Preventing Challenging Behavior: A Model for Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Purpose of Presentation

- Describe issues related to problem behaviors and ASD
- Present a multi-tiered model of prevention
- Discuss implications for practice

Agenda

- Introduction
- Autism and Challenging Behavior
  - Changing Perspectives
- A Model of Prevention
- Implications, Directions and Conclusions

Autism Spectrum Disorder(s)

- A diverse syndrome involving problems with the development of communication and social relatedness… as well as restricted interests and perseverative and stereotypical patterns of behavior
- ASD encompasses a great range of abilities and disabilities
- For instance, some children with ASD have very serious risks for challenging behavior; others have relatively mild risks

Challenging Behaviors

- Destructive Behaviors
  - Aggression; SiB; Property Destruction
- Disruptive Behaviors
  - Long tantrums; Loud, Repetitive Noises; Running, etc.
- Irritating & Interfering Behaviors
  - “self-stim;” repetitive and perseverative speech or actions, etc.
- Social Withdrawal
  - Lack of responsivity and initiations
Importance of Challenging Behaviors

- Barrier to Inclusion, Community Participation, and Social Opportunities
- Most Significant Impediment to Education
- Present Physical & Emotional Risk for Individual and for Families, Teachers, Other Professionals, Peers and Friends
- Need to Prevent/Resolve Challenging Behaviors as Early and as Thoroughly as Possible

It is important to appreciate that challenging behaviors seriously detract from:
- all aspects of social/emotional/intellectual development
- opportunities and quality of life of children
- quality of life of the children’s family members….

Some Changing Perspectives on Autism and Challenging Behaviors

Early (1st Generation) Perspectives

- Challenging Behaviors are “part of autism”
  - Not “diagnostic”, but “characteristic”
  - Intervention = contingency management
    - Largely reactive
    - Reinforcement (DRO) for desired behavior (or absence of problem behavior)
    - Time out, extinction, or punishment for problem behavior

1st Generation Effects

- Often, short-term beneficial effects
- But usually without maintenance or generalization
- Occasionally ineffective, leading to escalating intensity of rewards and negative consequences

Changing (2nd Generation) Perspectives

I. Challenging behaviors are not “part of autism”
II. Challenging behaviors: (1) are maladaptive ways of responding to inadequacies in the environment, (2) occur due to lack of socially-adaptive skills for controlling environment
III. Children with autism are at high risk for developing challenging behaviors due to difficulties with learning, communication, and perception
Changing Perspectives (continued)

- Intervention involves PREVENTING problem behaviors from developing or occurring by:
  1. Arranging the environment so that challenging behaviors are unnecessary (and desired behaviors are encouraged), and
  2. Teaching skills needed to navigate and control the social environment

3rd Generation Challenges

- Developing Strategies for Incorporating Effective Prevention Practices into the Systems that Affect our Service Delivery

Multi-tiered Prevention Frameworks

- Increasingly common (e.g., community health; school-wide PBS)
- Basic framework has 3 levels:
  1) Universal strategies (primary prevention) — for everybody; low intensity prevention practices
  2) Targeted strategies (secondary prevention) — for particularly high risk groups; higher intensity
  3) Indicated strategies (tertiary prevention/ intervention) — for individuals already affected by problem; usually intensive and individualized strategies

Preventing Challenging Behavior for Children with ASD

- LEVEL 3: Individualized Intensive Interventions
- LEVEL 2: Building social and communicative competencies inconsistent with challenging behavior
- LEVEL 1: Building positive relationships, supportive environments, and healthy physiologies

Prevention – Universal (Level 1)

- Positive Relationships
  - Nurturing, caring, secure
  - Enhances influence of adult caregiver
- Physical and Emotional Health
  - Physical health and nutrition
  - Social-emotional well being
  - Safe, responsive, “friendly” and stimulating environment

Prevention – Level 1 Practices

- Adult-child interactions
  - Positive attention
- Organized environment
- Structure, routine, schedule
  - A comprehensible environment
- Instruction
  - Useful communication
  - Social skills
  - Clear, consistent behavioral expectations
Preventing Challenging Behavior for Children with ASD

**Level 2**:
- Individualized Intensive Interventions

**Level 2**: Building social and communicative competencies inconsistent with challenging behavior

**Level 1**: Building positive relationships, supportive environments, and healthy physiologies

**Level 2 Prevention Practices**

- Differences from Level 1 Practices
  - Intensity of Intervention
  - Planfulness of Intervention
  - Intensity of Data Collection
  - Intensity of Family Involvement

For children at risk for challenging behavior:
- Parent training classes
- Social-emotional teaching curricula

Building Functional Competencies

Interventions focused on teaching and building appropriate engagement

- Intervention supports for enhancing motivation
  - E.g., Pivotal Response Training
- Group strategies (classroom models) with direct focus on teaching and motivating social interaction
  - E.g., LEAP; Project DATA; Walden

**Level 3 Practices - Intensive Individualized Interventions**

- Are used for children with persistent and severe challenging behavior
- Are used when children do not respond to preventive practices, child guidance procedures (e.g., redirection), or social-emotional teaching strategies
- Children with multiple, severe risk factors
  - Intellectual-Communicative Disability (e.g., autism)
  - Exposure to substances, violence, depression, poverty, etc., etc.

Positive Behavior Support

Level 3 procedures for children with serious challenging behavior
Level 3 - Positive Behavior Support

- An approach for resolving challenging behaviors that is based on person-centered values, empirical data and a multi-disciplinary scientific orientation
- A pragmatic, data-based problem-solving approach for enhancing development and improving quality of life in natural, everyday contexts
- A preventative approach emphasizing teaching and environmental redesign

PBS - Components

1. Team-building, Goal Setting
   - Person-Centered Planning
2. Functional Assessment of Challenging Behavior
3. Individualized Behavior Support Plan
4. Implementation
5. Evaluation

Core Elements of a Behavior Support Plan Level 3 - PBS

(Link to Assessment Information)

Prevention Strategies – Arrangements of antecedent environment
Teaching Strategies – Building skills to teach throughout the day to replace the challenging behavior
Reinforcers – Providing effective reinforcement schedules (note --- this is the contingency management component)
_________________
+ Evaluation strategies

Evaluation

- All support plans should have some form of evaluation, so team knows if plan (or parts of a plan) is working as intended
- Evaluation can focus on desired outcomes AND on extent to which elements of plan are being implemented
- Evaluation should NOT be complicated or effortful, but it should be valid…and valued

Summary and Conclusions

- Preventing and resolving challenging behaviors is extremely important….
  - Because of the implications for the quality of life of individual and all those who are close to the individual
  - Because of opportunities that can be compromised if challenging behaviors persist

Closing Messages
Implications of the Prevention Model

- Some children with ASD will respond well to high quality implementation of Level 1 (universal) procedures
- Some additional children with ASD will respond well to high quality implementation of Level 2 procedures
- The remaining children with ASD will require implementation of Level 3 procedures

The proportion of children with ASD who require some Level 3 procedures may be high, but we can presume that the implementation of high quality Level 1 and 2 procedures will mitigate the intensity with which the Level 3 procedures need to be implemented.

What We Need to DO

- Early Identification --- because autism presents so many risk factors
- Provide ALL identified children/families with supports for Level 1 prevention strategies
- Provide ALL child care and pre-K classrooms with supports for implementing Level 1 prevention strategies

Need to Do (continued)

- Disseminate the rationale and logic of the multi-tiered prevention framework as well as specific procedures associated with all levels.
- Conduct research to validate and refine prevention model

What We Need To Do

- Provide for training and direct technical assistance so that all children/families have access to effective supports in designing and implementing PBS plans
  - In early intervention programs
  - In schools
  - In community agencies
  - For initial implementation and for ongoing support and evaluation

- Develop, evaluate and disseminate standardized models of PBS to enable large numbers of school practitioners to implement strategies with sufficient fidelity to be effective