Precorrection

Module 3

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Billy, a seventh grader with learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) shows behavioral issues when he is transitioning from one setting to another. Ms. Hernandez, a resource room teacher, always reminds him of what he needs to do before he goes to another setting. For example on Tuesdays, he needs to go to Ms. Smith's class to do art with his general education peers. Ms. Hernandez reminds "Billy what is the day today?" Billy says "Tuesday, we are going to Ms. Smith's Art class today." She further reminds, "Remember in the hallway you keep your hands at your sides and voices quiet." She asks another question "When you arrive at Ms. Smith's room, what do you need to do first?" Billy responds, "We need to find our seats." "Billy, what do you do after you find your seat in Art class?" asked Ms. Hernandez. Billy says: "We get our supplies out and wait for Ms. Smith." Ms. Hernandez reinforced: "Great job Billy, that is correct! Let's go to Art now." Every day Ms. Hernandez spends a considerable amount of time trying to get Billy settled in the Art class so Ms. Smith can hand out materials and present the task in her class without disruptions from Billy. If Ms. Hernandez forgets to use the precorrection procedure with Billy, Ms. Smith has to spend 5-7 minutes to gain control of Billy's behavior to help him get ready for the art activity. Not only that, she loses attention and time of other students. Sometimes she cannot get Billy's attention at all and she ends up sending him to Ms. Harris in the principal's office.

Description of Precorrection

This scenario is similar to common situations that special and general educators face in today's schools. They are constantly searching for strategies that prevent problems behaviors from occurring in the classroom, cafeteria, hallways, and on the playground. Precorrection is a classroom management and instructional strategy designed to proactively address academic errors and inappropriate behaviors. Through this procedure, teachers can reduce occurrences of problem behavior by providing behavioral prompts and rehearsals prior to the occurrence of problem behavior. Many students like Billy benefit from reminders about specific expectations

prior to the onset of a problem behavior (De Pry & Sugai, 2002). Verbal statements, behavioral cues, and explicit instructions regarding a desired behavior are given before an opportunity to present the behavior occurs. Precorrection statements should be framed positively and have the expectations embedded (Faul, Stepensky, & Simonsen, 2011)

Research that Supports Precorrection

Researchers have identified precorrection as an effective strategy that improves behavior and prevents the opportunities for disruptions in the classroom and non-education settings (Colvin, Sugai, Good, & Lee, 1997; DePry & Sugai, 2002; Lewis, Colvin, & Sugai, 2000; Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998). With the advent of School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS), educators are increasingly seeking preventative and positively focused approaches to reduce the occurrences of problem behavior (Sandomierski, Kincaid, & Algozzine, 2007; Sugai & Horner, 2002). SWPBS core principles are designed to encourage the mastery of skills or behavioral expectations. When precorrection is assimilated into SWPBS to address student behavior at the universal, supplemental, and targeted interventions (De Pry & Sugai, 2002; Sugai & Horner, 2008), it shows promising results for both large and small groups of students (Oswald, Safran, & Johnson, 2005; Lewis et al., 2000) as well as for the individual student.   Findings of research have shown that precorrection promotes positive student behavior (Barbetta, Norona, & Bicard, 2005; Stormont, Lewis, & Covington, 2007), teaches self-regulation (Sutherland, Lewis-Palmer, Stichter, & Morgan, 2008), and prevents problem behavior from occurring (Lewis et al., 2000; Oswald et al., 2005; Tankersley, Kamps, Mancina, & Weidinger, 1996).

Prompting desired behavior combined with reinforcement of the desired behavior (Flood, Wilder, Flood, & Masuda, 2002; Gena, 2006) and active supervision (De Pry & Sugai, 2002; Lewis et al., 2000) will increase the effectiveness of precorrection. This strategy is most effective when delivered at the time and place that is likely to occasion problem behavior. This enables a student to engage in prosocial behavior by providing descriptive prompts regarding how to behave. Research suggests that frequent (Lancioni et al., 2001) and specific (Hunsaker, 1983) statements increase the effectiveness of the prompts. For an effective precorrection, first the context must be identified in which the problem behavior occurs most frequently, such as: following a teacher request, during transition from one setting to another or change in activity (Lampi, Fenty, & Beaunae, 2005; Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2003). The use of a precorrective prompt reminds or teaches the student the desired behavior (Colvin, 2004). In addition, prompts are used to reduce the student's opportunities to behave inappropriately. The short-term effects include an immediate reduction in behavior problems, with the long-term effects of building good behavioral habits.

When to Consider Precorrection

Focus on Positive Behavior. Precorrection is quite effective for all students; however, it has been shown to be especially useful for increasing social skills for students suspected to be at-risk for developing emotional disabilities (ED). Students demonstrating emotional disabilities often have very complex learning experiences, which rarely include use of positive feedback (Burnett, 2002; Gable, Hendrickson, Young, Shores, & Stowitschek, 1983; McEvoy & Welker, 2000;

Shores, Jack et al., 1993; Wehby, Symons, Canale, & Go, 1998; Wehby, Symons, & Shores, 1995). Research has repeatedly suggested that teachers tend to react more negatively toward students who demonstrate challenging behaviors (Carr, Taylor, & Robinson, 1991; Greenwood, 1996; Gunter & Coutinho, 1997; Wehby et al., 1998). Likewise, Shores, Gunter, and Jack's (1993) research on interactions between students with ED and their teachers found teacher rates of positive feedback strategies for students with ED and occurred as rarely as once per hour. Despite evidence that teachers neglect to use positive feedback with this population, the use of positive behavioral prompts coupled with reinforcement is a strongly recommended strategy for educating students suspected or identified as ED (Kerr & Nelson, 2006).

Effective with Large and Small Groups. Strategies that focus on preventing problem behavior lend themselves to be sustainable if they are equally effective for large and small groups and for the individual student. For example, precorrection with large groups could include reminding a class of the behavioral expectations for an assembly prior to leaving the classroom. All students in the class are reminded of appropriate behaviors to engage in during the assembly time. Prompts provide students immediate information about prosocial behaviors. When students can retain the information and understand it, they are more likely to engage in desirable behavior. To improve retention and comprehension, precorrection must occur prior to entering a situation where problem behavior is likely to occur. Since minor behaviors can lead to a more serious problem, precorrection prevents building of a problem behavior. Teachers' use of precorrection provides students valuable information about their behavior and can decrease the likelihood of behavioral errors in the classrooms.

Works Well with All Ages. This strategy has been proven to be effective for students of all ages; however, precorrection in early childhood has shown lasting effects and is a useful early intervention (Stormont et al., 2007). Social skill instruction during early childhood that is accompanied by teacher prompts and praise can improve social behavior in young children (Tankersley et al., 1996). Coupling precorrective statements with behavior specific praise is an effective behavior support strategy to increase appropriate behaviors and learn social concepts (Flood et al., 2002; Gena, 2006; Stormont et al., 2007). This prevention-focused strategy has been documented for its effectiveness for students of all ages and varied levels of need (Sutherland et al., 2008).

Enhances Positive Relationships. In addition to improved student behavior, additional benefits associated with precorrection have been positive changes in teacher-student relationships which are vital to support child development and learning (Sutherland, 2000). Reducing teacher reliance on negative reprimands can improve the teaching and learning environment by increasing precorrective statements and behavior specific praise to aid in the development of social skills and positive relationships (Kauffman, 2005).

Guidelines for Implementation of Precorrection

General guidelines for providing effective precorrection procedures include consistent, positively stated expectations and reinforcement of demonstration of desired behaviors. Effective use of precorrection begins with presenting prompts in a situation or a context in which teachers remind students of the expected behaviors. Once the teacher anticipates that the

situation or the setting has predictable problems, behavioral errors, and patterns (Kerr & Nelson, 2006), the next step is to modify the setting through visual or auditory reminders, behavioral prompts, or creative activities to improve the effectiveness of precorrection interventions (Colvin, Sugai, & Patching, 1993). Continued practice of the behavioral expectations, coupled with positively reinforcing students for demonstrating prompted expected behavior, results in preventing problem behaviors from occurring.

Let us return back to Billy to see how Ms. Hernandez used the following basic steps of precorrection:

1. *Identifying the problem behavior and the context in which it occurs*. Ms. Hernandez completed an Antecedent/Behavior/Consequence chart and found that Billy had problems with transitions. When Billy could not find his materials in Ms. Smith's class, he started throwing a fit and became more disruptive. Ms. Hernandez and Ms. Smith worked together to identify a designated place where Billy could find his materials.
2. *Prompting, reviewing, and rehearsing expected behavior*. Ms. Hernandez figured out that Billy works better when he is reminded of what to expect in the class. He needs to know the expectations ahead of time and he responds positively when he has opportunities to practice in a simulated situation. He learns what to do and behaves appropriately in Ms. Smith's class.
3. *Providing reinforcement for expected behaviors*. Billy receives reinforcement for practicing the desired behavior in a simulated situation in Ms. Hernandez class. Ms. Smith also reinforces Billy's behavior when he finds his seat and collects his materials from the designated location.
4. *Monitoring the precorrection plan in the context*. Both Ms. Hernandez and Ms. Smith have tracked how the precorrection plan has worked for Billy, if Billy needs additional prompting or teacher guidance. After a year-long data collection and analysis, Ms. Hernandez and Ms. Smith have been able to reduce Billy's number of office referrals significantly. While Ms. Harris, the principal reports that there are "good days and bad days," Billy and his teachers are pleased with the improvement they have seen.

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