

Supporting Families With PBIS

Over 25,000 schools have embraced positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) as a highly effective way to build children's social-emotional-behavioral skills and reduce challenging behaviors. PBIS can be effectively used at home too and is especially helpful when events disrupt normal routines (e.g., worldwide health pandemics, natural disasters, extended breaks). Below are some recommendations for families and caregivers on how to use PBIS to support their children's social and emotional growth and minimize behavioral disruptions in the home.

Set Routines

Most children thrive when they have routines and structure. Schools set specific routines for students to follow during the day. Schools often post these schedules in classrooms or give them to students at the beginning of the school year or term. When schools are not in session, students may have fewer predictable routines, which can increase their anxiety and challenging behaviors. To cut down on behavior problems, families and caregivers can mimic school routines with their children and set up times for learning, exercise, and play. It's helpful if these routines are similar to what students are already familiar with from school. The home schedule needs to be posted in a visible central place for all to see. The more consistent the routines and schedule can be, the easier it will be to support prosocial behavior and prevent challenging behavior in the home.

Set Home Expectations

If your child is in a school that uses PBIS, the school will have a chart with desired behaviors, including a description of how those behaviors will look like in each setting. For example, your child's school might ask students to "Be Respectful" (what's expected) in the classroom (where it's expected) by raising their hand before speaking (the desired behavior). Often these charts can be found on the school's website homepage. Schools that actively use PBIS might have an orientation on what behaviors are expected and where and set a time in the beginning of the year to teach students and staff the specific behaviors. These can be adapted by families to fit the home setting.

Teach, Remind, and Reward Expected Behaviors with Positive Feedback

Just like schools that use PBIS, doing so at home is much more powerful with a plan to teach, remind, and reward behaviors using positive feedback. Emphasizing respect, responsibility, and a sense of community is important for maintaining a smooth home-school connection. For example, consider having conversations with your child that match conversations they might have at school on respecting other individuals. If your child's comment reflects a lack of understanding or bias, calmly discuss factual information (e.g., "Anyone can get sick." "We are a community that takes care of each other.").

Be Creative

With the emphasis on safety, your children may not have access to their peers for play dates or other family members in separate households. Consider setting time to chat or be with friends in

virtual play dates (e.g., FaceTime, Skype) or connecting with friends or relatives. There are several free or discounted online learning resources for Pre-K–12 students to complete from home to keep up with learning. Parks, community areas, and libraries may not be physically accessible, but there might be fun activities available on-line. Keep children connected to their peers and distant family members virtually and take breaks throughout the day if feeling overwhelmed.

Model and Promote Emotional Wellness

You or your child might experience stress and anxiety during this time of extended school closure. Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations and how you respond will make an impact on your child and the other individuals in your household. Take breaks from the news or social media. Take care of your body by engaging in deep breaths, stretching, exercising, and getting plenty of sleep. Make time for an enjoyable activity and connect with others by talking to them. Modeling these behaviors will not only help you but will show and teach your child how to cope during stressful situations. It is important to continue to monitor your needs and your child's needs and contact your healthcare provider if you have immediate or ongoing concerns.

Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Center for Parent Information & Resources. (March, 2020). Supporting Families with PBIS at Home. University of Oregon. www.pbis.org.