Laying the Foundation for Positive Behavior Support through Person-Centered Planning

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One of the principal features of positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) for individual students with serious problem behavior is a commitment to a collaborative team approach. This feature of PBIS is especially important for those students whose behavior problems have been occurring for some time, are evident in multiple settings, and present substantial obstacles to the student's opportunities for learning, friendships, and quality of life. These are the students who require individualized planning and intervention, and for whom effective supports are apt to require more intensive and comprehensive attention. A truly collaborative team approach can be difficult to achieve because it requires commitment and it contrasts sharply with the types of team meetings that most parents, students and professionals have typically experienced. Still, the establishment of a unified, collaborative approach to a student's support can be the difference between being effective or ineffective and, in our experience, the commitment is well worth it. The general term that describes the pathway to effective team processes has come to be known as person-centered planning.

Person-centered planning differs significantly in form and philosophy from traditional planning processes. In person-centered planning, the team consists of individuals that have a stake in the success of the student. The team may include friends, family, community members, caring professionals and, whenever possible, the student with problem behavior. This group is brought together to collaborate in a series of activities that allow the participants to come to a common understanding of the student's history, current life experiences, and goals for the future. These activities are frequently guided by a skilled facilitator using graphic recordings (words and pictures on large sheets of paper) of the process.

Name	Preference	Description
Personal Profiling	O'Brien, Mount & O'Brien, 1990	Team identifies critical themes in a person's life in the areas of people,places, health, history, etc. in coming to a common understanding of the person.
Personal Futures Planning	Mount, 1987; Mount & Zwernick, 1988	Team uses the themes identified in the personal profile to develop a plan for the person's future that typically addresses home, school/work, community, choices, and relationships.
Planning Alternative Tomorrows	Pearpoint, O'Brien, &	Team may address long -and-short-term planning for the person and can clearly

with Hope (PATH)	Forest, 1996	identify the dreams and desires of the person.
Making Action Plans (MAP)	Vandercook, York, & Forest, 1989	Team follows an established framework that addresses who the person is and his or her history, "dreams", "nightmares", strengths, gifts, and talents.
Essential Lifestyle Planning	Smull, 1997	Team supports the individual to express his or her choices or preferences that are considered "non-negotiables", "strong preferences", and "highly desireable" and to develop an action plan.

If you would like to view a PowerPoint presentation that has samples of several of these person-centered planning approaches, click here. In addition to a sample PATH and MAP processes, the person centered planning approach used by projects at the University of South Florida, including the Florida Positive Behavior Support Project, is included in this presentation. This process adapts several of these person-centered planning approaches into a model that can be completed in about 2-3 hours with a planning team.

Person-centered Planning's Values Base

Although person-centered planning processes differ in form and emphasis, all share a common values base that makes them "person-centered." First, there is a commitment to listening to the student and the family to identify the big and small choices and preferences they have for their everyday lives. Second, there is a commitment to the student being present and participating in the community, gaining and maintaining satisfying relationships, and developing personal competencies and skills. Finally, there is a belief that the student, family, and team can accomplish significant goals and outcomes that are consistent with these values.

These values allow person-centered planning teams to operate from a strength-based perspective rather than from a deficit and punishment perspective that sees the problem as residing in the student. A person-centered planning approach sees the dreams, skills, and strengths of the student and team as the necessary foundation for understanding that problem behavior is simply a sign of a problem life and environment. A comprehensive understanding of a student's life might actually produce the awareness that problem behavior is not at all unexpected given the challenges and context of the person's environment. In fact, the team may come to wonder why serious problem behavior isn't even more serious!

How PCP Leads to an Effective PBIS Process

Although not initially considered a behavior support strategy, person-centered planning processes became a part of positive behavior support approaches over a decade ago because researchers and practitioners began to realize that person-centered planning approaches could establish and enhance a positive

behavior support approach (Kincaid, 1996). Since then, person-centered planning has had a profound impact on how positive behavior support approaches are delivered in homes, schools, and communities (Kincaid & Fox, 2001). Person-centered planning has led to a more effective delivery of comprehensive positive behavior support in the following ways:

Collaborative teaming. Most, if not all, requests for positive behavior support for students with problem behavior originate from situations where other approaches have failed. Frequently, those teams are neither "person-centered" nor a "team." Perhaps they have been operating in a crisis mode, are "burned out", or are unable to focus on anything positive about the behavior of the person. Team members may blame each other and the student for their inability to address problem behaviors. Often statements like "If _____ (student, parent, teacher, psychologist, etc.) would just _____, we wouldn't be here now" are overheard.

Any traditional attempt to intervene with the problem behavior, or even to initiate a functional behavior assessment, is likely to fail because the team is likely to be unreceptive to change. Although not a panacea, person-centered planning provides the process and philosophy to gradually, and in some cases dramatically, change the context in which the team functions. Often, within a few short hours, a team can begin the process of embracing the positive, respecting the student and each other, and getting motivated for change. Ask any experienced facilitator of person-centered planning processes and they can provide you with numerous examples of apparently miraculous attitude and behavioral change from team members that have resulted in a commitment to a collaborative team. With this collaborative team in place, a positive behavior support process has a foundation on which to grow.

An inclusive process. Traditional behavior management approaches have frequently neglected to include the student with the problem behavior and his or her parents in the development of a support plan. The student and the family have sometimes been seen as extraneous to the development of a technically precise behavior plan. In addition, the people who know the person best (teacher, assistant, friends, etc.) have often been excluded because their roles have not been valued or defined in the context of developing a support plan.

Person-centered planning seeks to include and involve individuals in the decisions that impact their lives. This includes the student with problem behaviors, as well as family members, school personnel, friends, and community members. Such an approach is built on a profound respect for the knowledge, commitment, and skills of all those individuals. This respect results in a commitment to listen to differing views, to building consensus, and to include each member of the team in the positive behavior support process.

Quality of life outcomes. Positive behavior support emphasizes outcomes that extend well beyond simple

or discrete behavior change (Carr et al., 1999). The development of friendships, functional communication, independent living in the community, academic success, and inclusive education settings are just a few of the broad quality of life outcomes for students that may be targeted in addition to decreases in problem behaviors. There are also significant outcomes for families (community participation, reduced stress, etc.) and for professionals (satisfaction, recognition, rewarding collaborations with families and other professionals, etc.) that can be achieved as a result of a comprehensive positive behavior support process.

Each of these quality of life outcomes is likely to be identified in an effective person-centered planning approach. Supporting the team to envision a positive future for the student and to set short-term and long-term goals will often direct the team to consider a set of broader quality of life outcomes as indicative of a successful team process. Without developing and frequently revisiting the person-centered plan, the positive behavior support team often faces a conflict with systems contingencies that want a "quick fix" for serious behavioral and lifestyle issues, thus lessening the overall impact of positive behavior support to provide lasting and substantial change in the life of the student.

Context variables. Researchers and practitioners have long known that the tools and interventions of positive behavior support alone cannot guarantee successful outcomes for a child, family and system (Albin, Lucyshyn, Horner, & Flannery, 1996). Much of the success of positive behavior support is built on an understanding of how to effectively imbed an empirically-valid technology within the context of the student's life. In other words, it is not enough to know what to do and multiple ways to do it. It is as important to know as much about the person, their environment and their support systems as possible so that what you do fits their life.

Person-centered planning can identify many critical context variables that might impact the development and implementation of a positive behavior support plan. In fact, information gleaned from a person-centered plan may identify whether there is even a need for ongoing behavioral support. If people are living in places they don't want to live and doing things that they don't want to do, it is unlikely that a positive behavior support plan will have a lasting impact on their quality of life. Perhaps substantial lifestyle changes such as a new school, a new curriculum, or an inclusive setting may be more critical than a behavior support plan for the student's success. Although such situations do occasionally present themselves in a person-centered planning process, it is far more likely that a positive behavior support plan will still need to be developed, but will be more effective because of the specific student, family, systems, and environmental information gathered through the process.

Sustainability. The previous four outcomes of person-centered planning lay a foundation that can make the initial positive behavior support effort more effective. However, they also enhance the ability of behavior support plan to produce sustainable outcomes. As the student continues to grow and develop and

as their environment continues to change (positively or negatively), the behavior support plan will also need to be adapted. These adaptations will often require the team to revise or revisit the existing person-centered plan or to even consider whether a new plan or a different planning process might be necessary for the student. Sustaining quality of life improvements and pursuing new goals will often require changes in multiple aspects of the positive behavior support process including the person-centered plan.

We hope that this short introduction to person-centered planning has clarified the significant impact such processes can have on the successful outcomes of positive behavior support approaches. We also hope that parents and professionals will advocate for positive behavior support approaches that are built on a process of person-centered planning.

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