

Preschool Behavior Resource Guide: A Framework of Tiered Supports

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Introduction

The New York City Department of Education (DOE) is committed to supporting the positive behavior and social and emotional development of all preschool children. Research indicates that strong social and emotional competencies in early childhood are directly linked to (a) increased self-esteem, (b) better academic performance, (c) a decrease in special education referrals, and (d) greater wellbeing throughout life. Because positive behavior and social and emotional competencies are learned skill sets that need experience to develop, it is important that schools cultivate professional dispositions and intentionally foster and teach young children these skills.

Emphasizing social and emotional competence also helps support the inclusion of all children. Teaching social and emotional skills to children with and without disabilities in inclusive settings supports children’s emotional literacy, encourages friendships, facilitates problem-solving skills, helps children navigate the expectations of different environments, and builds community—all of which help children be more successful.

Purpose

This resource offers a framework to support schools with the systematic implementation of evidence-based practices to develop young children’s social and emotional competencies and positive behavior. It focuses on proactive measures to effect positive outcomes for all children and to prevent the development and/or occurrence of challenging behavior. It includes a broad overview of the fundamental principles of early childhood development and early learning that underpin effective early childhood educational settings, summaries of key instructional practices and conditions, and provides resources to extend and deepen learning.

Schools are encouraged to use this resource, in conjunction with the DOE Preschool Special Education Office’s companion document, [Behavioral Supports and Interventions Quality Indicators: Classroom-Based Supports and Interventions](#), to guide discussions around existing practices and supports to drive planning and school improvement and to inform the development, selection, and implementation of evidence-based strategies.

Neither this behavior resource guide nor the behavioral supports and interventions quality indicators document is intended to prescribe definitive strategies or to be used as a checklist.

New York State Education Department (NYSED) Guidance

The NYSED is focused on improving outcomes for young children through the inclusion of social and emotional learning and behavioral supports in schools.

- The [NYSED Field Memo \(July 2015\): Suspension and Expulsion of Preschool Children](#) provides information regarding federal and state policy to ensure challenging behaviors exhibited by preschool children are addressed in the context of a comprehensive approach to behavior support that is designed to teach, nurture and encourage positive social behaviors. It requires that preschool programs establish school-wide and tiered supports to address challenging behaviors.
- The [NYSED Blueprint for Improved Results for Students with Disabilities \(November 2015\)](#) is a statewide framework of expectations for improved instruction and results for all students with disabilities. It focuses on seven core research and evidence-based principles and practices, e.g., schools provide multi-tiered systems of behavioral and academic support.
- The [NYSED Special Education Field Advisory \(June 2016\)](#) requires preschool special education providers to adopt and implement a program-wide system of positive evidence-based practices to support social and emotional competence and teach social-emotional skills.

NYSED: Social and Emotional Learning

In August 2018, the NYSED published [Social Emotional Learning: Essential for Learning, Essential for Life](#). This document is a guide to help schools with implementing programs and practices to advance children's social and emotional skills and competencies. It names five interrelated core social and emotional competencies identified by the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#) as those children and adults need to learn to be successful in school and life: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Indicators for these competencies and a learning standard for adaptability are articulated within the social and emotional learning domain of the [NYS Prekindergarten Learning Standards](#). The continuum of social and emotional development and learning for children, birth through age eight, is outlined in the [NYS Early Learning Guidelines](#). The Head Start [Early Learning Outcomes Framework \(ELOF\)](#) also presents five domains of early learning designed to show the continuum of learning for infants, toddlers and preschool children.

Frameworks of Tiered Supports

School-Wide Frameworks of Tiered Supports

- A **Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)** is a school-wide prevention-based framework of team-driven data-based problem solving for improving the outcomes of every child through a layered continuum of supports and evidence-based practices in *behavior and academics*. MTSS is driven by six essential components that are embedded into systems and structures at the classroom, school, and district level.
 - **Response to Intervention (RTI)** is an example of MTSS for academics.
 - **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)** (sometimes referred to as School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports [SWPBS]) is an evidence-based example of MTSS for social, emotional, and behavior support for school-age children.
 - The **Pyramid Model** is an evidence-based example of MTSS for promoting the healthy social and emotional development of young children. It is uniquely designed to address the needs of infants, toddlers, and preschool children. When schools are implementing PBIS, the Pyramid Model is used within early education classrooms to guide the implementation of promotion, prevention, and intervention practices.

A Framework of Tiered Supports for the Classroom

A framework of tiered supports gives schools a way to systematize their efforts to optimize desired social and emotional outcomes for children and reduce the need for intensive behavioral interventions. It is a prevention-based approach to challenging behavior based on the idea that preventing problems is more effective, for more children, than treating them as they arise.

A tiered framework focuses on effective teaching and skill building for **all** children in **all** classrooms. Through a continuum of increasingly intense and focused practices and data-based decision-making, children's shared and individual social, emotional, and behavioral needs can be met.

A tiered framework is typically depicted as a triangle with three levels of supports. Practices range from support for all children (core universal support), to support for some children (targeted support), to support for a few children (intensive support). Each tier is layered upon the previous one so that children receive additional support, not support that replaces what preceded it.

Types of support describe the degree of need a child has at a particular time, not something inherent to the child. The type and intensity of support is matched to children's needs versus placing a child at a particular tier. In other words, there is no such thing as a Tier I, Tier II, or Tier III child. Rather, there are Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III supports.

Children who are typically developing and those who have or are at risk for developmental delays or disabilities can be supported at any tier. Support is intended to be fluid and responsive to children's needs and progress.

Continuum of Supports

Tier I – Core Universal Instruction and Supports

Tier I supports include core, universal research-based practices for teaching and learning for **all** children in **all** classrooms. This includes effective academic and social and emotional instruction and support. It is designed to promote healthy relationships and social and emotional development and prevent challenging behavior.

When implemented with fidelity, most children (80-90%) will develop the social and emotional competencies and positive behaviors necessary for learning, socializing, managing their feelings, and responding to environmental demands in productive ways.

Tier II – Targeted Supports and Interventions

Tier II includes targeted supports and interventions and explicit social and emotional instruction for **some** children (10-15%) who have not adequately responded to Tier I. In addition to and aligned with Tier I practices, children receive more systematic and focused instruction and supports as well as interventions targeting specific skills.

Tier III – Intensive Supports and Interventions

Tier III includes intensive, comprehensive and highly individualized interventions and supports for a **few** children (1-5%) who have not sufficiently responded to Tier I and Tier II. In addition to and aligned with Tier I and II practices, child data is used to identify children's need(s) and to develop a support plan that matches the specific need(s).

Key Components at Every Tier

Promoting skills and preventing challenging behavior is fundamental to each tier:

- Tier I focuses on preventing the occurrence of challenging behavior,
- Tier II focuses on preventing risk factors or early-onset challenging behaviors from progressing, and
- Tier III focuses on reducing the intensity and duration of challenging behaviors.

The use of ongoing assessment and progress monitoring to inform all instructional decisions is consistent across tiers. Data-based decision making helps ensure that the type and level of support matches children's needs.

Collaboration with families/caregivers is central to every tier. From the start, schools should take meaningful action to partner with families/caregivers to promote children's positive behavior and social and emotional development.

Positive and Supportive Relationships

Positive and supportive relationships anchor tiers of support and are the foundation for a school culture that sets children up to thrive. Healthy development depends on the quality and reliability of a young child's relationships with the important people in their life, both within and outside the family/caregiver. Even the development of a child's brain architecture depends on the establishment of these relationships.

Principles of Practice

Teacher-Child Relationships

Positive and supportive relationships between teaching teams and children are the basis for teaching and learning in the early childhood classroom. It is in the context of nurturing and responsive relationships with adults that young children learn and develop social and emotional knowledge, understandings, attitudes, skills, and competencies. These relationships ultimately affect their self-concept, self-regulation, emotional well-being, behavior, and social awareness. When children develop social and emotional competencies, they are more capable of seeking help when needed, managing their own emotions, and problem solving difficult situations.

Strong connections between adults and children also provide a supportive context for addressing challenging behavior. As adults build positive relationships with children, their potential influence on children's behavior grows significantly. Children are more apt to observe and imitate caring adults and to look for ways to get more positive attention. Alternatively, studies have shown that children who have insecure relationships with their teaching teams had more difficulty interacting with peers and engaged in more conflict with their teaching teams.

When children engage in challenging behavior, especially behavior that is aggressive or disruptive, teaching teams often have a hard time establishing positive relationships with them. By contrast, effective teaching teams find ways to form meaningful relationships with these children. They recognize that these are the very children probably most in need of a helping relationship with a caring adult.

Resources to Support Implementation

- Lesaux, N., Jones, S., Paratore Bock, K. & Russ Harris, J. (2015), ["The Regulated Learning Environment: Supporting Adults to Support Children"](#)
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, ["Serve and Return"](#)
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004), ["Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships: Working Paper 1"](#)
- U.S. Department of Education, ["Fostering Healthy Social and Emotional Development in Young Children"](#)
- Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC), ["Fostering Connections"](#)
- Banking Time, ["Preschool Relationships Enhancement Project Pre-K Manual"](#)
- Joseph, G. & Strain, P. (2010). ["Building Positive Relationships with Young Children"](#)
- Ellsberg Edge, E. (2019) ["What's Love Got to Do with It? Relationships and Reflections in Early Childhood Programs"](#)

Trauma or Adversity

For children who have experienced trauma or adversity, a consistent and nurturing relationship with a teacher can be especially powerful. Research shows that the single most common factor for children who develop the capacity to overcome serious hardship is having at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult. A safe and caring relationship with an adult can empower children, build resilience, and buffer them from the adverse effects of stress.

Resources to Support Implementation

- **Video:** Nadine Burke Harris, [“How Childhood Trauma Affects Health Across a Lifetime”](#)
- Statman-Weil, K. (2015), [“Creating Trauma Sensitive Classrooms”](#)
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2014). [“Excessive Stress Disrupts the Architecture of the Developing Brain: Working Paper 3”](#)
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2011). [“Building the Brain’s ‘Air Traffic Control’ System: How Early Experiences Shape the Development of Executive Function: Working Paper 11”](#)
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2015). [“Supportive Relationships and Active Skill-Building Strengthen the Foundations of Resilience: Working Paper 13”](#)
- Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development, [“The Impact of Trauma on Infants, Toddlers and Young Children”](#)
- The Pyramid Model Consortium, [“Checklist of Early Childhood Practices that Support Social Emotional Development and Trauma-Informed Care”](#)
- Burns, M.S. (2020), [“How Teachers can Counteract Adverse Childhood Experiences with Positive Ones”](#)

Adult Emotional Regulation

Effective teaching teams reflect on their reactions and responses to children’s behavior and demonstrate well-developed emotional recognition and self-regulation. When children are struggling with big emotions and stressful situations, effective teaching teams remain calm, provide meaningful assistance, show empathy, and model communication skills.

Resources to Support Implementation

- **Video:** Center for Early Childhood Education Eastern Connecticut State University, [“Reflecting on our Reactions and Responses to Children’s Behavior”](#)
- Lesaux, N.K., Jones, S.M., Paratore, B., & Russ Harris, J. (2015). [“The Regulated Learning Environment: Supporting Adults to Support Children”](#)
- Jones, S.M., Bouffard, S.M., & Weissbound, R. (2013). [“Educators’ Social and Emotional Skills Vital to Learning”](#)
- Zinsser, K.M., Denham, S.A., & Curby, T.W. (2018). [“Becoming a Social and Emotional Teacher: The Heart of Good Guidance”](#)

Implicit Bias

Effective teaching teams consider any implicit bias they may have about a child and/or the reason for the challenging behavior. They understand how their attitudes toward children can shape their treatment of children and what they ultimately learn.

Without supportive and responsive relationships between teaching teams and children that are genuine and sincere, supports and interventions at Tier I, II and III will not be effective. Remember that children often know whether a teacher is being authentic, and they respond accordingly.

Resources to Support Implementation

- National Education Association (NEA). [“When Implicit Bias Shapes Teacher Expectations”](#)
- **Webinar:** Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children, [“Understanding Implicit Bias and Its Role in Early Learning Environments”](#)

Class Community

Children feel cared for and part of a community when they connect with others and build positive relationships and friendships.

In a caring class community, there are positive and supportive relationships between adults and children and among children. Through engagement with peers, children learn how to share, to engage in reciprocal interactions, e.g., taking turns or managing their own impulses. Children also learn to respect differences, to value one another, and to demonstrate greater compassion and empathy.

Full membership in a class community and opportunities for positive interaction with peers is often absent for children with challenging behaviors. Young children with challenging behavior are often rejected or avoided by their peers and receive less positive feedback from teaching teams. A lack of interaction with peers deprives children, particularly those who are struggling with behavior challenges, necessary opportunities to learn and practice prosocial behaviors and important peer feedback that can help them learn to monitor and adapt their behavior.

Effective teaching teams establish a class community that ensures a sense of belonging and safety for every child. They create a safe space where every child feels valued. Effective teaching teams recognize that preschool children cannot become socially competent without multiple opportunities to interact with one another. They take deliberate steps to provide support and experiences that help every child connect with peers in order to form friendships.

Resources to Support Implementation

- Responsive Classroom (2007), [“What Teaching Matthew Taught Me”](#)
- Head Start Center for Inclusion, [“Member of the Class”](#)
- Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC), [“Creating a Caring Community”](#)
- The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) at Vanderbilt University, [“You’ve Got to Have Friends”](#)

Relationships with Families/Caregivers

Positive and respectful relationships between staff and families/caregivers provide opportunities to share and acquire information necessary for advancing children’s social and emotional development and for addressing challenging behavior. Effective teaching teams seek family/caregiver input about their goals and expectations for their children and respond with sensitivity to those priorities. Effective teaching teams listen to family/caregiver concerns and respect family/caregiver personal and cultural preferences.

Families/caregivers have deep, intimate knowledge about their children and this information is invaluable for making decisions and supporting behavior planning. On the other hand, families/caregivers do not feel like partners in the relationship when staff members see themselves as having all the knowledge and insight about children. When staff members believe all families/caregivers have strengths and that families/caregivers can help their children succeed, staff members and families/caregivers can work together to solve problems and negotiate differences in order to meet children’s needs and improve outcomes.

When there are strong relationships, family/caregiver and teaching teams are better able to understand the child’s behavior across contexts and successfully implement interventions.

Resources to Support Implementation

- Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center (ECLKC), [“Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework”](#)
- Koralek, D. G., Nemeth, K. N., & Ramsey, K. (2019). *Families & educators together: building great relationships that support young children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI), [“Implementation: Family Engagement”](#)
- PBIS OSEP Technical Assistance Center, [“Aligning and Integrating Family Engagement in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports \(PBIS\)”](#)
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), [“Schools, Families, and Social and Emotional Learning - Ideas and Tools for Working with Parents and Families”](#)

Staff Relationships

Supportive and respectful relationships are as important to the social and emotional well-being of staff as they are to children. Positive relationships with colleagues can improve workplace culture and productivity, decrease stress levels, motivate adults to perform their best and create a sense of belonging. Feeling known and appreciated in a community can encourage creativity and collaboration. These elements are essential for instructional planning, knowledge building, problem-solving, and engaging in continuous improvement discourse.

Children benefit when adults at school have positive relationships with one another. When adults experience relationships that are supportive, respectful, and trusting, they are better able to support children, form caring relationships with them, and build inclusive class communities that encourage children’s learning and development.

Children have a front row seat to how teaching teams engage with each other and handle disagreements and frustrations. These are the models children see daily. They provide feedback to children to either encourage or discourage certain types of behaviors.

Effective school leaders serve as models of healthy relationships and have a plan in place to support professional relationships throughout the building. If the relationships between administrators and teaching teams are trusting,

generous, helpful, and cooperative, then the relationships between teaching teams and children, between child and child, and between teaching teams and families/caregivers are likely to be trusting, generous, helpful, and cooperative.

Resources to Support Implementation

- Fournier, R., Solis Cervera, M., Buckley, K., & Gutierrez, A. (2009). ["Stories from the Field: Cultivating relationships through administrator actions"](#)
- Westerberg, T. (2016). ["The Principal Factor"](#)

The Science of Early Childhood Development and Learning

The science of early childhood development and learning is the basis for effective instruction and practices across all tiers. This knowledge base informs (a) how children learn and develop, (b) what approaches and conditions tend to work best for them, (c) what they need to know, and (d) how adults can support their learning, development, and needs.

Knowledge of how children within a given age span typically develop and learn provides a general framework to guide teaching teams in preparing the learning environment, considering curriculum, designing learning experiences, and teaching and interacting with children.

Effective teaching teams draw on the principles of child development and learning, as well as the knowledge base on effective practices and use this information to advance learning and development for individual and groups of children.

Resources to Support Implementation

- PennState Extension (2016), [“Why Learn About Child Development?”](#)
- National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning (NCECDTL), [“The Science of Child Development and Learning”](#)
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, [“In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development”](#)

Tier I – Core Universal Instruction and Supports

Tier I practices are the core, universal, instruction and supports that **all** children in **all** classrooms receive. These are the evidence-based practices known to maximize social and emotional learning for every child and prevent challenging behavior.

In a tiered framework, Tier I is purposely depicted as wider than Tiers II and III to symbolize its function as the foundation for other practices. And it is proportionally deeper than Tiers II and III to indicate that more intensive support or instruction is less likely to be necessary if high-quality Tier I support and instruction are in place.

When teaching teams focus on core, universal instruction that promotes and teaches positive behavior and social and emotional skills, they decrease the likelihood of challenging behavior from occurring and the need for targeted and intensive, individualized interventions. This proactive, preventative approach is also more effective than waiting for challenging behaviors to occur and then responding.

Elements of core, universal instruction include:

- a learning environment where every child feels safe and supported,
- research-based, developmentally appropriate curriculum that fosters all areas of development and is aligned to the standards,
- evidence-based teaching practices grounded in principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL),
- ongoing progress monitoring and data collection using a valid and reliable authentic assessment system, and
- quality professional learning opportunities to provide teaching teams with the tools to ensure all children are actively engaged and successful.

Principles of Practice

Environment

Learning Environment

Effective learning environments are supportive, sensitive, and responsive to the way young children process information, interact, grow, and develop. These high-quality environments foster development in all domains, promote active learning and engagement for every child and prevent challenging behavior. Building environments in which children feel valued and supported requires educators to know a great deal about children’s developmental pathways and progressions in all areas. It also requires they appreciate that children develop in each area at different rates and in different ways and hold space in the classroom for these individual pathways.

Many challenging behaviors in preschool classrooms can be prevented by designing environments that promote children’s engagement, helping children learn what to do, and teaching children new social skills and emotional competencies.

Physical Environment

A well-designed physical environment is fundamental to an effective learning environment. The arrangement of furnishings, selection, placement, and relevance of materials, design and display of visual materials and the messages that the physical environment sends to children all have a direct effect on children’s behavior in the classroom.

Effective physical spaces are safe, organized, well-equipped, engaging, and flexible. They provide developmentally appropriate (DAP) activities, materials, and experiences and send positive messages to children that advance learning

and children's social behavior. Well-designed physical environments also include schedules, routines, and transitions that maximize learning and prevent challenging behavior by providing structure, predictability, and instruction on how to access, use, and respond to environmental demands and expectations. This helps children know what to do, when to do it, and what is expected of them. When children know these things, they are less likely to demonstrate challenging behavior.

Social Environment

Effective social environments provide a positive social climate in which children feel safe and supported and want to be. Here, adults are reliable, responsive and attuned to every child. They engage children in meaningful ways and provide frequent encouragement, modeling, and positive feedback to foster positive behavior and build children's social and emotional repertoire. In a supportive social environment, interactions between children are nurtured by adults who understand the developmental continuum of emotional literacy and prosocial behavior and guide children through these stages in responsible ways. When children feel safe, supported, and cared for, they are less likely to demonstrate challenging behavior.

Resources to Support Implementation

- The Iris Center Peabody College Vanderbilt University, [“Early Childhood Environments”](#)
- WestEd Center for Child & Family Studies Teaching Pyramid, [“Classroom Materials”](#)
- WestEd Center for Child & Family Studies Teaching Pyramid, [“Resources and Background Materials”](#)
- Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC), [“Effective Teaching Practices: Engaging Interactions and Environments”](#)
- PennState Extension, [“Interactions Matter: Positive Teacher-Child Interaction Strategies”](#)
- Alter, P. & Conroy, M. (n.d.), [“Preventing Challenging Behavior in Young Children: Effective Practices”](#)

Curriculum

Effective preschool curriculum is research based, developmentally appropriate, and aligned to the standards. It addresses all domains of development and fosters growth within and across domains. It promotes learning through child-initiated play, child-centered learning experiences, and meaningful interactions among children and between children and their teaching teams. Effective curriculum reflects how and in what sequence children acquire specific concepts, skills, and abilities and builds on children's backgrounds, interests, motivations, and prior experiences. When children are engaged and interested in the curriculum content they are less likely to demonstrate challenging behavior.

Instruction

Academic Instruction

Effective academic instruction is a key factor in preventing challenging behavior. Effective instruction includes evidence-based teaching practices that are developmentally and culturally appropriate and are grounded in the principles of UDL. High quality instruction is delivered in the context of responsive interactions between children and teaching teams and provides access to the curriculum for every child. Instructional approaches and strategies that are in keeping with children's developmental level (and not their chronological age) and lessons designed for multiple learning modalities, strengths and needs help children master goals and optimize social and emotional competencies that are essential for success in the classroom and across the lifespan.

When teaching teams plan activities with multiple levels for scaffolding; allowing children to work at different levels and on different activities, children are more likely to be actively engaged and appropriately challenged and less likely to be disinterested, frustrated, overwhelmed, and demonstrate challenging behavior.

Social and Emotional Skills Instruction

Social and emotional skills instruction is an important and necessary component of a prevention-based approach to challenging behavior. Maturation alone does not provide sufficient environmental support for children to learn the complex repertoire of social and emotional skills and behaviors they need to act on and react to their environment in productive ways.

In order for children to become socially and emotionally competent, teaching teams must provide children with instruction that intentionally promotes and teaches these competencies. Effective teaching teams make available experiences that teach social skills through a variety of planned actions such as lessons, role playing, modeling, and activities that encourage cooperation, sharing, turn-taking, and requesting and by embedding social and emotional instruction into daily classroom activities.

Effective teaching teams consistently acknowledge and give specific positive feedback to children for appropriate behaviors and good decisions. They supply developmentally appropriate positive guidance and explicit teaching to children on rules and expectations, identifying and labeling emotions in themselves and others, and strategies for problem solving and conflict resolution. By teaching children the social and emotional skills they need for successful interactions and regulating emotions, teaching teams can prevent children's challenging behavior.

Resources to Support Implementation

- Vanderbilt University Peabody College, [“About the Magic 8 Classroom Practices”](#)
- [Center for Early Childhood Education Eastern Connecticut State University](#)
- The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) at Vanderbilt University, [“Inventory of Practices for Promoting Children’s Social Emotional Competence”](#)
- PennState Extension, [“Applying Developmentally Appropriate Practice”](#)
- The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) at Vanderbilt University, [“Teaching Your Child to Identify and Express Emotions”](#)
- NYSED, [“Fostering Healthy Social & Emotional Development in Young Children: Tips for Early Childhood Teachers and Providers”](#)
- Jung, L.A. & Smith, D. (2018), [“Tear Down Your Behavior Chart!”](#)
- WestEd Center for Child & Family Studies Teaching Pyramid, “Tell Me What to Do Instead” [CLASSROOM VERSION](#), [FAMILY VERSION](#)
- WestEd Center for Child & Family Studies Teaching Pyramid, [“Moving From Praise to Acknowledgement: Providing Children with Authentic Support”](#)
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2011), [“Building the Brain’s ‘Air Traffic Control’ System: How Early Experiences Shape the Development of Executive Function: Working Paper No. 11”](#)
- National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI) (2019), [“A Practice Guide for Teaching Executive Function Skills to Preschoolers through the Pyramid Model”](#)

Assessment and Progress Monitoring

Ongoing, systematic collection and analysis of data using a valid and reliable developmentally appropriate assessment tool should be used to determine whether children are responding to instruction and to ensure necessary adjustments are made in a timely manner.

Information should be gathered and analyzed from multiple data sources and across all developmental domains, to track children's learning and growth, plan activities, provide supports to aid children's progress toward mastery of goals, and to provide ongoing information to families/caregivers.

Effective teaching teams also have systems and structures in place for how they will share data with families/caregivers and engage them in planning for their child.

When teaching teams have comprehensive and objective data on all aspects of children's learning and development they can identify environmental conditions in the classroom and lagging skills children have that may contribute to challenging behavior. Effective teaching teams use this information to provide differentiated supports, scaffold learning activities, and identify areas of implementation that may be weak or inconsistent.

It is important that teaching teams collect and review reliable data prior to considering or implementing Tier II and Tier III supports and interventions. Teaching teams must first be able to assure that children have access to effective teaching, support, and environments before concluding that children need more intensive support.

Resources to Support Implementation

- NAEYC, [Assessment](#)
- New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council, "Effective Use of Appropriate Assessments in Prekindergarten through 3rd Grade: Building a Strong Foundation for the New York State Learning Standards"

Professional Learning

Effective schools offer ongoing opportunities for teaching teams to receive supportive, descriptive feedback, and meaningful professional learning. These opportunities should provide clear expectations for practice as well as content to build the knowledge, dispositions, and competencies teaching teams need to provide effective early childhood education. Activities such as mentoring and frequent classroom observations can help meet the individual needs of teaching teams and professional learning topics such as specialized instruction, trauma-informed practices, and positive behavior supports (PBS) can inform teaching and learning.

Tier II – Targeted Supports and Interventions

Tier II addresses the needs of children, typically 10-15%, who require more support than is available for all children at Tier I and less support than that of individualized, intensive interventions at Tier III.

Targeted, supplemental supports and interventions are provided for some children based on data indicating they need more intentional, focused and explicit instruction and interventions. These supports and interventions target specific social skills and emotional regulation to make behavioral gains. At this tier, the goal is to prevent challenging behavior from progressing for children who are at some elevated risk or who need some additional support in particular areas, e.g., having experienced a known risk factor, underdeveloped or lagging skills, friendship skills.

Targeted supports and interventions can be provided for individual children or a few children; some of whom may share a social or emotional learning need, e.g. expressing emotions, handling disappointment or frustration, social problem solving, etc. Targeted supports and interventions should be delivered through a systematic teaching approach that allows children to acquire and use new skills easily, over time, and in a variety of situations.

A strong Tier I foundation is necessary for Tier II supports and interventions to be effective. If more than approximately 15% of students are receiving support at this level, teaching teams should look back at their Tier I practices and check for quality, execution, and fidelity.

Principles of Practice

Data Analysis

As with universal supports, data-based decision making guides the Tier II process. Ongoing authentic assessment data should be collected and analyzed to identify children in need of additional supports and more focused, explicit instruction and to inform decisions about targeted interventions. Teaching teams should first analyze data to consider whether children's areas of need could be addressed by refining the quality and/or execution of Tier I practices. They should reflect on what core universal instruction looks and sounds like in their classroom, what, when, where and how they teach, and whether practices are evidence-based and implemented with fidelity.

Once gaps in Tier I practices have been ruled out, teaching teams should use assessment data to design effective teaching approaches and plan instruction. Data collection should look at what a child can do independently and/or with guidance and supports from adults and/or peers. Multiple sources of information, including observations, children's work, and checklists should be collected on an ongoing basis during daily classroom activities.

Progress Monitoring

Ongoing progress monitoring, at regular intervals, should be used to help teaching teams and families/caregivers monitor children's individual progress. Based on documented progress and outcomes, changes in teaching team practice and/or child supports may be warranted. Reliable and objective information is necessary to gauge the effectiveness of interventions in meeting goals for individual or groups of children. An effective intervention and/or support should produce measurable differences in social and emotional skills and/or behavior and an increase in positive outcomes, e.g. increased time on task, use of language versus physical means to get wants met, more frequently initiating engagement with peers, etc.

Targeted supports and interventions are only intended to be provided for as long as data substantiates a need.

Communicate with Families/caregivers

Families/caregivers should be informed of additional supports and interventions being provided within the classroom for their children and be involved as much as possible.

To successfully partner with families/caregivers, teaching teams should develop relationships with families/caregivers grounded in mutual trust and respect, cooperation and shared responsibility. Collaboration should include, but is not limited to, regular and frequent communication on their child's progress, multiple opportunities for participation, link to a range of services, planned conferences and resources to support their child's progress.

When implementing additional supports in the classroom, teaching teams should discuss their rationale using relevant data and share strategies with families/caregivers. Data should be in family/caregiver friendly language and in the preferred language and mode of communication for the family/caregiver. Families/caregivers should also be provided with information on what children are expected to know and be able to do at the end of preschool as outlined in The New York State Prekindergarten Learning Standards.

Resources to Support Implementation

- Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children (TACSEI), [Promoting Social Behavior of Young Children in Group Settings \(2009\)](#)
- National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI), ["Teaching Tools for Young Children with Challenging Behavior"](#)
- Young Children on the Web, ["You Got It!" Teaching Social and Emotional Skills \(2006\)](#)

Tier III – Intensive Supports and Interventions

Tier III practices start with strong Tier I and Tier II foundations. They refer to intensive, individualized interventions for a few children, typically 1-5%, who have persistent challenging behavior and significant social and emotional needs that have not been responsive to Tier I and Tier II supports.

Intensive supports and interventions involve comprehensive, assessment-based interventions designed to target explicit challenging behaviors. Interventions are child-specific and are provided to children in addition to Tier I and Tier II supports.

Children with and without an Individualized Education Program (IEP) can be supported at Tier III. However, just because a child has an IEP, it does not automatically mean their social, emotional, and/or behavioral needs rise to this level of intensive intervention. Conversely, children without IEPs who receive this level of support, should not automatically be referred for an evaluation for special education services. Although a referral to the Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) is a possible Tier III intervention, and may be warranted, this decision should follow an in-depth analysis of data, including rate of progress, and a review of the nature, breadth and fidelity of strategies and supports that have been implemented.

The goal of Tier III is to provide highly intensive and individualized supports and interventions to extinguish challenging behavior or minimize the severity and/or the frequency of the behavior, support the development of new/replacement skills, and transition the child to less intensive supports, e.g., Tier I or Tier II. If more than approximately 5% of children are receiving support at this level, teaching teams should look back at their Tier I and Tier II practices and check for quality, execution, and fidelity.

Principles of Practice

Functional Assessment

Tier III supports are the most intensive supports the school offers. These supports are the most resource intensive due to the individualized approach of developing and carrying out interventions. At this level, schools typically rely on formal assessments to determine a child's need and to develop an individualized support plan.

A functional assessment or functional behavioral assessment (FBA) is a process used to understand the factors related to a child's challenging behavior in order to identify effective interventions and develop a personalized support plan. A functional assessment of a child's behavior is comprehensive and follows a specific information gathering and problem solving process including; identifying environmental events that trigger the challenging behavior, skills deficits that make the challenging behavior a reasonable alternative, and reactions following the behavior that contribute to its' continuation.

Children with and without IEPs may benefit from a functional assessment to address persistent challenging behavior. In collaboration with families/caregivers, ongoing monitoring of children's responses to supports and interventions at Tiers I and II, should be used to decide if a functional assessment is the appropriate next step for individual children.

Behavior Support Plan

Based on the results of the functional assessment, a behavior support plan or behavior intervention plan (BIP) may or may not be developed. If a behavior support plan is justified, teaching teams and the child's family/caregiver should work together to determine the child's strengths, preferences, and needs and develop the plan. The behavior support plan includes strategies for preventing challenging behavior, supporting the child's use of new behaviors to replace the

challenging behavior, and changing how adults respond such that they support the use of the new skill rather than maintaining the use of the challenging behavior.

By linking intervention to assessment information, the approach is individualized and targets specific environmental features and skill difficulties making it effective and efficient.

Progress Monitoring

Progress monitoring at Tier III usually occurs more frequently than at the other tiers. Here, in addition to fundamental data collection and analysis, data practices should measure the frequency, duration, and intensity of targeted behaviors at scheduled intervals to gauge children's progress and the impact of practices in the behavior support plan.

All adults who support the child, whether in or out of the classroom should be involved in data collection and analysis including teachers, teacher assistants, teacher aides, paraprofessionals, 1:1 paraprofessionals, related service providers, and Special Education Itinerant Teachers (SEITs).

Teaching teams should regularly collaborate with families/caregivers to evaluate and refine intervention strategies and determine when changes are needed. When a child meets the established behavior goal/s they should receive less intensive support (Tier I or Tier II). Intensive interventions are only intended to be provided for as long as data substantiates a need.

Resources to Support Implementation

- Anderson, M. (2018), ["Getting Consistent with Consequences"](#)
- Teaching Tolerance (2016), ["Reframing Classroom Management: A Toolkit for Educators"](#)
- Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development, [Creating Teaching Tools for Young Children with Challenging Behavior](#)
- Teaching Tolerance ["Reframing Classroom Management: A Toolkit for Educators"](#)

Summary and Recommendations

Every preschool teaching team can take proactive measures to prevent children's challenging behavior and support inclusion for all children.



By adopting a framework that focuses on promoting children's social and emotional development and positive behavior and providing children with a level of support matched to their level of social, emotional, and/or behavioral need; teaching teams can prevent challenging behavior from developing, progressing, and intensifying.

Preschool teaching teams are encouraged to incorporate a framework of tiered behavioral supports into their practice to ensure all children have access to effective learning environments and education programs.

Recommended Resources - Websites

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

- Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT Center), [“MTSS: Universal Support”](#)
- Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT Center) [“Resource Shelf”](#)
- [New York City Department of Education \(NYCDOE\) Multi-Tiered System of Support](#)

Response to Intervention

- The Division for Early Childhood for Exceptional Children (DEC), [Framework for Response to Intervention in Early Childhood: Description and Implications \(2013\)](#)

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

- [Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#)

Pyramid Model

- [The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning \(CSEFEL\)](#)
- [National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations \(NCPMI\)](#)
- [The Pyramid Model Consortium](#)
- [The Colorado Center for Social Emotional Competence and Inclusion](#)

Social and Emotional Development

- [Center on the Developing Child – Harvard University](#)
- [Zero to Three](#)
- [Barton Lab at Vanderbilt University](#)

Early Childhood Mental Health

- [Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development](#)
- [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)
- [Center for Early Child Mental Health Consultation](#)

Early Care and Education

- [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#)
- [Office of Head Start, Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center \(ECLKC\)](#)
- [Center for Early Childhood Education Eastern Connecticut State University](#)
- [Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center](#)
- [Eastern Connecticut Center for Early Childhood Education](#)
- [Iris Center](#)
- [NYS Early Childhood Advisory Council \(ECAC\)](#)
- [NYS Education Department Early Learning](#)
- [Penn State Extension Better Kid Care](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education Early Learning](#)

Recommended Resources - Books

- Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (Eds.). (2013). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs: Serving children from birth through age 8.* (3rd ed.). National Association for the Education of Young Children.

- Dombro, A., Jablon, J. & Stetson, C. (2011). *Powerful interactions*. National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Gartrell, D. (2004). *The power of guidance: Teaching social-emotional skills in early childhood classrooms*. Thomson/Delmar Learning.
- Howell, J. & Reinhard, K. (2015). *Rituals and traditions, Fostering a sense of community in preschool*. Washington: National Association for the education of young children.
- Sours, K. & Hall, P.A. (2016). *Fostering resilient learners: Strategies for creating a trauma sensitive classroom*. ASCD.

Key Terms

Authentic Assessment use multiple methods to evaluate children’s comprehension and approaches to learning within real life contexts that are grounded in naturally occurring instructional activities. These assessments are typically based on collections of students’ work across developmental domains and subject areas. They are “criterion referenced” which means that the assessment compares students’ own knowledge and skill over time.

Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP): A plan to address problem behavior that includes, as appropriate, positive behavioral interventions, strategies and supports, program modifications and supplementary aids and services that may be required to address the problem behavior.

Challenging behavior is defined as any persistent behavior that significantly interferes with academic learning and/or social interactions. This includes unresponsiveness despite numerous, developmentally appropriate interventions and supports and actions that may lead to serious self-injury or harm to others. It is important to remember that typically developing preschool children may display behaviors such as withdrawal, anxiety, hyperactivity, noncompliance, tantrums and physical and/or verbal aggression, but these behaviors are often specific to a situation and last for a brief time. The concern for challenging behaviors is the persistence, intensity and frequency of the behaviors that determine their seriousness and the need for interventions.

Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE): The CPSE is responsible for coordinating the special education process for children ages 3 to 5. CPSEs serve families in the district where a family resides, regardless of where children receive preschool services. There are 10 CPSEs in different areas of the city. Each CPSE is part of a larger Committee on Special Education (CSE) office. A Chairperson oversees the CSE office, including the CPSE.

CSE/CPSE contact information can be found at <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/learning/special-education/help/committees-on-special-education>

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) is an approach to teaching grounded in the research on how young children develop and learn and in what is known about effective early education. Its framework is designed to promote young children’s optimal learning and development. DAP involves teaching teams meeting young children where they are, both as individuals and as part of a group; and helping each child meet challenging and achievable learning goals.

Emotional development refers to the ability of a young child to identify, express and manage his/her feelings while understanding and responding to the feelings of others. For a preschool child, this includes self-regulation and self-awareness skills and the ability to express their emotions in appropriate ways. For instance, this could be observed when a child is comforting peers that are hurt or upset, adapting to changes in the class environment, calming himself/herself after a disappointment or demonstrating the ability to handle frustration.

Emotional literacy is the constellation of skills, strategies, maps, and tools that help us understand the world and ourselves and to become emotionally fluent. It is an essential element of social and emotional learning.

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA): A problem-solving process for addressing student challenging behaviors. FBA relies on a variety of techniques and strategies to identify the reasons for a specific behavior and to help teaching teams select interventions that directly address the problem behavior.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): The IEP documents children's eligibility for special education services and formalizes the school system's plan to provide special education services that are appropriate for their unique needs. It contains specific information about the child and the education program designed to meet their needs, including:

- Child's current performance in school and goals that can be reasonably accomplished in a school year;
- Special education and related services, including counseling; speech, occupational or physical therapy; paraprofessional support; assistive technology; behavior intervention and modifications;
- Participation with non-disabled children and/or mainstreaming opportunities;
- Participation in state and citywide tests, promotion criteria and diploma objectives;
- Date services will begin, how often they will be provided, where they will be provided and for how long;
- Means of measuring progress.

Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) provides a process to understand and resolve the problem behavior of individuals or children that is based on values and empirical research. It offers an approach to develop an understanding of why the child engages in problem behavior and strategies to prevent the occurrence of problem behavior while teaching the child new skills. Positive behavior support offers a holistic approach that considers all factors that have an impact on a child and the child's behavior. It can be used to address problem behaviors that range from aggression, tantrums, and property destruction to social withdrawal.

Progress Monitoring is a term used to describe the systematic and continuous process of informing decisions about whether children receiving research-based instruction or caregiving practices at any tier are responding to that instruction.

Social and emotional competence is the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one's life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development. It includes self-awareness, control of impulsivity, working collaboratively, and caring about oneself and others.

Social and emotional learning is the process through which children and adults develop the skills, attitudes, and values necessary to acquire social and emotional competence.

Social development refers to the ability of young children to create and sustain social relationships with peers and adults. For a preschool child, this includes building positive relationships, negotiating difficult situations, interacting with peers and understanding their needs. For instance, in the classroom environment, this could be a child reaching out to adults for assistance, initiating an activity with a peer, negotiating with a peer to take turns or plan a play activity or using simple strategies to solve a problem.

Social literacy involves the process of learning about a range of social skills as well as the development of social knowledge to understand and interpret various social problems that must be faced in life.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn. It is a research-based set of principles to guide the design of learning environments that are accessible and effective for all. The UDL framework offers an overarching approach to designing meaningful learning opportunities that address learner variability and suggests purposeful, proactive attention to the design of goals, assessments, methods, and materials. UDL aims to change the design of the environment rather than to change the learner. [The Center for Applied Special Technology \(CAST\)](#) developed UDL Guidelines, a tool to support educators, curriculum developers, researchers, parents, and more to apply the UDL framework to practice.

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