



Quarterly Newsletter

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Function-based Behavior Intervention Plans (f-BIP) through a Trauma-Informed Lens

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With 32 years of experience in the field of education as a school psychologist, nine years as a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), and 18 years traveling the State of Alaska working in rural and remote schools, I have witnessed the impact of historical trauma on communities and families; the behavioral manifestations of complex trauma students with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in their histories; Alaskan educators struggling to meet the needs of this student population while concurrently developing secondary trauma. Moreover, this specialist has witnessed educational systems struggle to respond to this group of students' needs.

Students with Emotional-Behavioral Disorders (EBD) often face significant challenges stemming from various factors, including exposure to traumatic experiences, which can lead to learning, social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. Traditional disciplinary approaches, often reliant on punitive measures and power dynamics, can be counterproductive for students with EBD. Function-based Behavior Intervention Plans (f-BIP) are widely recognized as effective in addressing challenging behaviors in students with EBD. However, recent research findings (Pollack et al., 2023) recommend placing greater emphasis on aligning f-BIP with trauma-informed practices (TIPs). The alignment would better support students with EBD and trauma histories. Supporting students with EBD requires a comprehensive and empathetic approach that acknowledges the potential impact of trauma. Educators benefit from a greater understanding of TIPs and its application in schools. Key principles of TIPs include:

Safety: Teachers prioritize students' emotional and physical safety, avoiding any actions that might trigger a stress response. They create a calm and predictable classroom environment, minimize the use of punitive disciplinary practices that could trigger a stress response, and offer students a safe space to de-escalate when needed. Special education aides stay mindful of student interactions, use a gentle and reassuring tone, monitor students for signs of distress, and use least-to-most prompting to minimize behavioral error correction and offer support.

Trustworthiness: Teachers establish and maintain consistent routines, clear expectations, and communicate changes in schedules or activities in advance. Follow through on promises and commitments. Special education aides are reliable and consistent in student interactions and provide clear and predictable support.

Opportunities for Choice and Control: Teachers offer students choices within the classroom whenever possible. Involve students in decision-making processes related to their learning and behavior goals. Special education aides allow students to express their preferences and choose during activities.

Empowerment: Providing students with voice and choice, allowing them to participate in decision-making and fostering a sense of control.

Self-Regulation Skills: Focus on student strengths with instruction-based strategies and a road map to improve the student's self-regulation skills. Plan to reduce behavior escalations quickly in the short term. Provide opportunities for students to develop self-regulation skills and practice coping strategies. Reinforce positive behaviors and efforts toward self-regulation.

Collaboration: Work collaboratively with students, families, and other professionals to develop and implement behavior support plans. Foster positive relationships with students based on mutual respect and understanding.

Relationships: Build healthy relationships based on trust, empathy, and understanding to create a sense of belonging and connection.

Cultural Sensitivity: Recognize and value the diverse cultures within the school community, ensuring that interventions are culturally and gender-responsive.

TIPs focus on understanding the underlying causes of behavior. The trauma-related behaviors that manifest can be carried into the learning environment and should be considered "setting events" that make problems more likely to

occur. Educators can use their knowledge of function-based interventions and provide support that promotes healing and growth. It involves creating a safe and predictable environment, empowering students to participate in solutions, fostering collaboration, and promoting skill development. Creating a trauma-engaged school requires a collective effort from all educators, administrators, and support staff. It involves building strong relationships, implementing school-wide practices that promote safety and support, providing explicit instruction in self-regulation and social-emotional skills, integrating cultural traditions, partnering with families, and prioritizing educator self-care.

Reinforcing a point made earlier, students with an EBD, regardless of trauma history, require explicit instruction in emotional regulation skills. Emotional regulation encompasses several key components, including *recognizing emotions and their intensity, understanding triggers and causes of emotions, managing emotions in healthy and adaptive ways, and expressing emotions appropriately*. By acquiring these skills, students with an EBD and trauma histories can more effectively navigate challenging situations, maintain positive relationships, and make better decisions rather than being driven by impulsive emotions.

References:

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