President’s Update

The Association for Positive Behavior Support networks are continuing to grow and thrive. Currently, we have 15 APBS Networks representing state teams, regional groups, or smaller collaborations, including people who are meeting either in a geographic area or virtually through conference calls, webinars, websites, emails, and so forth to support PBS implementation efforts. Many of the individuals meet at the APBS conference annually to continue the important work they are doing and to share information about their efforts. The best way to describe an APBS Network is an informal community of practice.

The process for creating an APBS Network is easy. You need (a) five APBS Members willing to sign the petition and (b) a formal proposal that includes goals and objectives for your network. Non-members can also participate in APBS Network activities; however, an important goal of all APBS Networks is to increase the number of APBS members. For instance, some of the APBS Networks are providing annual reports on the growing number of APBS members. For instance, the newest APBS Networks include Arizona APBS Network and the thematic Network called Adults with Disabilities and PBS. We are very pleased to have our new Arizona PBS Network join us and are looking forward to seeing their progress.

The Adults with Disabilities and PBS Network represents APBS members and other individuals who are interested in topics related to community-based services (including intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental health diagnoses, and seniors who require memory care and other related services). Over 100 individuals across the United States have already signed up to participate in this new and exciting network. We believe that this network is similar to the Student APBS Network in that just as the latter serves all students interested in APBS, the former is open to everyone interested in the topic of individuals and community services.

The initial petition for this thematic network was sent during the March 2011 conference. The broad goals stated in the petition include increasing membership, stimulating new ideas, and expanding stakeholder group participation as it relates to issues such as transition from schools to adult services and systems, aging and disability, family experiences supporting adults with disabilities across the lifespan, and supported employment. Although the petition has been approved by the APBS Board, this group is just getting started, and the persons chairing this network want your input on the direction of this network. The first conference call meeting is scheduled for:

**May 16, 2011 (11:30 a.m. Pacific, 12:30 p.m. Mountain, 1:30 p.m. Central, 2:30 p.m. Eastern)**

Please help provide guidance and direction to this important APBS Network. To join, please contact Kristin Rennells (tatekris@ku.edu). Kristin will make sure your email address and contact information are on the list so that you will receive upcoming information.

APBS Board Elections: Nominations Requested

Nominations are being solicited from the APBS membership for five open seats on the full Board of Directors. Any member in good standing may nominate another member (or themselves) to run for the board. Terms run for 3 years. The APBS nominations committee will establish a slate of candidates based upon the information provided with each nomination. Nominations must include submission of the following items:

1. The Nomination Application form for APBS full Board of Directors
2. A letter or email from the nominee agreeing to run for the board

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Universal Strategies

The creation of safe, caring communities where both students and adults feel supported is the first step in effective/efficient bully prevention. Many currently available programs employ school-wide strategies such as bully-proofing pledges, increased staff training, social skills training for all students, standardized adult responses to incidents, reinforcement for appropriate behavior, and support for the parent community. While each of these strategies can improve school culture and student outcomes, two issues in particular keep them from having an ideal impact. First, available bully prevention programs often prescribe a significant amount of intervention but rarely provide sufficient strategies for data-based decision making to inform modifications and the additional support needed for all students to succeed. Second, many pre-packaged universal programs require a significant amount of time and resources (especially for programs involving large, school-wide social skills curricula). Schools have had a difficult time implementing them without additional funding or personnel, and follow-up studies have indicated that few beneficial effects have been maintained even 2 years after initial implementation (Limber et al., 2004; Roland, 1993).

The one exception is School-wide Positive Behavior and Intervention Strategies (SWPBIS). While not a pre-packaged program, 20+ years of research has demonstrated SWPBIS’s ability to reduce problem behavior and improve school climate through a focus on data, systems, and practices (Horner, Sugai, Todd, & Lewis-Palmer, 2005). SWPBIS employs (a) empirically tested instructional principles to teach expected, positive behavior to all students (Colvin & Kame’enui, 1993), (b) systems of reinforcement for expected behaviors and a continuum of consequences for inappropriate behavior, (c) training/feedback to staff regarding systems implementation (Crone & Horner, 2003), and (d) documentation/analysis of reinforcement and discipline data by SWPBIS teams, who use the data to modify support on a regular basis (Sprague & Horner, 2006). When implemented by typical state agents, these strategies have resulted in demonstrated effectiveness (Bradshaw, Reinke, Brown, Bevans, & Leaf, 2008; Horner et al., 2009), as well as over time (Colvin & Fernandez, 2000; Luisselli, Putnam, & Sunderland, 2002; Putnam, Luisselli, & Sunderland, 2002; Taylor-Greene & Kartub, 2000).

Skill Development for Bystanders

SWPBIS can create positive school environments where students feel safe and are more likely to act according to expectations. It can also provide the data and systems necessary to recognize when students need more. This is often the case with bullying when schools implement SWPBIS with fidelity but find that a proportion of their students still exhibit bully-like behavior. Immediate responses to these outcomes would typically involve implementing secondary interventions; simple, often generic strategies that can be implemented with small groups or individuals. But herein lies a problem. Research on bullying has demonstrated that it is frequently exhibited covertly and is almost always reinforced by peer attention (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Craig & Pepler, 1995; Salmivalli, 2002; Soutter & McKenzie, 2000). Therefore, simply implementing a secondary intervention with the bully or the victim will not be enough. Other students in the school fuel the behavior by laughing at victims when they are teased, fighting back/harassing...
perpetrators in retaliation, or even watching the problem behavior and doing nothing about it. Instead, once effective universal systems are in place, the next level of intervention should involve teaching bystanders (all other students in the school) to remove the peer attention that maintains the problem behavior. Doing so effectively involves three aspects: (a) teaching students specific skills that can be implemented outside the classroom, (b) implementing sufficient generalization strategies, and (c) ensuring ongoing staff implementation.

Specific skills. Several available programs provide curricula for teaching students to address bullying and include a plethora of instructional objectives, such as empathy, cliques, problem solving, exclusion, sexual harassment, how to take a stand, and definitions of bullying. Unfortunately, these curricula usually require substantial resources to implement (e.g., ten 50-minute lessons), and while the skills they teach are valuable for many students, they may not be necessary at the school-wide level. Bully Prevention in Positive Behavior Support (BP-PBS; Ross, Horner, & Stiller, 2008) was developed in response to this need for more efficient approaches to teaching bystander skills. Specifically, BP-PBS teaches all students a three-step response to use when students exhibit problem behavior (not just bullying), towards either them or others. It also teaches perpetrators an appropriate reply when the three-step response is directed towards them. By focusing on specific critical skills that are easy to remember and implement, the delivery of BP-PBS is reduced to only 45 minutes of initial instruction along with 10- to 15-minute data-based follow-ups in unstructured settings. In addition, by reducing the resources used for instruction, more staff time and effort can be directed towards generalization strategies and staff implementation fidelity, which are equally important but often overlooked.

Generalization. Generalization is an incredible challenge for educators, not just for bully prevention skills but for any skills we want students to actually use outside the classroom. Far too often, substantial effort is made to teach students effective bully prevention strategies in the classroom followed by an expectation that those skills will generalize to unstructured settings. Defined as “behavior change that proves durable over time, across settings, and across behaviors” (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968, p. 96), generalization rarely happens without planned programming. First, teach the skills you want students to use in the actual settings where bullying occurs. BP-PBS does this through 10- to 15-minute data-based follow-ups conducted in school locations where bullying continues to be an issue. Second, involve adults who are normally in that environment. Teachers or counselors usually deliver the initial bully prevention instruction, but other adults (i.e., supervisors, instructional aides) are often the ones responding to reports of bullying. Therefore, these adults must be trained to (a) reinforce student attempts to use new skills at a high rate, (b) practice skills with students on a regular basis, and (c) use a universal review and resolve routine for responding to student reports of problem behavior.

Staff implementation fidelity. The effectiveness of bully prevention efforts is entirely contingent on adult implementation of the above generalization strategies. This is so important that simply expecting them to follow through is not enough. SWPBIS teams should lead the effort by providing ongoing collaboration and coaching with staff who supervise unstructured settings. In addition, SWPBIS teams should collect ongoing implementation data, which can be done through weekly surveys or daily checklists filled out by supervisory staff. Example questions on the forms can include how many times staff (a) practice with students, (b) deliver reinforcers for students’ attempting new skills, (c) deal with reports of problem behavior, and (d) deliver office discipline referrals for continued problem behavior.

When implemented with fidelity, the combination of SWPBIS systems, simple bystander response skills, and effective generalization strategies can have an enormous impact on problem behavior in schools. In an empirical trial across three elementary schools, Ross and Horner (2009) observed a 72% reduction in physical and verbal aggression after the intervention was delivered. In addition, other students on the playground were substantially more likely to respond appropriately (less likely to reinforce) when they experienced problem behavior.

Individualized Supports

Finally, school-wide systems and effective bystander strategies may not be enough. Successful approaches to bullying prevention should also include individualized, functionally related interventions for students who have not responded to previous efforts. Many prepackaged programs provide interventions for these students, but they are often standardized and not based on the specific reasons for their lack of response. There are three common reasons why students do not respond to initial bullying prevention efforts: (a) they have not acquired, mastered, or generalized the pro-social skills necessary for effective behavior change, (b) they continue to be reinforced by a small group of peers, or (c) their problem behavior is maintained by a function other than peer attention.

The first problem can be addressed through additional pro-social skills instruction for the given student. Assessment (e.g., teacher ratings, direct observation) should be conducted to evaluate externalizing as well as internalizing issues that still need to be addressed. Instructional objectives, lesson plans, generalization strategies, and progress monitoring can then be developed accordingly.

The response to the second problem can be similar to the first but with extra consideration of the specific peers involved. In many cases, certain peers fail to effectively respond to bullying and continue to reinforce it because they fear losing their friendships or popularity. For these students, pro-social skills must be practiced with the perpetrator or victim, both in the classroom and in applicable settings. It is critical to consider group size and delivery type. Instruction can be delivered one-on-one, in dyads, or in small groups, depending on the resources available and the type of typically occurring peer interactions. For example, some perpetrators or victims will benefit most from practicing pro-social skills with one preferred peer. Others may benefit more from a small group of socially appropriate peers. Just be careful to avoid grouping together deviant peers, as this may lead to increased peer attention to problem behavior (Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999). Also, shorter lessons conducted on a more frequent basis—with specific objectives, assignments, practice in applicable settings, and numerous opportunities for feedback—will be ideal for many students.

The third problem, behavior maintained by a function other than peer attention, cannot be effectively addressed through peer-based interventions. For example, some students
will engage in continued bullying behavior to acquire adult attention. For these students, interactions with adults due to continued bullying only serve to increase the probability of future problem behavior. Schools should consider other secondary interventions for these students, such as Check-in, Check-out (Crone, Hawken, & Horner, 2010), or Check & Connect (Christenson et al., 2008). These interventions provide strategies for pre-correction and additional adult reinforcement for appropriate behavior, and they have demonstrated effectiveness across multiple studies (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004; Hawken, MacLeod, & Rawlings, 2007).

In Conclusion

Schools that hope to sustainably prevent and reduce bullying despite constant demographic, administrative, and budgetary changes must learn to approach the problem systematically. They must move away from the common practice of purchasing/ implementing what sounds good, looks good, or feels good, and instead approach bullying as they approach RtI: by providing high-quality interventions matched to student need. The strategies described in this article can help schools develop a positive climate, specific skills for bystanders, and effective interventions for individual students. Even with these in place, however, a few students may require even more intensive assessment and intervention. Functional behavior assessment, behavior intervention plans, and additional resources may be necessary, the details of which extend beyond the limitations of this article. However, by addressing bullying universally through SWPBIS, teaching bystanders how intervene, and, finally, providing a menu of interventions for unresponsive students, the number of students requiring the highest levels of support will be greatly reduced. Future research is warranted to expand the current knowledge base on effective bullying prevention. Specifically, detailed and controlled studies are needed to both isolate essential features as well as evaluate effectiveness across diverse school populations.

References


