97403
Voice (541) 346-2505
E-mail: pbis@oregon.uoregon.edu
www.pbis.org

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