



# BEAM Newsletter

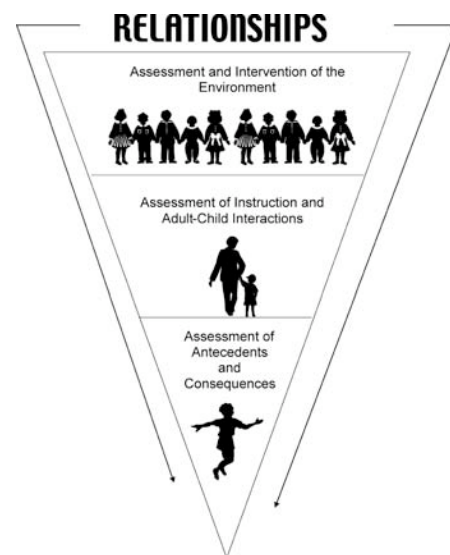
Bridging Education and Mental Health

## Using the BEAM Pyramid to Address Challenging Behaviors and Early Literacy

Within every preschool classroom there are children who are on different developmental continuums. Children are growing at different rates in the developmental domains of language, social-emotional, cognitive, fine and gross motor and self-help. As teachers prepare children for kindergarten, they must provide balanced interactions and opportunities for growth in each area. Over the past year, the BEAM Newsletter has focused on Relationships, Environments, Instruction and Interaction, and Child Specific interventions. The purpose of this newsletter is to use the BEAM pyramid to explore strategies to address concerns that arise when working with young children with challenging behaviors and to also see the positive impact that these strategies can have on early literacy development. After reading the case study below, we will present some possible solutions using the BEAM model.

*James is a 4-year-old boy who attends a childcare center. James's teachers are concerned about his behavior and are seeking help. James's parents recently separated. When he was three he started receiving speech and language services. In addition, the speech and language therapist is suspecting some receptive language delays. He has a difficult time following multi-step novel and routine directions and is having difficulty answering simple comprehension questions. James enjoys playing with blocks, cars and trucks at the sensory table and outside on the playground. He also likes to interact with adults, however circle time is a struggle for James. When he makes it to circle areas, he often refuses to participate and often seeks teacher attention while she is reading or talking with other children. He has a difficult time choosing and sharing toys during free play and various materials when the children are making art projects or doing other activities while seated at the table. Transitions and change are difficult for James. For example, on days that it's raining and the class can't go outside, James screams, cries and some days will even run out of the room. In addition, James has a difficult time changing activities.*

*For example, if he's coloring a picture and it's time to end one activity and begin a new one, he yells "No," screams, and begs to finish coloring his picture. This typically escalates into a full blown tantrum, which can last for up to 45 minutes of crying and screaming. The teacher really wants James to be successful in her classroom, but feels like she's constantly attending to James and she fears this is impacting the rest of the classroom.*



James is engaging in some challenging behaviors and there are also specific early literacy skills we want him to make progress in; particularly his ability to communicate using words in place of engaging in challenging behavior. Teachers can use specific strategies to be very explicit and help him to make transitions and develop self control skills. Now let's consider some strategies based on the BEAM pyramid that will address his needs on many levels.

**Relationships:** It will be critical for whole child development that the teachers work to build positive relationships and provide a consistent, contingent, and predictable environment so that James can trust his caregivers and feel safe. Considering the fact that his parents recently separated, teachers will need to be sensitive to James's socio-emotional needs and development. One way that teachers can build this relationship with James is by reading to him. Reading with children helps teachers develop a relationship with a child and is also a great early literacy activity.

**Classroom Environment:** Using a picture schedule that is clearly labeled to tell the whole class about each part of the daily routine as it happens will help all the children including James transition and understand what to expect as the day progresses. It will also increase awareness of print and show that pictures and words can represent meaning.

**Teacher/Child Interactions/Instruction:** The class schedule may not be enough to assist James through his difficult transitions as his resistance to changes result in escalating tantrums. A step-by-step mini-schedule will help him anticipate changes. Teachers can use clear, consistent language, pictures, and physical prompts which will help instruct him and increase his ability to transition more smoothly. The use of pictures and print will also model communication and promote early literacy skill development.

**Child Specific:** It is clear that James may need more support in communicating his feelings in a more effective and developmentally appropriate way. Using a FEELINGS GAME or chart that allows James to use pictures to describe how he feels will provide teachers a chance to verbally label that emotion for or with James. The chart may have different pictures of facial expressions of children labeled; mad, sad, frustrated etc. and then pictures of what can be done when that emotion is felt. For example "When I am... MAD, I can...count to 5." Using this before James experiences "a big feeling" will help him gain skills in naming and expressing his emotions in socially acceptable ways and help him develop language necessary for success in the kindergarten classroom.

**From BEAM Project staff: Thank you for your participation in the BEAM Project! It was a wonderful experience and we look forward to working with you in the future.**

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Pictured clockwise from top:  
Christopher Watson, Carrie Johnson, Lisa Cariveau,  
Shelley Neilsen Gatti, Leah Hjelseth, Lilly Duran