

## CHAPTER 5

# Schoolwide Interventions

## Tier 1

Jackie was beginning her second year as principal at Jefferson Middle School. She was dreading the opening of school because of the constant influx of office disciplinary referrals (ODRs)—over 700 the previous year. Jackie and her colleagues felt like they were spending all of their time dealing with discipline and neglecting academics. She wondered whether there was something she could do to improve this negative situation at her school.

She contacted the district behavior specialist, Doug, for assistance. During their first meeting they examined all of the ODR data, looking for patterns (where problems were occurring, which students were involved, etc.) and discussing options for resolving the problem. The data showed that more than 200 of the school's 450 students had been referred to the office for discipline at least once. Of those 200, about 15 had more than 10 ODRs, and an additional 50 students had between 2 and 9. They learned that 65% of the ODRs resulted from incidents in the classroom, with the remaining 35% occurring in nonclassroom environments (e.g., school grounds, lunchroom, and hallways). They also learned that more than 50% took place when less-structured activities were more common. In reviewing the typical consequences for ODRs, they discovered that over 90% were punitive in some way (e.g., in-school suspension, suspension). It was obvious from these data that this was a schoolwide problem, not just the misbehavior of a few students—although a few students did create a lot of problems. Jackie and Doug also decided that the solution had to be a schoolwide team approach, relying more on positive, proactive strategies.

Jackie's experience is not unusual. As discussed in Chapter 2, many have noted that transitioning from elementary to secondary schools involves many challenges: larger school and class sizes; more impersonal, bureaucratic administrative procedures; and nonindividualized, departmentalized instruction (Eccles, Lord, & Midgely, 1991). Secondary students can lose interest in and motivation for school, often resulting in lower academic achievement. Truancy and other problem behaviors can also increase in secondary schools. These conditions may compound risk factors for adolescents who are already academically, socially, or emotionally vulnerable. This chapter discusses what can be done to help address such concerns schoolwide as part of Tier 1 or universal-level SWPBS intervention.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPECTATIONS

Creating and teaching expectations for positive behaviors is a fundamental feature of several well-known schoolwide approaches to behavior, such as SWPBS, social and emotional learning, and schoolwide discipline plans. Effective schools establish from the beginning of the school year how students are expected to behave, and throughout the year teachers discuss expectations and boundaries with students.

**Students who are striving to meet high behavioral expectations are less likely to exhibit inappropriate behaviors.**

High expectations are important for several reasons. First, students who are striving to meet high behavioral expectations are less likely to exhibit inappropriate behaviors. Second, expectations let everyone know exactly what behavior is desired. For example, most youth try to please the important adults in their lives, those with whom they have a relationship based on mutual respect and trust. Often administrators and teachers assume that students will just intuitively know what is wanted without having to be told or directly taught. Sometimes students will know that what they are doing will not please adults, but if they have not been taught another way to meet a particular need, they often resort to inappropriate behaviors because they lack alternatives. Other times students choose inappropriate behaviors because experience has shown them that such behaviors can help them get attention, obtain something that they want, and/or avoid things they dislike that are uncomfortable or painful. Third, teachers with high expectations communicate to students that they are capable of achieving meaningful outcomes. Knowing that someone else believes in them may be crucial in helping some students stay engaged when challenges arise and they feel discouraged. While it is important to adopt and communicate high expectations, it is also important to ensure that those expectations are reasonable and achievable; otherwise students can become frustrated.

Consistency in implementing expectations is also important. When expectations are reasonable and achievable, school personnel find it easier to be consistent in following through with program implementation. As expressed by Young et al. (2008),

**If we relent and tolerate low expectations, we are in effect demonstrating to the student that less is acceptable.**

If we relent and tolerate low expectations, we are in effect demonstrating to the student that less is acceptable. The student may see us as inconsistent and perhaps unfair. He learns that we can be manipulated. If the student meets expectations, be certain to reinforce them. If the student continues to struggle, re-teach the expected behavior rather than punish. What you do as the teacher impacts the student's behavior immensely. If the student is making a sincere effort and is unable to meet the expectation, you may need to divide the expected task/behavior into smaller steps. Nonetheless, the final goal should remain the same, and you should keep teaching, encouraging, and believing in the student until that goal is reached. (p. 21)

Returning to the example of Jefferson Middle School, after Jackie's initial meeting with Doug, she worked with the current school discipline committee to transform that group to a team that would develop a new, positive approach to discipline. At Doug's suggestion, the school adopted SWPBS. The new team became the school's SWPBS team. One of the team's first tasks was the development of clear positive expectations for student behavior.

## Creating Behavioral Expectations in Secondary Schools

Creating clear behavioral expectations in secondary schools may be more challenging than in elementary schools. Just under half of high school teachers involved in one study supported implementing key behavioral strategies of acknowledging and positively reinforcing appropriate student behavior (Flannery et al., 2009). Another difference between secondary and elementary schools is the greater degree of secondary student involvement in SWPBS as discussed in Chapter 4. Because secondary students are capable of active involvement in school activities, they should be involved in the planning and implementation of schoolwide expectations. The success of SWPBS depends on understanding secondary students' perspectives regarding expectations and the subtleties of data collected by school teams. Fenning (2004) provides an example of how a high school utilized students in producing a video demonstrating the schoolwide expectations. The students participated in personal interviews and mock scenes illustrating students following school expectations; the final video was shown at a schoolwide assembly.

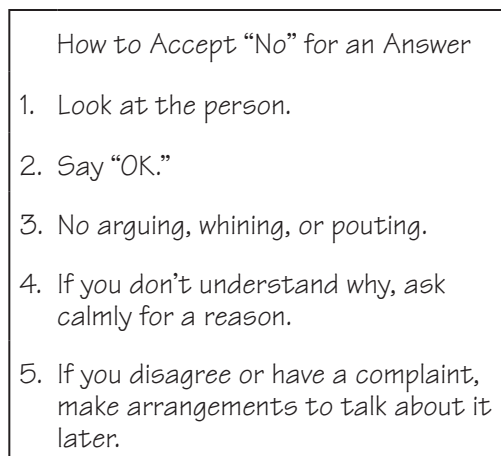
Secondary schools appear to emphasize broad expectations that can be defined differently in different settings. For example, Flannery et al. (2009) found that most high schools reported emphasizing *respect* and *responsibility*, and many included *learning* expectations (e.g., perseverance, achievement). Such broad expectations are best expressed in terms of more specific behaviors as shown in the examples below:

- *Respect for self.* Keep dress and grooming appropriate for school.
- *Respect for others.* Use polite expressions and greetings with others.
- *Respect for property.* Leave public areas in the school neat and clean.

An essential part of establishing clear expectations is posting rules as reminders for both teachers and students. In secondary schools one might want to discuss with teachers and students using the word *expectations* instead of *rules*. We would encourage the use of the word *expectations* because it may diminish the potentially coercive tone of the word *rules*—this helps recognize the desire for increasing autonomy of secondary students. Teachers can emphasize the expectations when they are teaching positive behavior or correcting misbehavior. Teachers must also reinforce students when they meet expectations and follow rules. The combination of teaching and reinforcing positive behavior is the most powerful way of helping students learn to behave within the boundaries established by the faculty. Faculty can help students become confident in what they are expected to do (or not do) by posting, reviewing, and reinforcing schoolwide expectations. Posting provides a visual reminder of the expectations for students and a prompt for additional instruction by the teacher (e.g., see Figure 5.1) (Black & Downs, 1993, p. 43). When specific rules are given, *examples* and *nonexamples* can be provided, demonstrating what each rule looks like in various school contexts. Examples make rules and expectations very clear, ensuring that students know exactly what behaviors are expected (Taylor-Greene et al., 1997). Several additional guidelines are noted by Young et al. (2008, p. 24) that can help make this process more effective:

**The combination of teaching and reinforcing positive behavior is the most powerful way of helping students learn to behave within the boundaries established by the faculty.**

**Posting provides a visual reminder of the expectations for students and a prompt for additional instruction by the teacher.**



**FIGURE 5.1.** Sample poster of a schoolwide expectation.

- Limit the number of rules or expectations to *no more than three to five*. The goal is to promote student success. Expectations must be high, but reasonable.
- *State rules positively*. For example, “Keep your hands and feet to yourself” is better than “No hitting, pushing, or kicking.” Give students something they can do that can be reinforced.
- Include *positive consequences* for following the expectations. Group contingencies work well. For example, a special class activity could be scheduled if everyone comes to class prepared for 5 days.
- Include mild *negative consequences* for not following the expectations, when necessary. However, remember that the best form of discipline is teaching, not punishing.
- Use *natural consequences* wherever possible. Natural consequences are a logical result of the student’s action. For example, a natural consequence of not bringing a pencil to class would be to use one of the old broken “stubbies” from the collection of homeless pencils. Avoid using consequences that interfere with learning or that might actually be reinforcing to the student: for example, do not send the student to his or her locker to get a pencil.
- Be sure the expectation is *observable and measurable*. If a behavior cannot be seen or counted, it should not be used as a rule. For example, “Raise your hand to be called on in class” is observable and measurable, whereas “Respect others” is not because it does not specify the expected behaviors.

A good example of the use of schoolwide expectations to improve student behavior in a middle school is discussed in Metzler, Biglan, Rusby, and Sprague (2001). Doug, the behavior specialist in the opening vignette, recommended to Jackie that the school faculty read the Metzler et al. article, which describes how a school staff clarified rules, taught and positively reinforced expected social behaviors, provided mild consequences for rule violations, and monitored data on students’ behavior. Schoolwide expectations were also formed into four school rules:

1. Be respectful.
2. Put-ups not put-downs.

3. Cooperate with others.
4. Solve problems peacefully.

For each rule, specific desired behaviors were identified, and 50-minute lesson plans about these expectations were developed and taught by teachers. Results included a decrease in students' aggressive behaviors and improvement in perceptions of school safety. The Jefferson Middle School adopted an approach similar to that of the Metzler et al. study, but they added a schoolwide social skills component.

## TEACHING SOCIAL SKILLS TO ALL STUDENTS

After establishing rules and expectations for appropriate behaviors, it is helpful for teachers to proactively teach social skills in the classroom. Teaching social skills is integral to SWPBS. Some students have had few opportunities to learn and practice specific social skills. The common assumption that students know how to behave in school may be inaccurate. It may be safer to assume that students need instruction regarding appropriate social behavior; a way to provide this instruction is through schoolwide teaching of social skills. To develop and implement a schoolwide social skills curriculum, we need (1) to understand the nature of social skills, (2) to identify and define the specific social skills appropriate for students and relevant to the needs of the school, (3) to assess students' social skills, and (4) to teach the social skills and encourage their use.

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### **The Nature of Social Skills**

Social skills are those behaviors that are necessary for students to successfully interact with others. Examining the characteristics of youth or adults who are socially skilled reveals three fundamental aspects of their behavior. First, the word *social* refers to interpersonal interactions between two or more individuals. Thus behavior such as having a conversation with another person, making a polite request, or asking someone to join an activity are all social skills.

Second, skills require action. A social skill must be a positive action, such as engaging in conflict resolution. Simply not fighting is not engaging a social skill. In this case, if a replacement behavior for fighting is identified, such as positive problem solving, we now have an appropriate social skill to teach. In designing a social skills program for an individual or an entire school, the planning team must focus on the skills they would like the students to acquire, not the problem behavior they want to eliminate.

Third, to be considered socially competent a student must be capable not only of using the social skills but of using the skills in appropriate contexts (e.g., with the right people, at the right time, and in the right place). A socially skilled person performs appropriate social behaviors repeatedly and consistently. For example, a socially skilled student knows not only how to be assertive, but also when and with whom. A skilled person has the ability to perform a behavior well under a variety of circumstances. The actions of socially skilled individuals are natural,

genuine, and comfortable. Thus becoming socially skilled requires time, practice, coaching, and reinforcement.

Social skills are behaviors valued by others; they are important and worthwhile interactions, but they may vary from one culture or subculture to another. The society and the cultural groups within that society define what behaviors constitute social competence within their community. In school students are expected to follow directions and comply with authority figures; students who act accordingly are usually considered socially skilled, at least by school personnel. Assessing the student's cultural environment to determine what behaviors are considered socially acceptable is important. Students may need to be acculturated through more direct teaching, practice, and reinforcement if their culture does not support the use of such skills.

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In summary, social skills are interactions between two or more persons; the skills involve action; and the interactions are positive, effective, and valued by society. Socially skilled persons consistently display these interpersonal behaviors at the appropriate times, in appropriate situations, and in a natural manner.

Researchers have documented that students with social skills deficits have both short- and long-term problems, including school failure, school dropout, social rejection, interpersonal conflicts, unemployment and job instability, mental health problems, and economic challenges (see Merrell & Gimpel, 1998, and Merrell & Gueldner, 2010).

### **Social Skills Assessments**

Assessments should be conducted to determine the students' social skills strengths and deficits. Effective assessment strategies include checklists, role playing, and direct observation, among other procedures. A detailed description of social skills assessment is beyond the scope of this chapter. An excellent source of information regarding social skills assessment can be found in Merrell and Gimpel's (1998) book *Social Skills of Children and Adolescents*.

Other useful schoolwide assessments to aid in selection of social skills to teach include interviews, observations, focus groups, archival data, systematic screening for behavior disorders, and data from office discipline referrals (Marchant et al., 2009). For example, reviewing ODR data may reveal that a significant number of students are sent to the office for failing to follow teacher directions. Teaching students how to follow instructions could be a reasonable next step.

Another resource to help in the selection of specific social skills to teach is to use social skill taxonomies, classification systems that are frequently used to categorize behaviors. Caldarella and Merrell (1997) developed such a system by reviewing 21 research investigations involving the assessment of social skills and identified five frequently occurring social skill dimensions: peer relationships, self-management, academic, compliance, and assertion. They also provide examples of specific social skills under each of these dimensions that school teams could focus on.

Based on the chosen assessment method, identifying and prioritizing the specific social skills to be taught and the steps for teaching each skill become primary tasks of the team. Social skills lessons should be taught based on student needs, usually every week or two so that the



ideas remain fresh in students' and teachers' minds (see Goldstein, 1999, and Kerr & Nelson, 2006, pp. 239–245, for good examples of social skills lessons).

The SWPBS team at Jefferson Middle School requested participation of all teachers in the school in selecting five critical social skills to be taught to all students. They used a four-step process: (1) the SWPBS team reviewed ODR data to determine which discipline problems might have been avoided by use of specific social skills; (2) all teachers were asked to use the social skills checklist provided in *Skillstreaming the Adolescent* (Goldstein, McGinnis, Sprafkin, Gershaw, & Klein, 1997) to identify the five social skills they thought most important for their school; (3) the SWPBS team combined the skills identified in steps 1 and 2 and narrowed the list to the five most needed skills for their school; and (4) the SWPBS team met with all faculty, discussed the list, made minor modifications, and finalized the following five social skills they all agreed to teach:

1. How to follow directions.
2. How to give and accept compliments.
3. How to solve problems with others.
4. How to offer help or assistance to others.
5. How to express appreciation to others.

After agreeing to focus on these five social skills, the SWPBS team next needed to address how to train their staff to teach these skills in a way that students would learn how to use them.

### **Teaching Social Skills**

Particular methods and procedures have been found to be effective in teaching social skills to children and youth. Walker et al. (2004, p. 208) identify some guidelines of social skills training, which include the following:

- Social skills are best taught in naturalistic settings and situations such as classrooms, though they can also be taught in small groups or counseling situations.
- Social skills should be taught by the same procedures and principles used to teach academic skills, including direct instruction, modeling, practice opportunities, feedback, and reinforcement when skills are successfully displayed.
- A direct, positive relationship should be evident between the extent and quality of social skills training and changes in social behavior.
- Social skills training should be supplemented by behavioral rehearsal opportunities or practice, performance feedback, and contingency systems in naturalistic settings to promote use, fluency, and mastery of the skills taught in more formal instructional settings.

The way social skills are taught to students can be as important as the skills themselves. The next section presents the rationale for teaching social skills and presents the instructional procedures that are most effective in helping students become socially competent. Much of

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this material is based on the work of Young and colleagues (see Young et al., 2008) who have spent many years training educators in social skills instruction.

### **Social Skills Rationales**

**By explaining why we want students to engage in the appropriate behavior, we demonstrate that there is logic behind our request, teaching students that outcomes for their behaviors are predictable rather than haphazard.**

A rationale is a reason or justification given to students for learning and using specific social skills. By explaining why we want students to engage in the appropriate behavior, we demonstrate that there is logic behind our request, teaching students that outcomes for their behaviors are predictable rather than haphazard. A rationale for teaching students how to accept feedback or criticism is illustrated in the following statement from a member of school staff:

“When teachers correct your behavior, you must look at them and listen to what they have to say without arguing. Accepting feedback helps you understand how your behavior is seen by others and allows you to learn from them; it also shows respect, and helps you build positive relationships. By showing respect, you are less likely to be sent to the principal’s office for discipline.”

**The most effective rationales have certain common characteristics: they are brief, believable, and personal to the student.**

The most effective rationales have certain common characteristics: they are brief, believable, and personal to the student. When a student asks why something is important, many adults respond by saying “Because I said so.” A more helpful and instructive way to respond is to use one of the following three types of rationales:

1. Explain the *benefits* of using appropriate behavior or avoiding inappropriate behavior: for example, others trust us when we behave in a polite and civil manner.
2. Remind the student of possible negative consequences or punishments that may follow misbehavior. Teach students that using positive social skills will help them *avoid unpleasant consequences*.
3. Teach students that appropriate social behavior *shows others that we care* about their needs as well as our own.

### **Instructional Procedures**

Adults are sometimes reluctant to teach social skills to youth because of concerns that the process is overly complex or requires specialized training. However, the instructional procedures to teach such skills are fairly easy, though they may require some practice to become natural to the teacher. The following simple process is often used to teach a social skill to a group of students or to an individual:



1. Begin by telling the students what specific social skill they are going to learn and describe each step included in the skill. Have students repeat out loud the steps of the skill.
2. Explain to the students the rationale or reasons why it is important to learn and use this skill.
3. Demonstrate the social skill for the students. For some skills you may want to demonstrate both using and failing to use the skill: for example, demonstrating how to make a polite request versus demanding something. This process helps students more clearly discriminate when their behavior is socially correct.
4. Have students practice the skill several times.  
Just as academic behaviors require many opportunities to practice, so do social behaviors.
5. Provide specific feedback on each step of the social skill as students practice: praising appropriate social behavior, correcting mistakes, and reinforcing students' attempts to use the skill correctly.
6. Provide opportunities for students to practice the social skills in natural settings to ensure that behavior is maintained over time and the skill use is generalized to multiple settings. Giving the students specific assignments to practice outside of the instructional setting helps to promote natural use of the skill.

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Below is an example of how teachers at Jefferson Middle School used the teaching process with the specific social skill of giving a compliment. They used a dialogue like the following for each of the steps of the skill, and posted the social skill steps as a visual prompt to students and teachers:

1. Name the social skill and describe the steps for performing the skill. "Today I am going to teach you how to give someone a compliment. The steps are:
  - a. Decide on a behavior that deserves a compliment,
  - b. Look at the person,
  - c. Use a pleasant voice, and
  - d. Say the praise statement."

The teacher might give this example and review: "Steve, I thought you made a great comment in class today recognizing Angela's presentation on Shakespeare. You used the steps I am describing. Let's repeat the steps for the social skill of giving a compliment." After the class has repeated the steps in order, the teacher might praise them by saying, "You did a great job of repeating all four steps in order."

2. Give a rationale for why the skill is important. "It is important to give people compliments because our feedback helps them feel good about their behavior. Compliments also let people know that you like them and notice the good things they do. If we don't give positive feedback, people may feel uncomfortable and stop doing those good things. So our compliments strengthen the good behavior of others."

3. Demonstrate the social skill for the students.
  - a. “I’m going to pretend that Simona has recently moved here and joined our class. She has smiled and been friendly to others. I will give her a compliment using the four steps.”
  - b. “I first look at her and then say in a pleasant voice, ‘Simona, I like your smile. You seem friendly: Would you like to join us for lunch?’”
4. Have students practice the skill several times.
  - a. Have the whole class say the steps in unison (choral responding).
  - b. Have students say the steps individually, either to the class or (if the group is large) to a peer.
  - c. Call on a student to role-play: “Pretend that I am a student who has recently joined your class. Show how you might give me a compliment.”
  - d. Have additional students role-play for the rest of the class.
  - e. Have the students pair up and practice with each other. Monitor them so that you can give feedback and extra help when needed. Repeatedly reviewing the steps helps to establish fluent use of the skill in natural settings.
5. Provide feedback and praise on each step of the social skill.
  - a. “You have remembered and said each step in the social skill of giving a compliment.”
  - b. “As I listened to you practice I noticed that each of you identified something positive about your partner. You also looked at each other and used a pleasant voice as you gave your compliment.”
6. Have students practice these social skills in natural settings. “Now you all know how to give a compliment. I’ll watch you this week. I want to see each of you give compliments the way we have practiced. If you can’t remember all of the steps, check the poster on the bulletin board or ask me for help. The more you practice, the easier it will become.”

The sample lesson above is scripted to guide teachers in learning the steps to teaching social skills. Our experience is that initially mastering scripted lessons helps instructors transition to teaching the skills in their own words without omitting any of the critical components. Addressing each instructional component of the lesson is critical if students are to master the social skills. For example, omitting practice will reduce students’ ability to recall and implement the skills. But with practice, skill acquisition will become natural and more comfortable for both instructors and students.

Administrators and teachers at secondary schools have been successful in teaching selected social skills as part of SWPBS. When all students learn to use these basic social skills, an atmosphere of civility becomes the school norm. One way to accomplish this is to have all teachers spend 10 to 15 minutes three times per week teaching social skills in homeroom classes. However, instruction alone is not sufficient. All school personnel should

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encourage and praise these social skills throughout school settings and across all classes and activities to achieve maintenance and generalization.

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## **SCHOOLWIDE ENCOURAGEMENT AND PRAISE**

Encouragement and praise are critical to all aspects of a student's life, not just learning and using social skills. School personnel must encourage academic performance along with socially appropriate behavior. It is common for students to experience doubt and uncertainty as they are trying to learn and use new skills. As their social environment becomes more challenging, many secondary school students find it difficult knowing how to interact appropriately. Encouragement can help students face issues that they may struggle with—things that are important but uncertain to them. Students must understand that it is all right to try and to sometimes fail because they can always try again. Encouragement acknowledges what is good in students, supports their efforts, and communicates that they can succeed. Sincere encouragement can foster feelings of courage and fortitude for facing their fears as well as building teacher–student relationships of trust.

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However, encouragement is used too infrequently in schools. Ironically, the students who need encouragement the most are often the least likely to receive it: “Children who misbehave are most likely to receive the least amount of encouragement . . . instead of building them up, we tear them down; instead of recognizing their efforts and improvements, we point out their mistakes” (Evans, 1997, p. 12). So it is important that all students, including those who do not know or use social skills, receive encouraging remarks from teachers. The following are examples of encouraging statements that could be used with secondary students:

**Encouragement is used too infrequently in schools. Ironically, the students who need encouragement the most are often the least likely to receive it.**

- “You can do this.”
- “I can tell you worked hard on that assignment.”
- “Remember, you’ve done things like this before.”
- “I can see that you’re not sure of yourself, but I believe in you.”
- “Relax, you’ll do better each time you try.”

To make encouragement believable, such statements should be accompanied by specific reasons that are meaningful to the student and that the teacher believes he or she can succeed. These can be tied to the nature of the work, to the student's ability, or to both. For example, “Remember the last difficult assignment you completed by working hard and getting help from a friend. You can do this.” This encouragement will more likely be perceived positively when

the teacher and student have a positive, trusting relationship, which is critical in working with adolescents.

Praise also can be used to encourage students' efforts toward positive behavior. Praise is widely known to be effective in teaching and reinforcing appropriate behavior. Praising specific student behaviors was noted in Chapter 3 as a way for teachers to improve the classroom climate; praise is also an important part of SWPBS Tier 1 interventions. Teachers and administrators need to acknowledge and praise students' cooperation and attempts to do what is asked. While students' efforts may not be effective the first time or even the sixth time, it is important to let them know that their efforts are noticed and appreciated so that they continue to display appropriate behaviors.

Praise is a natural, nonintrusive intervention that can be used in schools (Sutherland, Wehby, & Copeland, 2000), considered to be perhaps the easiest classroom modification the general education teacher can make to address students' problem behaviors (Niesyn, 2009). Unfortunately, praise is used too infrequently and often lacks enough specificity to be effective. The use of specific praise in schools occurs at even lower rates. Students experiencing emotional or behavioral difficulties often receive little if any praise from adults.

To be effective, praise must include a statement that is contingent, specific, and immediate, and have a positive effect on student behavior (Marchant & Young, 2001). Teachers can reduce the frequency of problem behavior by using effective praise, thus saving time and energy previously spent responding to classroom disruptions. Teachers should find something for which to praise every student at least once per day, using praise consistently and contingently as a positive reinforcement strategy for increasing desired behaviors and reducing disruptive off-task behaviors. Satisfied students tend to receive more teacher praise and less negative teacher feedback than do dissatisfied students (Burnett, 2002). Praise has also been shown to help socially withdrawn and isolated students become more outgoing (Nelson, Caldarella, Young, & Webb, 2008; Moroz & Jones, 2002). Increasing effective praise and teaching corrective behaviors can positively influence those students who are repeatedly being sent to the principal's office for discipline.

Praise has been shown to be an essential component of SWPBS in middle schools. Nelson, Young, Young, and Cox (2010) examined the use of schoolwide teacher-to-student praise notes as part of SWPBS in a secondary school. Teachers were trained to use direct instruction in teaching social skills during their first-period classes and to write praise notes when students displayed these skills. Praise notes were given to students by their teachers, with a copy for parents. Teachers were reinforced with gift certificates to local restaurants when they reached benchmark numbers of praise notes written (e.g., 25, 60, 100, 150). Results revealed a significant negative correlation: as the number of praise notes increased, the number of student ODRs decreased considerably, saving student, teacher, and administrator time. Form 5.1 (at the end of the chapter) presents an example of a praise note that can be used in schools.

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Praise must be instructive—teaching students what behavior was noticed and why what they did was valued. For example, a general praise statement such as “Good job” is less instructive than “Susan, you followed all of the instructions on how to organize this paper, precisely as I directed. This helped you earn a higher grade on the assignment and also made it easier for me to understand your ideas. Nice job!” Students gain confidence when they know specifically

what was positive in their behavior and why it was valued and important to others. The following steps help make praise instructive as well as reinforcing (see West et al., 1995):

1. Specifically state the behavior you are complimenting.
2. Provide a detailed description of what occurred.
3. Give a reason why the behavior was praiseworthy.
4. Provide a pleasant consequence.

These steps are provided to highlight the important elements of instructive praise but they should not be taken to imply that the note or the process needs to be long. Such a praise statement can be a valuable teaching moment accomplished in only 10 to 15 seconds. For example, all of these elements are found in the following statement: “I appreciate how well you listened while I gave instructions. I noticed you looked me in the eyes while I was talking. I am sure as a result you understand the assignment better, and in the future I will listen very carefully to your questions.” West et al. (1995) show how the use of instructive praise as part of classroom teaching procedures helped improve the classroom behavior of middle school students. This study was conducted in several regular junior high classes of approximately 30 students in each class. Instructive praise could be used by every teacher as part of schoolwide Tier 1 interventions.

## **SCHOOLWIDE TOKEN ECONOMY SYSTEMS**

Closely related to schoolwide praise is the use of schoolwide token economy, a common strategy used with behavior management. When using token economies teachers award “tokens” to reinforce students when they meet positive behavioral goals. Tokens are created by the school, often in the form of tickets or points that students earn by displaying desirable behaviors. Students may then exchange the points for reinforcing items or activities. A menu is typically created listing how many points are required to access particular reinforcers. These reinforcers do not need to be expensive—in fact, secondary students often find access to special privileges (e.g., having a few minutes of free time with peers, being able to make the school’s morning announcements, listening to music during individual study time, being first in the lunch line) quite reinforcing, and they cost the school no additional money.

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Token economy systems have been effective at improving student behavior in a variety of settings including special education, general education, and even college classrooms. Token economies can also be used schoolwide as a universal-level SWPBS intervention (Sailor, Bradley, & Sims, 2009). Some important areas to address when designing token economy systems for use in schools include the following (see, e.g., Myles, Moran, Ormsbee, & Downing, 1992):

1. *Identifying target behaviors.* Target behaviors should be defined in measurable terms and be based on positive student behavioral outcomes (e.g., turning in class assignments on time, following teachers’ instructions, and getting a teacher’s attention appropriately).

2. *Specifying reinforcers.* Reinforcers should be purposefully chosen:
  - Student input should be included.
  - Reinforcers should be age appropriate such as a ticket with the student's name being submitted for a weekly schoolwide drawing for movie passes.
  - A variety of items and activities should be included as reinforcers.
  - Reinforcers should be accompanied by praise.
  - Eventually, reinforcers should be faded to naturally occurring social or academic reinforcers (e.g., permission to sit with chosen peers at an assembly).
3. *Planning token distribution and redemption strategies.* The school team should develop a system that can apply to all personnel and all students, and all need to understand it. The team should consider such issues as the following:
  - The schoolwide system needs to be relatively simple and not require a lot of time for the exchange of tokens.
  - Behavioral expectations and the rules for earning and receiving points should be taught to all students and publically posted in the building.
  - Decisions need to be made regarding the potential loss of points for inappropriate behavior. Taking points away tends to be viewed negatively by students and may create an unfortunate power struggle if a student feels the loss of points was unjustified. We recommend avoiding this.
  - It is important to establish a record-keeping plan that includes a record of points earned that is visible and accessible to students.

Let's return to the Jefferson Middle School SWPBS team for an example of a simple schoolwide token economy system. After agreeing on the five social skills that would be taught to all students, the team designed a reinforcement system to strengthen the use of the skills. A simple praise note that was developed for use as a token included five items: (1) a place for the student's name, (2) the date, (3) check boxes for the five social skills, (4) a comments section, and (5) a line for the teacher's signature. Copies of the notes were printed on (no carbon required) paper. A teacher who observed a student using any of the five social skills filled out a praise note and gave one copy to the student (who was encouraged to share it with his or her parents), providing positive feedback for use of the skill, and one copy to the office to serve as a token for a possible secondary reward. Every Friday, 10 notes were drawn from a box, names were read over the intercom, and the students were invited to come to the office after school to select a reward (e.g., a pencil, candy, movie pass, or positive note from the principal to the parents).

## **ADMINISTRATIVE INTERVENTIONS**

Despite teachers' best attempts to teach and reinforce appropriate behaviors, sometimes students will violate schoolwide rules and expectations. When this occurs, administrative interventions may be a good approach (Black & Downs, 1993). Rather than being simply a fallback for removing students who are creating a disturbance from class, effective administrative interventions are designed to get students back in the classroom as quickly as possible with needed instruction and reinforcement of improved behavior. After teaching and providing opportunities to practice positive alternatives to the misbehavior that resulted in the student being sent to



the office, administrators give meaningful rationales and reinforcers for using the new targeted alternatives. Students are also taught the behaviors needed to reconcile with their teachers: for example, how to apologize to their teacher for the misbehavior that resulted in an office referral. An appropriate apology includes looking directly at the teacher, using an appropriate tone of voice, delivering a statement that the student is sorry for the specific inappropriate behavior, and explaining the socially appropriate behavior to be used in similar situations in the future. Then the student should ask whether he or she may return to class. It is important that the school administrator conducting the intervention prepare the classroom teacher to receive the student's apology (see Black & Downs).

**Effective administrative interventions are designed to get students back in the classroom as quickly as possible with the needed instruction and with reinforcement of improved behavior.**

While this procedure is often considered to be a Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention, it may also be a valuable part of a Tier 1 intervention plan, as it can be used with any student in the entire school, not just those who have been identified as at risk. Many students might receive the intervention only once during the school year, but for students who repeat the same problem behavior the procedure becomes more specific and is monitored over time, as typical for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions.

If administrative interventions are to be fully effective at the schoolwide level, procedures and expectations must be clearly communicated to faculty and students prior to implementation. Teachers and students should know in advance what the administrator will do, and what is expected of them, if a student is sent to the office. At the administrative as well as classroom level, it is best to use preventative teaching procedures rather than punishing interventions. Students and teachers must be able to clearly see the benefits of having students return to class as quickly as possible. Administrative interventions are discussed in more depth in Chapters 8 and 9, which address more individualized interventions.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter has explored Tier 1 (universal-level) SWPBS prevention and early intervention, including the importance of establishing schoolwide expectations for student behavior and some of the challenges involved with creating such expectations in secondary schools. Schoolwide rules were reviewed, along with guidelines to follow when creating them. The importance of proactively teaching social skills to all students was emphasized as an essential element of Tier 1 interventions. Reinforcing students' behaviors through the use of schoolwide encouragement, praise, and token economy systems was also discussed. If secondary school administrators and teachers follow these empirically based strategies, they will likely eliminate 80% of behavior problems in their schools. However, to confirm results of Tier 1 interventions they need to monitor data and use problem-solving models—topics covered in the following chapter.

## Sample of a School Praise Note

Middle School

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

**You have been CAUGHT showing your  
SCHOLAR PRIDE!**

Thank you for making our school a better place by using your social skills:

- How to Follow Directions
- How to Accept Feedback/Consequences
- How to Show Appreciation
- Other



Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Homeroom \_\_\_\_\_

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