

## The Importance of Teaching

This document provides an overview of why teaching behavior expectations is important. It is adapted from the Missouri SWPBIS Tier 1 Team Workbook 2013-14.

### Why Teach?

Why teach? We teach because it works. All of us appreciate knowing what to do, when to do it, and how to do it regardless of what the expectation may be. Effective organizations are clear and purposeful in conveying what is expected and of whom. Consider your own learning history. Can you identify those times when you felt you had been clearly taught what you were to do? Our students need this too. If you are reading this workbook, then you already made the decision to integrate the important skills you possess as an educator and apply them to social behavior instruction.

We also teach social behavior because we know there is a close connection between academic and social competence (Algozzine, Wang & Olivette, 2011; Horner & Sugai, 2005). Successful students and adults have both. Just as we consider what to teach and how to structure the content based on what is age and developmentally appropriate for academic subject matter, we determine what is developmentally and age appropriate for teaching social behavior skills.

Why don't we just call them behavior skills or social skills? Behavior refers to "acting, reacting, or functioning in some specified way." Social refers to "living in an organized community, not solitary" (Oxford American Dictionary, 1980). If we are teaching them to act in a specified way within an organized community, they must be taught together.

Teaching expected behavior is a cornerstone because it integrates the notion of what students should know and be able to do (your matrix) with how you will be sure they can do it. Tier 1 reminds us that what is to be taught is for all students in all settings and is based on a preventative, proactive approach. It also reminds us that what we implement at Tier 1 is ongoing, even if Tier 2 and Tier 3 strategies are added. A solid teaching base at Tier 1 supports all of our SWPBIS work. The cultural context within your school, district, and community will help to shape SWPBIS.

Traditionally, teaching social behavior has consisted of stating the rule, expecting the students to always follow the rule, and then providing negative consequences when the rule is not followed. Using this approach to teach academics would be considered ludicrous. For example, teaching the order of math operations to calculate the area of a triangle and then isolating a student who did not remember the formula (rule) would not be considered an effective instructional approach to teaching the order of math operations. Effective instruction requires more than providing the rule—it requires instruction, practice, feedback, re-teaching, and encouragement (Sprague & Golly, 2005; Sugai, Hagan-Burke & Lewis-Palmer, 2004). If we

think of the connections to academic instruction, we are more likely to embrace the responsibility of teaching social behaviors for the important life skills they are.

The Science of Behavior has taught us:

- Students are not born with bad behaviors
- Students do not learn better ways of behaving when only given aversive consequences
- To learn better ways of behaving, students must be directly taught the expected behaviors
- To retain new behaviors, students must be given specific positive feedback and opportunities to practice in a variety of setting where the behaviors should be used

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