

# Practical Tools for Positive Behavior Facilitation

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*Positive Behavior Facilitation (PBF) is a comprehensive approach to understanding and intervening in the behavior of youth. This article describes the components of PBF.*

Research clearly indicates that the behavior of children is best understood and ultimately managed by comprehensive strategies and techniques that consider not only what a child is doing but also why a child is demonstrating a particular behavior (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002; Brendtro & Ness, 1983; Garbarino, 1999; Long, Wood, & Fescer, 2001; Mendler & Curwin, 1999; Redl & Wineman, 1951). All too often, the strategies we attempt to utilize with our children and youth focus exclusively on the what without considering the why. We become focused on the disturbance the child is creating, and most of our energy is used to find ways to make a child stop doing that particular thing. As a model for intervening in behavior, PBF examines not only the what; it purports that the why is as important in effectively intervening in the self-defeating behavior of children and in supporting, or facilitating, the demonstration of positive behavior from our youth.

In *Discipline with Dignity for Challenging Youth*, Mendler and Curwin (1999) write that change is one of the more difficult processes for humans. PBF reminds us that behavior is not microwaveable, meaning that behaviors are generally developed over time, and the changing of these behaviors is also done over a period of time. In today's microwaveable society, we expect everything to happen as speedily and conveniently for us as possible. However, we must remember that human behavior

is not something we can simply pop into a machine, push a button, and have delivered to us in an altered state. Humans develop certain behaviors for reasons that seem to make sense at the time they are developed, and the altering or ceasing of such behaviors is not accomplished with the snap of a finger. PBF supports the efforts of helping adults in intervening in student behavior by providing an understanding of what is necessary to change behavior and the inherent challenges our children face in developing new and more self-supportive behaviors.

PBF also presents a comprehensive continuum for examining, understanding, and intervening in the behavior of acting-out children. Its view is multifaceted, as PBF has been designed to offer a thorough approach in addressing and responding to behaviors. PBF teaches strategies for resolving crisis versus traditional models of behavior intervention, which are often narrow and reactive in nature. Traditional models tend to focus on the cessation of behavior, while ignoring the necessity for resolution of conflict and teaching new behaviors to children and youth.

## Assessment and Action in Positive Behavior Facilitation

Adults who are charged with managing the behavior of children and youth are often very skilled at assessing behavior. Traditionally professionals have

assessed behavior by identifying what is wrong with the behavior of a particular child or group of children (Dewey, 1944; Hobbs, 1994; Redl & Wineman, 1951). However, we are often not quite as skilled at identifying the necessary and appropriate actions to take once we have assessed the child, the behavior, and the particular circumstance. Because traditional models of behavioral intervention are often reactive in their scope, there is a scarcity of models that encourage positive action based upon thorough and logical assessment of the child and the presenting circumstances. PBF recognizes the importance of assessment and action in intervening in behavior. The six tools of PBF are based upon strategies that assist educators in the process of: 1) making thorough assessments of themselves, the child, the environment in which the child is functioning, and the presenting circumstances; and 2) taking appropriate and effective action based upon the assessment and the determination of what is most supportive and educative for the child.

## The Tools of Positive Behavior Facilitation (PBF)

Effective paradigms for behavioral intervention are varied and far-reaching in their scope of examining and responding to student behavior (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002; Brendtro, Ness, & Mitchell, 2001; Kohn, 1996; Long, Wood, & Fescer, 2001). Consequently, PBF presents six tools that are necessary for understanding and intervening successfully in the behavior of children. The purpose of these tools is to promote the mental, behavioral, emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being of children and youth by teaching adults to use techniques and strategies that can minimize inappropriate behaviors and maximize opportunities for positive, more functional behaviors.

The first three tools of PBF are assessment tools that assist professionals in thoroughly and accurately examining the existing variables that impact the behavior of a child. The remaining three tools of PBF are action tools that are specific strategies and techniques for addressing change in the behavior of a child. The six tools of PBF are: 1) awareness and management of self, 2) knowledge of the dynamics of conflict, 3) understanding behavior management vs. behavioral change, 4) therapeutic milieu, 5) surface behavior management techniques, and 6) effective communication.

### Tool #1: Awareness and Management of Self

Almost a half century ago, Jersild (1955) wrote:

To help a [child] have meaningful experiences, an [adult] must know the [child] as a person. This means that the [adult] must strive to know himself. An [adult's] understanding of others can be only as deep as the wisdom he possesses when he looks inward upon himself. How does one achieve understanding of self? One broad principle is this: to gain knowledge of self, one must have the courage to seek it and the humility to accept what one may find. (pp. 82, 83)

These words speak to the importance of the first tool of PBF, Awareness and Management of Self. Facilitation of positive behavior requires us to assess ourselves and examine our own behaviors. In other words, we cannot do for someone else what we cannot or do not do for ourselves. By becoming aware of and managing ourselves, we can learn the impact of thoughts and feelings on our behaviors. This information can then assist us in encouraging our children to understand themselves, which is the foundation of all behavioral change. This first tool:

- Allows for the examination and understanding of personal motivations and how individual frame of reference impacts interactions with children and youth;
- Assists us in remembering that managing the behavior of others is impossible without the ability to manage personal behaviors;
- Provides the opportunity to examine personal patterns of behavior and the thoughts and feelings that support these patterns. This examination supports self-knowledge, self-exploration, and self-correction;
- Offers adults the vital information necessary for self-examination and introspection. Mental and emotional triggers, defense mechanisms, suggestions for strategies for managing feelings, and personality types are all explored.

Through the internalization and practice of awareness and management of self as a tool for PBF, adults can encourage and sustain positive attitudes and behaviors in themselves while facilitating the same in children and youth.

## **Tool #2: Knowledge of the Dynamics of Conflict**

Long (1996) tells us that conflict is often the result when otherwise well-meaning adults get trapped into conflict and crisis events with children and youth. Knowledge of the Dynamics of Conflict teaches recognition of what takes place when conflict arises. Awareness of the dynamics of conflict enables analysis of the interactions among a child's thoughts, feelings, and behavior, and the environment's response or reaction to the child. This tool also provides a powerful model for understanding how children and youth in stress can transfer their stressful feelings to adults and, if the adult is unaware or unprepared, how adults may mirror the student's acting-out behavior.

Knowledge of the dynamics of conflict also allows for an understanding of crisis events and three critical truths about conflict. These truths support us in considering the specific dynamic of conflict and how adults participate in this dynamic. These truths are: 1) we must respond more and react less, 2) relief from a crisis is not resolution of crisis, and 3) conflict is not equivalent to crisis. When utilizing Tool #2, we have critical information that can guide us in responding vs. reacting to conflict, resolving conflict with children, and addressing conflict in ways that do not create crisis events.

## **Tool #3: Understanding the Differences Between Behavior Management and Behavior Change**

Understanding the Differences between Behavior Management and Behavior Change allows us to be clear about our intentions regarding the behavior of children and youth. Many of us are willing to address the behaviors that we see from the youth we serve. However, we are often unclear about what we are attempting to accomplish in addressing the behaviors. We must understand that making a decision about managing behavior or supporting change of behavior is critical in facilitating positive behavior. Once we make this decision, we must realize that management vs. behavior change requires us to use very different skills. This tool distinguishes between what is needed from the adult to manage a child's behavior and what is needed from the adult to facilitate change in a child's behavior.

When we are managing behavior, mastery of a specific set of skills is necessary. In supporting behav-

ioral change, a very different set of skills is required from us. In order to facilitate positive behavior, we must understand the differences between the two, be able to carry out both effectively, and be clear about when it is appropriate to strictly manage behavior vs. to facilitate change of behavior. Many adults who are interacting with children and youth may be addressing behavior without an understanding of the skills they are using or why they are using a particular skill. Many programs are ineffective in addressing the behavior of children because they have not stopped to ask what their goals are when intervening in behavior: management or support of change. Management of behavior is extremely necessary in order for us to educate and support our children. Without it, we can expect chaos and confusion in our environments. However, we must realize that both skills are necessary when intervening in student behavior in ways that encourage development of functional and long-lasting behavioral changes in children and youth.

## **Tool #4: Therapeutic Milieu**

Therapeutic milieu by traditional definition means "healing environment." Many decades ago it was thought that therapeutic milieu, as originally developed by Fritz Redl (1966), was a model with which special educators should be familiar, particularly those with the charge of managing and educating children with serious emotional disturbance. However, because so many of today's children and youth have been psychologically, physically, and emotionally wounded, the creation of therapeutic milieu is more necessary than it has ever been, in both general and specialized settings. The development of therapeutic milieu as a tool of PBF is necessary as it provides a structure for establishing an environment that will nurture and support children as they develop and, in some cases, heal.

The role of therapeutic milieu in Positive Behavior Facilitation directly relates to the climate in which children are served. Through the utilization of this tool, we learn that therapeutic practices are also transferable to all education settings. The establishment of an educational environment and process that considers a child's perceptions, thinking, and feelings is crucial to facilitating positive behavior. The development of a therapeutic milieu requires us to remember that all things in an environment impact upon the well-being of children. Those things can be visible and obvious, while others will

not be visible or quite so obvious. When utilizing the tool of therapeutic milieu, we must be aware of the impact of all factors present in the environment on a child's functioning.

Therapeutic milieu also plays a vital role in Positive Behavior Facilitation because it recognizes the impact of the atmosphere of a particular environment and the role that environment plays in the behavior of children. Many children will behave in one way in certain settings and a completely different way in another setting. Often this is due to the atmosphere or climate of the particular setting. In his seminal work, *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1944) explains that children's activities can be promoted or hindered, stimulated or inhibited by the environment, emphasizing its critical nature. As we observe the behavior of children and ask ourselves what can we do to facilitate positive behavior, therapeutic milieu assists us in understanding the importance of the environment, both physically and psychologically.

#### **Tool #5: Surface Behavior Management Techniques**

It is probably safe to say that adults who seek to support children and youth ask themselves the following questions: "How do I address the 'garden variety' behaviors of children and youth?" "Does every exhibited behavior require me to offer an in-depth response or are some behaviors simply to be managed?" "If there are behaviors that just need to be managed, what are they and how do I do it?" Surface Behavior Management Techniques (SBMTs) are effective and efficient ways of addressing surface behavior.

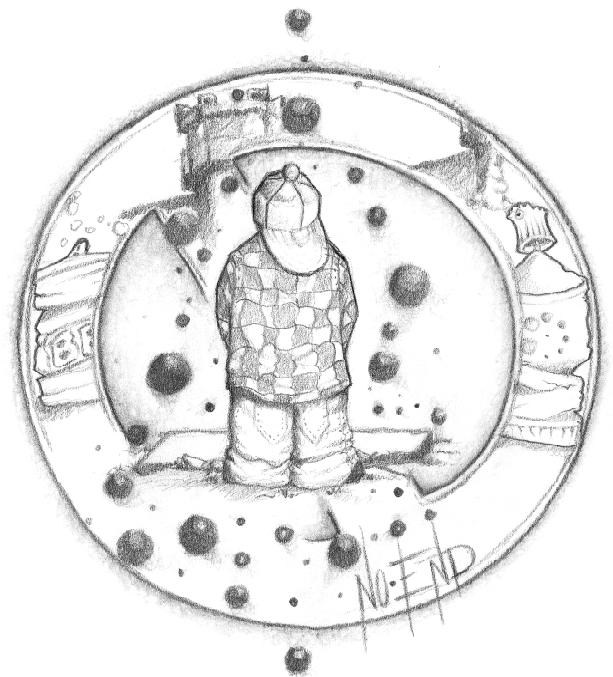
In *Conflict in the Classroom*, Fagan (1996) tells us that many educators have too limited a range of techniques that can be quickly utilized in response to deviant and acting-out behaviors of the children we serve. There are many instances in which we are required to respond to a behavior as simply as possible. The factors that must be considered when making a decision to respond to a behavior and which should drive your decision regarding your response are: 1) What purpose does this behavior serve for this child; in other words, what need is the behavior meeting?; 2) What am I hoping to accomplish in responding this way?; and 3) What do I believe the child needs from me in order to make the best behavioral decisions for him- or herself?

SBMTs are specific strategies and techniques that are effective in managing the surface behavior of children and youth. These techniques can be utilized by adults to restore, maintain, and promote order in the environment and to increase the demonstration of desirable behaviors in children. This tool provides a broad range of skills for intervening in problem behaviors that may impede the on-going education and development of children and youth.

#### **Tool #6: Effective Communication**

Effective Communication offers a comprehensive view of understanding and practicing what is necessary for interacting with children and youth, particularly when either a conflict or a crisis arises. This tool points out that communication with children requires more than casual conversation. By examining and practicing the skills presented here, adults will learn the strategies necessary for effective and helpful communications.

Communicating with children, particularly in times of conflict, involves many more skills than those we use in ordinary conversation. Our goal is to communicate with children in ways that open communication rather than close communication. Our skills in this area can make a great difference for the chil-



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dren and youth we serve. Our skills in communication with youth can determine whether or not our youth begin to believe that “talking out” their issues is more functional than “acting out” their issues.

When we communicate with children and youth in an effort to facilitate positive behavior, we use interviewing skills (Long, Fescer, & Brendtro, 1998; Long, Wood, & Fescer, 2001). Interviewing skills involve the techniques of listening, attending, observing, responding, signaling, and decoding. These skills represent the six necessary elements of the successful interview with children and youth. If we have been effective in our communications with children, their behaviors become less of a mystery and source of frustration for us. Through effective communication we can begin to understand the needs of our children and assist them in making choices that are self-supportive vs. self-defeating.

Effective Communication is central to PBF because it is through communication that we begin to understand the circumstances and events of our children’s lives. The skill of entering into a child’s life space in ways that allow the child to be comfortable is primarily mastered through the knowledge and use of the tool of Effective Communication. When we reach a level of understanding of the conditions in which our children live, we are better able to be empathetic to their struggles and offer support in ways that facilitate positive behavior.

## Conclusion

PBF was developed to address the on-going and increasing training needs of adults who are seeking to effectively serve children and successfully intervene in the behaviors of youth in ways that promote self-management, self-sufficiency, and self-awareness. As a training program, PBF seeks to provide information comprehensively and clearly so that those who are certified in PBF are equipped with the necessary tools to interact with children and youth in ways that uplift them, as opposed to discouraging and minimizing them.

It seems clear that we, as educators and helping adults, cannot continue on the road we are currently on with our children. On our current path, we lose far too many young lives. PBF is a divergence in the road that seeks to join the ranks of many educators and professionals who recognize the dire need of such a divergence. Although Redl & Wineman

(1951) told us over 50 years ago that the manner in which many children’s issues were being addressed was ineffective, we largely have not changed traditional, yet ineffective, models of education and treatment. PBF hopes to expand our thinking and our practice regarding the behaviors of children in ways that encourage us to make an “about-face” and seek effective and caring paths for supporting our youth.

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