

Research-based intervention teaching organization, time management and planning (OTMP) skills: Parent-focused strategies

This supplemental handout provides an overview of behavioral parent training interventions that are effective for children with ADHD and provides insights on how these interventions can be used by parents to address the executive functioning challenges shown by children and teens with ADHD. It also provides guidance on how to find a treatment provider and how to effectively collaborate with schools.

Research has repeatedly shown that one group of effective interventions for children with ADHD involves training adults who are with them in their daily lives to administer behavioral interventions at the 'point of performance.' Because children with ADHD have difficulty remembering to use something they learned in one setting in another setting, children with ADHD benefit from behavioral interventions that are administered at school and at home, where they are having difficulty. Behavioral parent training (BPT) is the treatment where parents are taught to use behavioral therapy strategies to identify and intervene to improve challenging behaviors that children manifest at home and elsewhere.

Pelham and Fabiano (2008) found that BPT, as well as behavioral classroom management (where teachers are taught similar strategies), met criteria for "well established treatment" based on a review of 46 treatment outcomes studies for children with ADHD conducted between 1997-2006. Their review highlighted that these interventions improve parent's ability to intervene behaviorally to help their child, reduce children's disruptive behavior, and reduce negative interactions between parents and children. A multisite treatment study comparing medication and behavior therapy and their combination as treatments for ADHD, found that behavior therapy was particularly important as a component of treatment if children had co-occurring anxiety or mood disorders, experienced poverty or other sources of family stress, or experienced significant academic impairment (Multimodal Treatment Study of ADHD (MTA), Swanson, et al, 2008). Research has found that BPT is effective in treating homework problems and Organization, Time Management and Planning (OTMP) skills deficits in children with ADHD. (Family School Success, FSS, Power et al, 2012; Collaborative Life Skills, CLS, Pfifner, et al, 2014; Parents and Teachers Helping Kids Organize; PATHKO, Abikoff et al, 2013).

Using BPT to address OTMP skills challenges at home requires that parents are willing to challenge their own assumptions about what maintains a particular child's behavior, that they are willing to experiment with making changes and seeing how their child responds and then adjusting interventions accordingly, and that they are willing to be creative and use all available resources to make the necessary individualized interventions doable and sustainable amid the demands of daily life. Through BPT, parents are taught to administer treatment to their child at home and collaborate with their child's school so setup interventions at school. Behavior interventions such as BPT are based on Social Learning Theory, which tells us that we can change a specific behavior by strategically changing the antecedents and consequences of the behavior.

When developing a behavioral intervention, the first step in enacting change is to **define what behaviors we want to change**. This is a step-by-step process and how well a parent does this process will make a big difference in how effective their intervention is. To make your intervention work as well as possible, BPT interventions will teach you to do the following:

- **Decide on a behavior to change:** First, parents need to take a step back and think about their child’s behavior and ask themselves “What is my child doing or not doing that I want to change?” The parent then should make a list of these behaviors.
- **Pick one or two behaviors to change first:** A common error is to try to change too much as once. Therefore, a parent should next pick one or two of these behaviors to try to change first.
- **Determine what you want your child to do:** It would be very frustrating to try to follow your GPS if it only told you where not to go. To be effective, GPS’s need to tell us where to go. Similarly, it works better if we tell our child what we want them to do rather than tell them what they should not do. Therefore, for each of the behaviors you have decided to target, it is important to figure out what you want your child to do so that they do not do the behavior you do not want.

Some examples:

- If you want your child to stop getting distracted when they are told to do something, the behavior might be “Finish doing what you were asked to do without getting distracted”
- If you want a child to stop having missed assignments, the behavior might be “Write down your homework assignments”, “Check canvas/your planner for homework and complete it” or “Turn in completed homework” depending on what is getting in the way. Note: If all three of those are getting in the way, work on each behavior a step at a time – for first have them practice writing down their assignments, then have them practice looking at their planner and completing homework and then turning it in.
- If you want your child to stop having a meltdown when asked to do homework, you need to first pay attention to when these meltdowns happen. If they often happen when your child is doing math, the goal might be “Start math homework calmly”
- **Target behavior is specific, observable and measurable:** As you figure out what behavior you want to change, you want to set your child up for success by making the behavior specific, observable, and measurable. Having a goal like “Behave during homework time” is not specific enough about what you want your child to do. By making it more specific, then your goal’s wording explicitly tells your child what you want them to do. This will also make it more likely that you and your child agree on

whether or not your child met the goal and avoid situations where you think they did not meet the goal while your child thinks they did meet the goal, which will cause frustration for your child and may make them stop trying.

Once you have decided on one or two behaviors to change, then you want to observe and **gather information about when the behavior occurs**. You can use the A-B-C acronym to remind you what you want to do here.

- **A – Antecedent - What happens before a behavior:** You want to pay attention to anything that might trigger a behavior or make it more likely. Some possible triggers are a particular setting (e.g., a noisy room), a specific situation (e.g., being asked to start homework or stop screens) or contact with a person (e.g., a sibling coming into the room while the child is doing something).
- **B – Behavior – What you want your child to do / not do:** This is the behavior you want to change so you are tracking when it happens by making these observations. You also want to observe how it happens. For example, if a response you are trying to prevent includes potentially unsafe behaviors, any intervention plan needs to include a plan for keeping your child and others safe. When you are preparing to intervene to help a behavior change, you want to track how frequently the behavior is occurring prior to starting any interventions so you can measure if an intervention is helping.
- **C- Consequence - What happens immediately after a behavior:** A consequence as it is used here can either make a behavior more or less likely to happen. It includes both rewards and punishments.
 - Positive reinforcement - A rewarding consequence which increases the likelihood that the preceding behavior will reoccur.
 - Punishment decreases behavior to which it is applied. If it does not, then it is not punishment

Both consequences are most effective if they follow a behavior and are given contingent on a behavior and if they are given immediately after the behavior has occurred.

The effective parent focused interventions for EF challenges teach you, as a parent to implement many different antecedent and consequence interventions for your child, see how your child responds and adjust the intervention as needed until your child is able to meet their behavioral goal consistently. Although people sometimes think that these interventions are to help children with behavior problems and therefore, might not see them as something that can help a child with their executive functioning challenges, these interventions have been shown to also work to treat OTMP and homework challenges in children with ADHD.

Finding a Treatment Provider to Provide this Intervention

Although the interventions might seem easy to try, slight differences in how they are implemented can make a big difference. Guidance from a therapist who provides behavioral parent training interventions can help you do this. When you are looking for a provider to do this intervention, you want to find a provider who describes the type of interventions they use as 'behavioral'. The provider should also give you homework each session to implement whatever intervention you developed together in session and ask you to report back on how it went. Many psychologists are trained to implement these interventions, as are other treatment providers like social workers. You should contact your insurance company for their provider list if you want this to be covered by insurance. Other good sources of therapist recommendations are your child's school and other parents. Even if a therapist does not take insurance, you can file for reimbursement of some of the visit cost from your insurance company.

Collaborating with Your Child's School

A positive relationship between parents and their child's school staff helps children do better in school. Whatever you can do to build such a positive relationship will help your child. Volunteering and giving positive feedback to your child's teacher is not an 'intervention' for your child, but it can benefit your child.

Some tips for working effectively with your child's school are:

- Understand interventions and accommodations – Schools can intervene to help a child with by designing an intervention to help address a problem or by setting up an accommodation for your child. Accommodations may help your child for a time, but they are not designed to teach your child a skill. Therefore, whenever possible, you want to make sure that your child's intervention plan for school includes an intervention component in addition to any accommodations.
- To address the impact of executive functioning deficits at home and at school, choose targets that work for home and school.
- Work with your child's teacher to develop effective assignment book and graphic organizers
- Start young when setting up school-based interventions
- Have realistic expectations. Your child's teacher is teaching multiple children. An intervention will be more effective to implement if it is relatively quick to do. One of the most effective interventions is a home-school note, which is an intervention where a teacher tracks whether a behavior occurred at school and sends this information home to the parent and the parent then reward the child for their success at school.
- Be observant of specifics (not "he doesn't finish assignments" but which? when? why?)
- Engage the child- he/ she may have important contributions!
- Provide explicit guidance and sufficient support (stress is bad for Executive Functioning!)

Finding a therapist who is also able to help you collaborate with your child's school, will be beneficial as you are learning to setup and implement these interventions.

References

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