An Optimistic Approach to Helping Students with Challenging Behaviors

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Behavior Problems and Stress

- Research on families who have a child with autism spectrum disorder finds that the parents have higher levels of stress than parents who have a child with other disorders.
- Research with teachers indicate that they experience high levels of stress as well.

Parenting and Stress

- If there are also behavioral challenges, the biological stress profiles of these families resemble; parents of children with cancer, combat soldiers, Holocaust survivors, and individuals suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

“Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional.”

Buddhist proverb

Fundamental Concepts

- Children with disabilities can learn
- All children and behavior problems are not the same
- Implications for parents/teachers/staff?

Does PBS/ABA Work?

- Does Positive Behavioral Support and/or Applied Behavior Analysis “work” for everyone?
- Example – sleep problems
Does PBS/ABA Work?

- Durand & Rost (2005)
- Reviewed 149 articles published in JABA
- Only 26% of the experiments indicated how participants were selected for inclusion.


Research Dilemma

- Are we helping all individuals or just the ones who fully participate in our interventions?

How do We Help This Mother?

- Why I don't yell at my son with Aspergers.wmv

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- Why I don't yell at my son with Aspergers.wmv

Explanatory Framework

- How do we explain why some children become more challenging?
- Positive, negative and automatic reinforcement processes – explain child behavior.
- Why do others (family members, teachers, caregivers) behave in ways that can increase problems (child effects)?
Explanatory Framework

- The “coercive family process” is the defining explanatory framework for problem behavior in children with conduct disorder (Patterson, 1982).
- It explains the nature of severe behavior problems and the family’s role in its development and maintenance.

Coercive Family Process

Explanatory Framework

- No similar model exists for these behaviors as observed in children with autism spectrum disorders.

Prevention Project

- Prospective longitudinal study
  - N=128
  - Age 3 to age 6


Developmental Progression

- Child Temperament
- Child Skills
- Family Stress
- Parenting Style
- Behavior Problem

Predicting Later Problems

- Not severity of disability
- Not severity of behavior problem
Predicting Later Problems

- Best Predictor?
- Parental pessimism

How you see yourself as a parent/teacher

**Negative Thoughts**
- I cannot control this child.
- I have doubts about my ability to help this child improve his/her behavior.

**Positive Thoughts**
- I am usually able to handle problem situations.
- I am capable of helping this child improve.

How you think others see you as a parent/teacher

**Negative Thought**
- When my child misbehaves, people see me as a bad parent/teacher.

**Positive Thought**
- I believe I am a good parent/teacher.

How you think others view this child

**Negative Thought**
- I think that other people judge this child when he/she is misbehaving.

**Positive Thought**
- Most parents/teachers have times when certain children misbehave.

How you see this child’s ability control his/her behavior

**Negative Thoughts**
- This child is not capable of behaving better.
- This child’s behavior is related to the disability.

**Positive Thought**
- This child is capable of behaving better.

How you view the problem situation

**Negative Thought**
- All of these situations are always a major problem.

**Positive Thought**
- This particular incident was a problem.
How you view the future

Negative Thought
• Things will never get better or will get worse.
• I will never have my own life.

Positive Thought
• Things can and will get better.

Who is responsible for a problem situation (Child)

Negative Thought
• This child is doing this on purpose.

Positive Thought
• This child is not intentionally being disruptive.

Who is responsible for a problem situation (Others)

Negative Thought
• If only others would follow my suggestions correctly, this child would be better behaved.

Positive Thought
• Everyone is doing their best under the circumstances.

Who is responsible for a problem situation (Self)

Negative Thought
• It is my fault that things are going wrong.

Positive Thought
• I am doing the best that I can under the circumstances.

Who should be responsible for the problem situation

Negative Thought
• Why am I always the one who has to be responsible for these situations?

Positive Thought
• Everyone is doing the best they can under the circumstances.

The Thoughts Quiz

• Reflect back on a recent problem situation.
• Estimate what was going through your mind at the time by indicating if you “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” that you were thinking something like this around the time of the difficult situation.
Thoughts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have little or no control over this situation.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I'm not sure how best to handle this situation.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. In this situation, others are judging me negatively as a parent.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. In this situation, others are judging my child negatively.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My child is not able to control this behavior.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My child's disability or condition is causing or contributing to this problem.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I'm not sure whether or not my child knows.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I can't control this problem on my own.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I don't have the power to stop the problem.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. This situation is always a problem for my child.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I feel it is my fault that this is a problem.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I feel I am always responsible for my child's behavior.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Attitudinal Influences

Child Control

Parent/Teacher Control

Child Efficacy

Self-Efficacy

Explanatory Framework

The “concession process” may help integrate a variety of observations about the development of challenging behaviors in ASD and how we react to them.

Child-Adult Interactions

Child Behavior

Adult Behavior

Outcomes

Escalation

Escalation (Coercion)

De-Escalation (Concession)

Child Abuse

Intermittent Coercion

Avoidance

The Concession Process

The tendency to change environments and approaches to avoid problem behavior.
Current Approaches

• Providing Intervention Strategies
• General Support

Positive Family Intervention

• Can we make pessimistic families more optimistic?
• Integrating cognitive-behavioral intervention with positive behavioral support

Positive Family Intervention

Help
Positive Behavior Support

Hope
Optimistic Parenting

Assess
Prevent
Replace

Confidence
Awareness
Gratitude

PFI Protocol

• Review homework (e.g., information gathered, strategies attempted)

• Share a difficulty and a success and thoughts/feelings associated with the event; introduce strategies

• Teach PBS: presentation, examples, application, and practice

• Analyze self-talk throughout session

PFI Protocol

Assess of eligibility (n=150)

Randomize participants (n=75)

Exclude (n=28): Not meeting inclusion criteria (n=25)
Other reasons (n=3)

Assigned to PFI Group (n=75)
Received intervention (n=73)
Did not receive intervention (n=2)

Assigned to PBS Group (n=75)
Received intervention (n=74)
Did not receive intervention (n=1)

Analysis (n=150)
Lost to follow-up (n=71)

Analysis (n=143)
Excluded from analysis (n=24)

Analysis (n=119)
Excluded from analysis (n=56)

Analysis (n=63)
Lost to follow-up (n=43)
Positive Family Intervention

- Session 1: Establishing Goals
- Session 2: Gathering Information
- Session 3: Analysis and Plan Design
- Session 4: Preventing Problems
- Session 5: Managing Consequences
- Session 6: Replacing Behavior
- Session 7: Putting Plan in Place
- Session 8: Monitoring Results

Self-Talk Journal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When my son sat down for dinner, he started whining and crying. (difficulty)</td>
<td>I thought “We will never have a normal dinner” and felt defeated, thinking that meals will always be a problem.</td>
<td>I gave him cookies so he would stop crying.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Session 2: Gathering Information

- To explore the relationship between thoughts and behavior
- To understand the purpose and goals of behavior
- To learn how to gather information through:
  - observing behavior
  - interviewing people
  - recording information
- To begin gathering information

Situations & Beliefs

- Identify situations that provide triggers to negative thinking (e.g., What was exactly happening? Where were you? What did your child and others do?)
- Identify beliefs associated with the event (e.g., What were you feeling and thinking while this was going on? What did you say to yourself?)
Example from Protocol

- **Homework** (i.e., information gathered through watching and recording; MAS)
- Ask them to **share a difficulty** and thoughts/feelings associated with the event
- Ask them to **share a success** and thoughts/feelings associated with the event

Share a Difficulty

- Example - “She wouldn’t leave the TV to go to school.”
- What were you thinking?
- Pessimistic Scenario – “Here we go again.”
- Optimistic Scenario – “I knew this might happen and I have a plan to handle her if she tantrums.”

Share a Success

- Example - “My son sat through a whole meal without yelling.”
- What were you thinking?
- Pessimistic Scenario – “He must be in a good phase.”
- Optimistic Scenario – “My efforts and patience are beginning to pay off.”

Consequences

- Identify the consequences or results of the negative (and positive) thinking (e.g., When you were thinking _____, how did that affect what you did? What were the results of your actions – both immediate and long-term?)

Recognizing Consequences

- Parenting “in the moment”
Session 3: Analysis and Plan Design
- To use distraction to deal with unproductive self-talk
- To use information to analyze patterns
- To summarize patterns / generate hypotheses
- To use patterns to brainstorm intervention ideas

Distraction
- Strategy to help with pessimistic beliefs
- Distracting oneself from the pessimistic thoughts

Session 4: Preventing Problems
- To understand the disputation process
- To discuss circumstances that increase the likelihood of behavior
- To learn strategies for avoiding difficult situations
- To learn strategies for improving difficult situations
- To learn ways to provide a child with choices
- To learn strategies for prompting good behavior

Disputation - A strategy for challenging beliefs
- Step 1: Identify the negative belief (e.g., What exactly do you say to yourself that is pessimistic?).
- Step 2: List evidence that supports the belief. (e.g., What makes you believe that to be true?)

Disputation
- Step 3: Find alternative explanations for the problem (e.g., Are there other possible reasons/motives?).
- Step 4: Evaluate the usefulness of maintaining the belief. (e.g., In what ways does that belief benefit you/others or improve the situation?)
Disputing Negative Beliefs

- CRNG Disputation.wmv

Session 5: Managing Consequences

- To use affirmations to replace pessimistic beliefs
- To understand how reactions may maintain your child’s behavior
- To learn how to manage consequences
- To take precautions when using punishment

Substitution

- Replace the pessimistic ideas with positive thoughts or affirmations (e.g., “This is a difficult situation and I am handling it well. I am a committed, loving parent. If I can follow through with my plan, things will get better.”)

Substituting Positive Thoughts

- RASA Substitution.wmv

Session 6: Replacing Behavior

- To practice cognitive restructuring
- To select replacement behaviors for your child
- To teach your child skills

Session 7: Putting Plan in Place

- To review self-talk and apply cognitive strategies
- To design a behavior plan
- To make sure the behavior plan fits
- To improve your child and family’s lives
- To create an action plan
Session 8: Monitoring Results

- To review self-talk and continue to apply cognitive strategies
- To make a monitoring plan
- To learn how to make adjustments over time
- To complete the training and continue on your own

Child Outcomes

- A two-way repeated measures ANOVA on the SIB-R GMI scores - significant differences between pre and post treatment.
  - PBS - (Cohen's $d = 1.25$)
  - PFI - (Cohen's $d = 2.20$)
  - PFI Versus PBS Post Treatment (Cohen's $d = 0.94$)

Effect Sizes - small, $d = 0.2$, medium, $d = 0.5$, and large, $d = 0.8$

Quality of Life

- Families from both groups reported significant improvements on following questions;
  - Other members of the family have to do without things because of my child.
  - Sometimes I feel very embarrassed because of my child.
  - My child is able to take part in games or sports.

Quality of Life

- Mothers in PFI condition reported improvement on these questions;
  - My child will be limited in the kind of work he/she can do to make a living.
  - I get almost too tired to enjoy myself.
  - There is a lot of anger and resentment in our family.
  - I am worried much of the time.
Self-Efficacy

- PFI group responded more positively than mothers in the PBS groups.
  - I feel less tense when I take my child out in public.
  - I am less likely to avoid taking my child out in public.
  - Members of our family get to do the same kinds of things other families do.

Child Behavior Change Data
One Year Follow-Up

Parent Fidelity Data
Post Intervention and One Year Follow-Up
Summary of Results

- Both PBS and PFI result in significant improvements in child behavior
- These improvements continue after one year
- Parents report overall improvements on QoL
Summary of Results

- PBS families tend to use avoidance strategies to improve child behavior
- PFI families tend to use more active strategies
- PFI families report more community involvement with their children and less anxiety

Optimistic Teaching

- Teachers received either Optimistic Teaching or traditional behavioral coaching.
- Teachers in the Optimistic Teaching condition implemented significantly more skills related to teaching children social skills.

Optimistic Teaching

- Teachers in the Optimistic Teaching condition reported significantly fewer children with serious social emotional difficulties post-intervention.

Optimistic Teaching

- Teachers in the Optimistic Teaching condition involved families in their children’s social emotional development when compared to teachers who were exposed to traditional behavioral coaching alone.

Optimistic Teaming

- Working with both parents and teachers to examine their thoughts and beliefs.
- Strive for common goals and communication strategies.

The Concession Process

- The tendency to change environments and approaches to avoid problem behavior.
Home Rules


Rules

• Rule #1: Do not yawn. Especially no yawning and talking at the same time.
• Rule #2: Do not have loud background noise. That means TVs, radios, computers, vacuums, or hand mixers (can use, but need to alert him first).
• Rule #3: Do not sneeze and scream at the same time (some people do that without realizing it).
• Rule #4: Do not say “blah, blah, blah…” while speaking.
• Rule #5: I need to see all your old photographs when I visit.

Rules

• Rule #6: I also need to take a mental inventory of all your DVDs, and any VHS movies you may have.
• Rule #7: I rule the TV. I will block the other channels while I’m here, but will unblock them before I go.
• Rule #8: No loud unexpected laughter. Please.
• Rule #9: Unlimited baths are expected.
• Rule #10: Friday night is pizza night. It must be gluten-free.

Rules

• Rule #11: I need to touch you on the chin and the head every time you yawn, sneeze, or sing.
• Rule #12: Keep things orderly and predictable. Please. I need to know the schedule.
• Rule #13: No deviations in the schedule. Please.
• Rule #14: Absolutely do not change your mind or give me more options.
• There are so many other things I could add, so many that they don’t even seem odd to me anymore.

Why ASD?

• Blame disorder (child efficacy)
• Failure to back down in the face of discipline escalation
• Subjective reaction to distress

Positive Family Intervention

• Addresses the needs of children with challenging behavior
• Addresses the need of family members who carry out the plans
• Better outcomes when we address both

Ten Tips to Optimistic Parenting

1. Explore your thoughts and feelings before, during and after meltdowns. Practice noticing these experiences so you can see later if they help or hurt your parenting skills.

2. If your spouse or partner doesn’t help – ask why. Just as your thoughts and feelings interfere with good parenting, so might your spouses’ self-doubts or doubts about your child. This involves the seemingly obvious but often very difficult issue that confronts most couples – “communication.”

3. Believe you are a good parent. When you add up all you do for your child, the positives far outweigh any occasional lapses you may experience.

4. Believe your child can change. All of our experience tells us any child can improve his or her challenging behavior.

5. Take care of yourself. You can’t help your child if you are hurting. Give yourself permission to occasionally be “selfish.”

6. Leverage – don’t multi-task. Doing two things at once means you may be doing two things poorly.

7. Parent in the moment. Keeping reminding yourself to focus on what is happening right now with your child (for example, having a good bath) rather than other things (for example, thinking about what to make for dinner while bathing your child).

8. List three good things that happen each day.

9. Express gratitude toward those who help you.

10. Sometimes bad is OK. Feeling bad sometimes is inevitable for everyone.
Optimistic Parenting


Optimistic Parenting