Developing Successful, Strengths-Based Behavior Plans

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Objective:
Identify effective methods for the practical application of concepts related to improving the delivery of services for persons with developmental disabilities
Identify and emphasize attitudes that enhance the opportunities for persons with DD to achieve their optimal potential

Notes:
Developing Successful, Strengths-Based Behavior Plans
Elisabeth Dahl, Psy.D.

Application of Information
- Behavior plan development is a complex topic
  - Specialized training in applied behavior analysis (ABA) takes years
  - A lay person does not understand or know what ABA is
- Distinct from "Positive Behavior Support" (PBS)
- Reward plans are already widely used in a wide variety of settings where behavior outcomes are needed
- Reward plan development is an important skill that can be developed and used effectively with training and oversight
- The goal is to address how to approach unexpected behaviors and how to promote expected ones

Strengths-based refers to a single individual's likes, positive qualities, and abilities
Successful strengths-based behavior plans are highly individualized

Reward plans are already widely used in a wide variety of settings where behavior outcomes are needed
Reward plans are a useful, hands-on tool that can be developed and used effectively with training and oversight

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Major Components of Strengths-Based Approach
- Effective strengths-based approaches take into account:
  - Individual's support system
  - Individual's strengths
  - Individual's perspective or view of the world
  - Individual's activities

Does not just identify these, but actually uses them – cannot overlook the importance of this

Support system: what are they actually capable of implementing and how can they be helpful in modeling and/or encouraging an individual to use new skills? Which individual do they work with? There are many people involved;
Favorite activities: very useful as rewards
Perspective/view: Why is this important to me? Why would I want to do this?
Positive qualities/activities done well, we can compare a new skill to something already acquired or use a current skill as a foundation for teaching a new skill

Major Components of a Behavior-Therapy-Based Reward Plan
- Identifies a "social problem" (social problem)
  - Problem impacting the individual or those around them
  - Fairly broad in application

Is rooted in ABA tenets
- Scientific, systematic, data-based
- Not just trial and error

Background/Expertise
- Professional degree in psychology
- Experience in wide variety of settings
- Introduction to applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapy as a wrap-around provider in PA under supervision of Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) for 5 years
- Primary population/expertise with children 12 and under
- Outpatient setting as a clinical child psychologist in group practice working with children and their parents
Reward Plans 101
1. Identify the Unexpected Behavior(s)
- Common examples:
  - Not following directions/refusal to do particular work/change/demand
  - Community setting: individual takes off when teacher is talking
  - Home setting: individual takes off when the television is on
  - Social manners issue: wide-ranging, but can include anything from not answering others when they speak to individuals at a distance
- NotObviously include anything from not answering others when they speak to individuals at a distance
- Word it "in the positive" for the goal
- Common examples:
  - Activities: independent hobbies of interest
  - "Don't call names" (a dead man can do this) = "talk to others without calling names"
  - Refusing to load dishes = "load my dishes after I'm done eating"
  - "Taking off from the group" = "staying with the group"
  - "Calling out" = "raising my hand to share my thoughts with the group"
- Obvious skills = concretely observable the moment they occur
- Less obvious skills = skills accounted for through time lapse
  - "Joining the group when directed" – I can see if you did this within moments
  - "Keeping my hands to myself" – this is happening almost all the time, so I need to rely on other means
- Social manner issue: wide-ranging, but can include anything from not answering others when they speak to individuals at a distance

Reward Plans 101
2. Identify a New Skill to Teach
- Can define by time period
  - Less obvious skills = skills accounted for through time lapse
  - "Taking off from the group" – this happens almost all the time, so I need to rely on other means
- Can define by clear occurrence
  - Obvious skills = concretely observable the moment they occur
  - "Joining the group when directed" – I can see if you did this within moments
- Word it "in the positive" for the goal
  - "Calling out" = "raising my thoughts with the group"
  - "Taking off from the group" = "staying with the group"
  - "Refusing to load dishes" = "load my dishes after I'm done eating"
- "Dead Man's Test:" If a dead man can do it, it's not a goal
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Reward Plans 101
3. Identify Appropriate Rewards
- 3 types of rewards:
  - Ticklers: anything from component of larger toy – e.g. 1 Lego to large toy – e.g. full Lego set
  - Money
  - Food treats
  - Activities: independent hobbies of interest
    - Time to play with Legos
    - Extra screen time
    - "Joining the group when directed" = "staying with the group"
  - Social: 1-to-1 group endeavors
    - Cartwright game with 1 or more people, video game with 1 or more people
    - "Joining the group when directed" = "staying with the group"
    - "Keeping my hands to myself" = "this is happening almost all the time, so I need to rely on other means"
- Make it clear and measurable
- Make sure anyone could understand what is expected (no room to misinterpret)
- Make sure it cannot be further broken down into various skills
- Not measurable/unclear: "be good," "be nice," "be kind," "do what you're expected," "be a good citizen"
- Measurable/Clear: "hand in your paper before the timer goes off," "Complete your homework before 3:30pm"
- Consider needs of self and others (e.g. Maslow's hierarchy of needs) to address a longer-term behavior without complexity/oversight
- Make it palatable by writing a Social Story
  - Carol Gray's books, articles, or video teach how to write an effective, clear Social Story
  - Important to follow through on individual doing the expected skill even if not meeting criteria for reward

Reward Plans 101
3. Identify Appropriate Rewards cont'd
- "Reward" is defined by being valuable – individual cannot have access or control over the outcome of the reward plan
- Should fit the setting/teamwork (e.g. time to watch TV would not work in most school settings)
- Should be of sufficient value to motivate (e.g. 5 minutes to watch YouTube after whole day of completing a goal is not highly motivating, but 5 minutes to watch YouTube each ½ hour might be)
- Research shows some of the most disruptive behaviors in individuals with disabilities are negatively reinforced, meaning that taking away anything that is perceived as reinforcing behavior
  - e.g. removing the demand to complete a task increases the chances that we will see the behavior continue
  - Important to follow through on individual doing the expected skill even if not meeting criteria for reward
- One of the best rewards for an expected skill is removing the demand or situation
  - e.g. stop instruction time as a reward for paying attention/working during instruction time
  - e.g. put task on hold for a while

Reward Plans 101
1. Identify the Unexpected Behavior(s) cont'd
- Name the list to most important
  - The more behaviors being addressed, the more challenging it becomes to achieve individual goals with single reward plan
  - Becomes more confusing and complicated
  - Ideal numbers is 1, do not recommend taking on more than 3 at same time
- Prioritize
  - Consider needs of self and others (e.g. Maslow’s hierarchy of need to priorities)
  - 1. Physiological needs
    - 2. Safety needs
  - 3. Social belonging
  - 4. Independence / achievement
  - 5. Self-actualization (being the best me I can be)
  - Where to start thinking about the best way to influence or control over this outside of the reward plan
  - Priorities
    - Put lower needs back before higher needs met
  - Consider how long the behavior has been in place – will be more difficult to address a longer-term behavior without complexity/oversight
  - Forte behavior occurring very often, will be more of a challenge due to fatigue or burnout

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Reward Plans 101
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Most effective plans are going to have highly-preferred rewards, as determined by the situation/child

Most effective plans are going to have several of each type of reward (“menu”)

Most effective plans are going to offer choice
- Moment-to-moment motivation gratification is not stable (no one is ALWAYS satisfied by the same thing all the time)

Most effective plans are going to rotate reward choices
- Satiation (you will get “full” at some point)

Most effective plans are going to setup ALL rewards with some form of social rewarding ALWAYS
- Smile, praise

Most effective praise is a specific statement related back to the skill being taught (e.g. “I’m so proud you put your dishes in the dishwasher” versus “Good job”)

Complex topic on its own, but a few elements are necessary

Baseline/starting point of success
- 1 of every 10 times? 6 of every 10 times?
- Cannot expect someone at 10% to meet a plan expecting 100%, but can expect someone at 10% to meet a plan expecting 10-20%
- For goals involving longer-term participation, this may need to be broken down into time chunks

If store trip is typically 20 minutes and individual stays with the group only 5 minutes, cannot expect 20 minutes with group at first

If teaching block is 1 hour, and student typically calls out 8 times, cannot expect student not to call out at all for 1 hour

Meet the individual where they are at first to establish their success (use the starting point as the first goal: if at just about 50%, require 50% for a reward for a short time)

If using time blocks, determine the typical length of time the individual is successful (e.g. 5 minutes, 10 minutes) – that becomes your measuring block for goals

Make small shifts in expectations
- Cannot expect someone to go from 50% to 80%, but can expect them to go from 50% to 60%

Use more frequent rewards to start
- May need to reward each time the individual is successful (e.g. reward every 5 minutes the individual stays with the group)

Over time, move to intermittent rewarding (“slot machine” rewarding)

Consider the ability of the individual being rewarded to experience a delay before getting rewarded
- Immediate satisfaction versus delayed gratification

Not just a factor of age or development, but also personal characteristics and circumstances, though can use age and development to help guide decisions

E.g. 3-year-old child may need to be rewarded at least 1 time per day even when less consistent

E.g. 15-year-old high-functioning individual may be capable of waiting a week or more for a reward

Make sure a plan is not ended before moving to intermittent rewarding to make the skill resilient

In a review of studies regarding teaching social skills, research found the 3 most effective behavior approaches for teaching and generalizing (seeing it across different settings) a skill include a combination of “before and after” interventions:
- Instructions on how to do the skill
- Prompting to use the skill
- Positive reinforcement when the skill is exhibited

Reward Plans 101
4. Set up a Reward Schedule cont’d

Checklists (word-based) or picture prompts for routines or multi-step tasks

Calendar or charts for infrequently occurring tasks

Visual/verbal reminders of rewards

Call the individual by name to get their attention

Get the individual’s eye contact before giving a direction

Give a single direction rather than multiple

Use a positive, even-toned voice that assumes compliance rather than noncompliance

Make sure directions are clearly directive (e.g. do not ask a question like “will you?”)

Allow enough time to be successful

Wait 10 seconds to repeat a direction

Set a time limit (e.g. by 8:00pm) when a task will be done

Set the individual up for success

What tools will help the individual meet their goal?
- What is their skill-set?
  - If able to read well, tools may be written; if a poor reader, tools may be picture-based
  - If individual is knowledgeable and capable with a similar skill, reference it to build the new one
  - If skill is highly interactive, model role-play it repeatedly

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Reward Plans 101
5. Put the Plan into Place cont’d
- When rewarding each time a skill occurs, a reward chart is not needed initially
  - Important to note: skill occurs only 1-2 opportunities per day like getting in the car to leave the house without a tantrum
  - Important for cause-effect: do not offer rewards that are not available for immediate gain
- Take data - accurately record information on how often the individual is successful with their goals to know when to reduce rewards
- When rewarding less frequently (e.g., for 50% success), use a reward chart
  - Mark on reward chart replaces tangible/social/activity reward
  - Set up a time frame for rewards if predictable
- E.g., school setting: may be able to identify 10 opportunities/time frames predictably during morning classes and again for afternoon classes, so reward periods can be scheduled for just before lunch and just before end-of-day
- Keep a copy of every reward chart as data for knowing how often the individual is successful
- Basic math: divide number of successes by number of opportunities for%
- When using “slot machine” rewarding, make sure to use verbal praise and provide reward immediately after skill to maintain cause-effect

Example Reward Chart

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{Goal} & 900-915 & 916-930 & 931-945 & 946-960 & 961-975 & 976-990 \\
\hline
\text{Raised my hand and waited to be called on to speak or kept my thoughts in my head} \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

Reward Plans 101
6. Maintain the Plan
- Consistency is key
- Be methodical - major distinction between ABA and PBS
  - Take data - to ensure the plan is working and to know when to increase the bar (e.g., if you have met the goal with mastery, consistent meeting of goal over several weeks may move to 60% goal)
  - As previously mentioned, can use reward chart to track data or keep separately recorded
  - Change 1 factor at a time - if it is suspected 1 element of the plan is not working, only modify 1 thing at a time to identify what has an impact
  - If something isn’t working, consider having someone observe your use of it or otherwise seek a more objective perspective before giving up

References