

# Positive Behavioral Support:

## *Family, School and Community Partnerships*

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In the schoolwide support model of positive behavioral support (PBS), four levels of support are designed to assist educators, administrators, related service providers, and families in supporting students with impeding behavior to achieve social and academic success (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001). The first level of schoolwide support – universal support – includes the establishment of and instruction in guidelines on how the school is to operate for students and staff. The second level – group support – includes targeted instruction in positive social behaviors with select groups in the school. The third level – individualized support in school – consists of implementing functional assessment and individualized interventions in school environments for students who have significant impeding behavior. Finally, the fourth level of support – family school, and community partnerships – includes support and

instruction designed to enable students to function effectively in home and community with the direct support of family and community resources. Implementing the fourth level of support is critical for students who experience impeding behavior across multiple environments, including their school, home, neighborhood, and community (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001).

This article provides a case study in Level 4 supports. The case study focuses on David, a seventh-grade middle school student who resides in and attends school in an inner-city neighborhood in Kansas City. Over the past three years, David has received Level 1, 2 and 3 supports. More recently, due to significant impeding behavior in the school, home, and neighborhood, David has received Level 4 supports designed by members of the schoolwide PBS team and David's family. The following vignette provides an overview of David and his need for PBS.

*David is a 13 year-old African-American youth, who lives in and attends school in an inner-city neighborhood in Kansas City, Kansas. David's mother and father divorced when he was three. From 1987 to 1997, David has moved between his mother's and father's residences. Since 1997, David has lived with his father, Robert, due to his mother's economic and personal hardships. Robert tries his best to provide a supportive home for his son, but long hours at work make it difficult for them to spend both quantity and quality time together.*

*The neighborhood in which David's family lives is tough and often unsafe. In the three years that David and Robert have lived together David has had several physical and verbal confrontations with neighborhood peers and his home has suffered damage from vandalism. Understandably, Robert is worried for his son's safety and is concerned that he will become involved in a gang when he gets older. As a result of these concerns, David spends most of his time indoors and has little contact with peers after school. To gain the attention of his peers, he often provokes fights on the bus and on his way home from the bus stop. Further, David spends a great deal of time on the phone with his few friends. During these conversations he fabricates stories and gossip about other classmates that often get him into further trouble both in the neighborhood and at school.*

*In school David has encountered many academic and behavioral challenges. In elementary school, he was evaluated as having ADHD and reading delays. These problems have followed David to middle school where he has problems paying attention and advancing in the general curriculum. David also has impeding behaviors in the classroom setting. David's teachers describe him as very friendly to teachers, but controlling, domineering, and aggressive with students. Further, he has difficulty listening and following through with classroom instructions and completing tasks.*

In the following section, David's individual and Group Action Planning supports and outcomes are described.

### **Individual Supports for David**

Recognizing that David would benefit from individualized emotional and social support, the PBS team invited a

graduate student with experience in teaching and mental health counseling to work with David on a weekly basis. The PBS counselor (the senior author) meets with David on a weekly basis to understand and discuss (a) the underlying emotional challenges, (b) specific situations triggering socially undesirable

behavior, and (c) ways to reframe negative, aggressive perspectives to proactive and respectful ones. Further, the counselor observes David in class and corresponds on a weekly basis with teachers, the PBS team, and David's family to monitor his progress over time.

**Group Action Planning for David**

As a result of the inherent strengths and closeness of David's family, and David's needs for comprehensive support, the PBS team recommended that Group Action Planning be implemented. Group Action Planning is a process whereby students with impeding behaviors are supported by a unified group, including the student, family members, professionals, and friends (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1996). The purpose of this process is to support students and families to envision best outcomes and to bring the vision to fruition (Turnbull, Blue-Banning, Anderson, Turnbull, Seaton, & Dinas, 1996). Group members make a commitment to accomplishing, monitoring, and adjusting these goals to support the student and family comprehensively.

The fundamental characteristics of Action Groups are: (a) actively inviting people who can be helpful to participate in a reciprocal and interdependent manner, (b) creating a context of social connectedness and caring among all participants, (c) fostering dynamic and creative problem solving fueled by great expectations, and (d) continuously affirming and celebrating the progress that is being made.

After discussing the philosophy and practice of Group Action Planning with the PBS counselor and coordinator, Robert agreed that developing a network of coordinated support would be beneficial for David, his family, and his teachers. David's Group Action Planning meeting took place on a Saturday afternoon in his paternal grandmother's living room. In attendance were several family members, including David, Robert, his grandmother, aunt, uncle, and cousin; David's counselor (Action Group facilitator); and the coordinator of the PBS project (co-facilitator) at the middle school. The counselor used components of the Making Action Plans (MAPs) process (Falvey, Forest, Pearpoint, & Rosenberg, 1994), a person-centered approach, to guide the conversation and create a vision and action plan for David.

Each person described his or her relationship with David and personal hopes for his future. Nearly an hour was spent discussing the challenges David encounters in school, home, and neighborhood. This discussion provided an opportunity for the group to see many of the origins of David's impeding behaviors and how the behaviors

were interconnected across multiple environments. Gaining a clearer understanding of David's impeding behaviors through his family's eyes led to determining supports necessary to assist him in both school and home settings.

**Action Groups:**

- (a) actively invite people who can be helpful to participate in a reciprocal and interdependent manner,
- (b) create a context of social connectedness and caring among all participants,
- (c) foster dynamic and creative problem solving fueled by great expectations being made.

After spending about an hour discussing David's current challenges, the facilitator moved the conversation to David's strengths. This strengths-based approach is a vital component of the Group Action Planning process as it shifts from focusing on how David and everyone in his network "need to change" to what he and his support system do well. Through the family's description of David's strengths (e.g., his ability to cook, his humorous attitude, and his concern for the well-being of his family members), David opened up to the group and discussed his concerns about his feelings of isolation, his lack of friends, his academic difficulties, and his parents' divorce. Throughout this process, David was asked to elaborate on his feelings and to describe his goals. His primary goals were to get better grades and have more opportunities to interact with his peers. Although at times David's and Robert's hopes conflicted, the group members were supportive of David's desires and discussed how to make his hopes a reality within the parameters of the family's expectations.

After 2-1/2 hours of processing, the group concluded with an overview of the goals determined by the group (see Table 1).

Specifically, the facilitator reviewed (a) which persons were responsible for monitoring each goal, (b) methods of communication followup, (c) personal reactions to the process, and (d) a preliminary date for David's next Group Action Planning meeting.

Given the significant information that emerged from the meeting, the PBS counselor promptly followed up with a concrete plan of action for all persons who attended. The plan of action included David's long-term goals, short-term goals, and the names and agreed-upon responsibilities of each person involved in the Group Action Planning process. The plan of action was mailed to each participant along with minutes of the meeting and the phone numbers and addresses of everybody involved in the process. In addition to mailing the information, the PBS counselor called Robert to follow up on his feelings and perceptions of the Group Action Plan meeting.

Very importantly, the PBS counselor followed up with David the week after his Action Group to discuss his feelings about the process and his progress towards the short-term goals listed on his action plan. Further, the PBS counselor and coordinator worked with David's teachers to provide full information concerning David's Group Action Planning meeting.

Family and professional perspectives regarding the benefits of Group Action Planning are provided in Table 2.

**Future Plans for Providing Level 4 Supports**

Future plans to strengthen David's support include the continuation of weekly sessions with the PBS counselor to discuss and monitor the short-term goals generated by David's Action Plan group. Further, the PBS counselor is working with David to enable him to explore and determine his hopes for the future and ensure that these hopes and goals are woven into the Group Action Planning. In addition to weekly individual supports, the counselor will continue to work closely with David's teachers to ensure that communication is facilitated between all members of the team. The PBS counselor and coordinator hope that future meetings will move towards a more unified front of support for David, with educators, friends, and other significant family members attending and providing support at the meetings. David's second Group Action Planning meeting has been scheduled for the beginning of the school

year to review his progress over the summer and to discuss his academic and behavioral goals and vision for the new school year.

### Conclusion

At the end of David's seventh-grade year, his impeding behaviors in the home and neighborhood had improved. Robert shared with the PBS counselor that David has had less verbal and physical altercations with neighborhood kids and that he has been relatively successful at adhering to his structured eating and sleeping schedule. Although David continues to demonstrate some impeding behaviors in the school setting, several teachers report that his behavior has improved as a result of individual counseling sessions and enhanced communication between the school and his family.

It is evident that Level 4 supports have enabled David to attain behavioral progress that was not attained at Level 1, 2 and 3. Given the complex nature of David's impeding behaviors across school, home, and neighborhood environments, Level 4 support has provided an opportunity for all persons directly involved with David to come together to support his needs in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.

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**Table 1**

David's Long- and Short-Term Goals Determined by his Family

#### Long-Term Goals

- David will have quality friends and long-term friendships.
- David will graduate from high school and attend college or a vocational training school.
- David will learn self-sufficiency skills.

#### Short-Term Goals

- David's father will enroll David in a community youth program that provides opportunities for David to interact with his peers in a structured environment.
- David's grandmother will help David enroll in the church chaperone program, where he will have an opportunity to work with his peers in a structured environment.
- David's teachers and the PBS team will arrange for social skill group instruction for David and his classmates.
- A behavioral monitoring system will be implemented and used across all environments, with the assistance of David, his teachers, and his family.
- Because David is interested in mechanical engineering, his cousin will provide instruction over the summer in motorcycle repair and maintenance. David will also attend races with his cousin to gain a better understanding of the field of racing and motorcycle repair.
- Robert will work closely with David to ensure that he is on a systematic eating, sleeping, and rising schedule.
- David's grandmother will help him keep track of his money through a budgeting system.

**Table 2**

Perspectives on Group Action Planning Benefits

#### David

- David like the fact that all of his family members took time to come together on his behalf.
- David enjoyed talking about his future, both in the short term and the long term.
- David reported that he felt his family listened to his concerns.

#### Family

- The meeting provided all family members an opportunity to hear one another's concerns about David's challenges in home, school, and community settings.
- The meeting provided an opportunity for the family to explore and try to understand the complexities of David's challenges.
- The meeting provided an opportunity for the family to plan appropriate supports with the assistance of the PBS counselor and the coordinator.
- The meeting demonstrated the school's willingness to work closely with the family in planning and supporting David's PBS plan.

#### PBS Counselor and Coordinator

- Working closely with the family provided an opportunity to understand the family's specific concerns and goals.
- More assistance with PBS was forthcoming from participants.
- Progress in accomplishing goals was accelerated.

#### Teachers

- Teachers gained new insights into the roots of David's impeding behaviors.
- Many of the teachers were able to look at David's challenges through a more "proactive" lens.
- Many teachers recognized the importance of creating alliances with David's family members in efforts to better support David in the educational setting.
- Coordination of information between home and school has provided an opportunity for the persons supporting David to work in a streamlined fashion.