Bridging Education and Mental Health in Early Childhood

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http://www.education.umn.edu/ceed

Expanding our Horizons
to support the social and emotional needs of young children so they can develop to their full potential.

Overview
- A story
- What is BEAM
- Foundational beliefs of BEAM
- Conceptual framework for intervening with challenging behavior
- Interventions for challenging behavior

Bridging Education and Mental Health
Combining Positive Behavioral Support and Relationship-Based Teaching
to meet the social/emotional needs of young children.
A Story…

James is a 4-year-old Caucasian boy who lives with his parents and an older sister. James attends a childcare center that is owned and operated by the local community center. There is significant amount of diversity in the population of children at the center both in terms of race and socioeconomic levels. Recently the center has become NAEYC accredited and their mission is to provide high quality educational childcare to all children. All teachers have bachelor’s degrees and in general the daily activities are age appropriate, well paced and engaging for young children. James’s teachers are concerned about his behavior and are seeking help. He started attending the center as an infant and is there from 7:30 – 4:30.

Last year James’s older brother was killed in a car accident and his parents recently separated. When he was three he started receiving speech and language services. He has a 2.5 mean length of utterance and about 60% of his conversation is intelligible. 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. Music class is a struggle for James. When he makes it to class, he refuses to participate and often watches his class. He has a difficult time choosing and sharing toys in the gym. Transitions are especially difficult for James. When his mom drops him off he cries and clings to her. This is troubling for his mom and for James. He doesn’t handle change well either. 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 go on to the next activity, he’ll yell no, scream, and beg 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 fears this is impacting the rest of the classroom.

So, how can we support James in the classroom?

1. What are the challenging behaviors?
2. What are some issues related to James and the challenging behavior?

The behavior we observe provides many pieces to the puzzle, however it doesn’t give us the whole story. In fact one could say, it’s just the tip of the iceberg. It’s easy to jump to conclusions and intervene based on what we experience. But we need to closely examine the underlying issues that may be related to the challenging behavior.

Bridging Education and Mental Health

Traditional Educational Interventions – Positive Behavioral Support

Bridging Education

• Positive Behavior Support
• Origin: assisting children
• Question: What is the FUNCTION of the behavior?

Bridging Mental Health

• Psychodynamic Therapeutic Support
• Origin: assisting children who have experienced difficult emotional environments
• Question: WHY does the child behave in this way?

Bridging

Education
• Theoretical Orientation: Behavior problems are not abnormalities, but reasonable adaptations necessitated by the abilities of our children and the limitations of their environments

Mental Health
• Theoretical Orientation: Children are biologically set up to establish relationships with adult caregivers. As a result of early relationships, children develop a “mental model” of what they can expect from the world.
Positive Behavior Support

- Expands the child’s ways of communicating and behaving
- Redesigns the environment to enhance the child’s quality of life and minimize his or her problem behavior


Mental Health

Mental health is the springboard of thinking and communication skills, learning, emotional growth, resilience and self-esteem.

(Surgeon General’s Report on Mental Health, 1999)

Mental Health

- Mental health is a state of successful performance of mental function, resulting in
  - Productive activities
  - Fulfilling relationships with others, and
  - The ability to change and cope with adversity
- Mental health is indispensable to personal well being, family and interpersonal relationships, and contribution to community and society.


Common Components

- All behavior is communication.
- It has meaning.
- It is the language of the child.
- Relationships are a primary pathway to learning.

Foundation Beliefs of BEAM

- Teacher/care provider behavior directly impacts children’s behavior (and their social emotional development and mental health).
- To change children’s behavior, teachers and care providers must change their behavior.

(And it works when they do!)

Foundation Beliefs of BEAM

- Children and their challenging behaviors are typically multi-dimensional, multi-faceted, and require a range of support
- Teams need time to reflect on their practice for their own mental health and to improve instructional practices.
  - Reflective Practice and Reflective Supervision
**Reflective Practice**

Teachers and care providers systematically make time to reflect on their practices with children and their families. Reflective practice leads to reflective teachers who are able to critique their own performance based on the progress of their children they serve. Reflective practice requires flexibility and adaptability.

**Going Around the Circle**

- What’s the concern?
- Why do you think it is happening?
- What do you think the behavior is communicating?
- How can we help? What’s the plan?
- How is it going?

**Reflective Supervision**

For teachers and care providers to be sensitive, responsive and contingent, they need a place where they can name and own their feelings. This safe place is sometimes called a “holding environment”. It is where you can unload all that you have experienced and absorbed so that you can continue to “hear, see, feel and respond”. You are supposed to feel so you know what to do! “How does this child make teachers feel?”

**Foundation Beliefs of BEAM**

- A BEAM Classroom is
  - CONSISTENT,
  - PREDICTABLE, and
  - CONTINGENT

**How did we support James**

- Interventions for Relationship
  - Consistent Teacher Talk
  - Inviting and Containing

- Interventions for Environment
  - Picture Schedule

- Interventions for Interaction
  - Praise
  - Bibliotherapy

- Interventions for the child
  - High-probability request sequence
Interventions for Relationship

Positive Behavioral Support
- Consistent
- Predictable
- Contingent
  - Contingent attention
  - Noncontingent attention

Mental Health
- Consistent
- Predictable
- Contingent
- Physically Safe
- Emotionally Safe
- Accepting of the full range of emotions
  - Inviting and Containing

From a mental health perspective, we recognize that...

- We experience the present in part through the past.
- Past relationships with adult lay the foundation for future relationships regardless of the quality of that relationship.
- If the past relationship has led to maladaptive patterns, then it requires a lot of work on the teacher’s part to REPAIR the relationship.

Attachment

Attachment is a mutual, reciprocal relationship in which the child becomes a knowing partner. It is a relationship that develops gradually during the early months and years of a child’s life.

Child-Adult Attachment - A Lens for Viewing Decisions that Affect Children and Families, Lyn Glen and Martha Farrell Erickson, PhD.

How did we support James

Interventions for Relationship
- Consistent Teacher Talk
- Inviting and Containing

Relationship Interventions for James
- Consistent Teacher Talk
- Inviting and Containing Techniques
Teacher Talk

- Use same the phrases repeatedly
- Example:
  - “I’m going to help you.”
  - “I’m going to say no because…”
  - “This looks like a problem. Let’s solve the problem.”
  - “It’s almost time for…”
  - “We have enough…”

- “I’ll still be your teacher, even when you’re angry.”
- “This is a safe school, I’ll keep you safe, me safe, and all the kids safe.”
- “At our school we take care of kids when they are happy, and when they’re mad too.”
- “When you come back tomorrow…”
- “I go away and then I come back.”

Inviting and Containing

- All emotions and feelings are welcome
- Usually done in the context of developmentally appropriate activities
  - Dramatic play, drawing, painting, playdough, books
- Provide tools for self-expression
- Conveys the willingness to listen
- Provide an opportunity to reframe the situation

Containing Techniques

- The environment must be safe enough to contain children’s feelings
- Stable routines and a secure environment
- School structure is strong enough to survive their outbursts
- Relationships with adults are strong enough to survive angry interactions and big feelings

How did we support James

Environment

Preventive Interventions for the setting
Features of an Effective Environment - Home or School

Positive Behavior Support:
- Consistent
- Predictable
- Contingent
  – schedule

Mental Health:
- Consistent
- Predictable
- Contingent
  – schedule

Purpose of a Classroom Schedule

- To provide orderly structure and predictability so that children don’t have to worry about change
- Provides a level of trust for children – they know they can always rely on certain things (teachers, availability of food)
- To teach the child to carry out daily activities independently
- To facilitate interactions with other children
- Teachers need to be taught how to use a schedule and so do children

Good Use of a Schedule

- Schedule all activities
- Display schedule and review as necessary
- Alternate teacher-directed and child-directed activities
- Intersperse quiet and loud activities
- Have back-up activities (over-planning is better)

Example of schedule

How did we support James

Interactions

Interventions for adult-child interactions and instruction
Effective Ways to Provide Positive Attention

- Movement
  - Unpredictable pattern
  - Stop briefly
- Scanning
  - Sweep
  - Spot check
- Praising
  - Use name
  - Be descriptive
  - Be brief
- Following-up
  - Praise around

Interventions for Interactions

Bibliotherapy
- Using children’s books to reflect a range of issues and experiences
- Make books to address specific and unique issues and circumstances
- Provides a visual representation

Examples of Books

- Busceglia, L. (2002). The fall of Freddie the leaf
- Palmer, P. (1994). I wish I could hold your hand

How did we support James

Interventions for the child

Why don’t we go straight to strategies?

- a “bag of tricks” is not the answer
- we need to decide what the child needs (the meaning of the behavior) before we can decide what to do
**Functional Behavioral Assessment**

- A process of determining the relationship between events in a person’s environment and the occurrence of challenging behaviors.

**Data Collection**

- FBA Interview Form
- ABC Analysis
- Scatterplot
- Setting Event Checklist

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**Steps for Implementation**

**High Probability Requests**

- An intervention strategy that can be implemented to increase children’s participation in activities that generate escape-motivated challenging behavior.
- High-probability and low-probability requests must be chained together.

**High Probability Requests**

**Steps for Implementation**

- Identify those requests that the child typically will complete. These tasks should be easy and quick to complete. (High-p requests)
- Identify those requests that the child typically will not complete. (Low-p requests)
- Validate these requests.
- Deliver three high-p requests immediately prior to delivering the low-p request.
  - Use a variety of high-p requests.
  - Vary the order of the high-p requests.

**Example:**

James will not clean-up his activity when requested.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James, give me five.</td>
<td>Gives teacher five</td>
<td>All right!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch your ears.</td>
<td>Touches ears.</td>
<td>Yeah!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is on your shirt?</td>
<td>James says, “Batman”</td>
<td>Cool!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sit in your chair.</td>
<td>James sits in his chair.</td>
<td>Way to go! You sat in your chair!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The goal is to see the child not as an object to be changed, but as a potential author of her own change.

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Project Relationship

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