Positive Behavior Support

OVERVIEW

Description of the problem

Students with TBI often need a systematic approach to behavior management that differs significantly from the approaches commonly used in schools. They often have difficulty learning from the consequences of their actions; the skills they've learned in rehab frequently don't translate across context and approaches that focus on their disability tend to be counterproductive.

Causes

The parts of the brain that control impulsive behavior and permit learning from the consequences of previous behaviors are frequently damaged in a TBI. Loss of ability in many areas paired with recovering from significant injury can result in depression, sadness and frustration. These challenges can make behavior management difficult and stressful.

Solution

Be proactive in dealing with students who present challenging behaviors. Use established routines, positive communication, lesson planning and environment modifications to prevent or minimize challenging behaviors.

STRATEGIES

Use positive, negotiated, well-understood routines

Even among healthy adults, not knowing what to expect in a situation can cause anxiety. As much as possible, make each day predictable. Use graphic organizers so students can see what is going to happen next. Manage transitions between activities so students aren't taken by surprise.

Example: Something as simple as posting the daily schedule in a visible location can make a big difference. Post the schedule in a highly visible spot and then stick to it.

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Promote positive interactions

Keep your interactions with students as calm and positive as possible.

Example: If your student is upset, don't allow yourself to get upset as well. In a calm voice, give simple 1-step instructions.

Teach students how to notice and control their emotions

When you notice a student getting frustrated, you might say, "I noticed your knuckles are white. Often that means you're frustrated. Yesterday, I noticed your knuckles were white just before you lost control and shouted. What could you do now, while you're still calm, to feel less frustrated and prevent an outburst?" Then talk about what options are open to the student such as asking you for help, taking a break by turning to another task, and so on.

Example: Learning to control emotions is a key skill for all of us, but sometimes students with brain injury need to be taught more explicitly.

Use positive communication

Communicate positively and control the setting to create a momentum of success before introducing difficult or unpleasant tasks.

Example: If reading is difficult for a particular student, but they love science, start with science. Lead them through tasks they know they can do and enjoy doing before asking them to read.

Offer choices

Even young children like to feel they have meaningful choices to make and at least some control over their own lives. As much as possible, give students both choices and control within the constraints of the school setting.

Example: If it's quiet reading time, offer your student a book of choice or to listen to a recorded book. Make sure you are open to both choices, so it doesn't matter which option the student selects.

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Provide meaningful tasks

Tasks and instructions need to feel meaningful, important and interesting to the student doing them. Good lesson planning can prevent problem behaviors by engaging the students in high interest activities that are instructionally appropriate.

Manage the environment

Prevent negative behaviors by changing the environment. Set up the space to create clear areas for certain activities.

Example: Try moving two students who frequently argue to opposite sides of the classroom.

NOTES:

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