Adopting Evidence-Based Teaching Methods for Students who have Emotional/Behavioral Problems

Education Minnesota 2014 Conference

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Teaching approaches need to be tailored to each student's unique, individual needs. Mental health disorders are disabilities that a student may experience, but they do not define the student.

Regardless of the types of mental health disorders that are affecting students, the primary initial goal is to earn their trust and to help them feel safe within the classroom.

It is helpful to use a variety of instructional strategies to engage students in the learning process and to accommodate different students' learning styles.

Teachers may need to try different approaches with students until they find the ones that are successful in making positive connections.

A teacher's attitude is crucial in creating an emotional environment in the classroom in which students who have mental health disorders feel safe and secure.

When teachers display a sense of humor and are emotionally supportive and welcoming, their students feel accepted and less likely to act out in the classroom.

Teachers can build a sense of community in the classroom, and their students will feel that they are a part of an important group enterprise. They get the message that they are "all in this together", working with each other on a common goal.

Environmental stimuli can contribute to or cause problems for some students (e.g., fluorescent lighting and ASD students). Other students may need additional sensory input.

Interventions need to focus on students' developmental ag

Teachers can often learn to identify the triggers that lead to

There is no "cookbook" approach that matches specific teaching methods to diagnosed disorders, but there are general principals that can be very helpful.

It is important to recognize that mental health disorders are real disorders, and that they create disabilities that can be as severe as those caused by medical disorders.

Interventions work best when they address the nature and course of a student's mental health disorder.

Goals need to be realistic.

Don't blame the student for the disability. (E.g., FBAs that describe the function of inattention of student who has ADHD as being due to "avoiding schoolwork").

Skills training is an everyday activity that helps students who haven't learned the skills, or whose mental health disorder results in skills deficits.

Adaptations are changes made to a student's learning environment, curriculum, instruction, and/or assessment practices that assist the student to be a successful learner.

Accommodations are changes that allow a student to be able to meet the same classroom goals that are expected of the student's non-disabled classmates.

Modifications, on the other hand, are changes in the curriculum that is taught to a student, and in the schoolwork that is expected from the student.

Modifications may provide educational materials at the reduced level at which the student is working, due to the disability, and may thus alter or reduce the academic expectations for the student.

The Clinical-Behavioral Spectrum concept can help identify the degree to which problems require accommodations and modifications.

Examples of effective **math strategies**:

-Have the student use columnar and/or graph paper to aid organization of material.

-Make copies of the problems for students who have difficulty transferring spoken or written information.

-Reduce the number of problems that the student is required to solve. Having too many problems can be overwhelming and can defeat the purpose of the assignment.

-Highlight the crucial items in the student's book.

-Clearly define the work that needs to be done by using stickers, post-it notes, etc.

-Give work in manageable "chunks", one page at a time, to avoid overwhelming the student.

-Make sure that work sheets are not "too busy" and full of information. Papers should have plenty of white space.

-Whenever possible, let students use aids such as calculators, multiplication charts, etc.

-Avoid timed tests if they frustrate the student.

-Always list, clearly and concisely, what is expected of the student.

Examples of effective **written language strategies:**

-Have consistent standards for assignment organization such as the placement of the student's name, the date, the page number, etc.

-Space the assignments to encourage order- e.g., every other line, in columns, index spacing, etc.

-Some students find it helpful to have paper anchored down, or to use heavier paper.

-Using larger lined paper can help written work organization.

-Allow use of computers when possible, enabling spell checks and encouraging neatness.

-Teach note-taking skills, using abbreviations, two column note techniques and/or model note taking.

-Promote reading comprehension using modified SQ3R (survey, question, read, recite and review) methods. This helps the student survey the materials, look at the questions at the end of the reading assignment, highlight the work while reading and answer questions about the reading assignment.

-Have the student engage as many of their senses as possible to remember and to improve learning.

-Use acronyms and mnemonics to assist memory skills.

Assistive technology, including application software (apps) can be very helpful for students who have mental health disorders.

Evidence-based Teaching

Classroom and School-Wide Learning Environment

Proactive Classroom Management Techniques (PCM)

Prevents behavioral problems
Maximizes classroom time devoted to academics
Stresses positive interactions with students
Keeping classroom organized
Making sure that rules and expectations are understood
Setting goals
Providing feedback

Using a cuing system to gain students' attention
Providing numerous opportunities to respond
Visual schedules of classroom activities
Motivation system for rewards

Minimize distractions

Focus on positive communications

Reprimands should be brief, non-emotional, non-threatening and spoken in close proximity to the student

Deescalation:

Speak calmly
Be at the same height as the student
Offer caring statements
Provide a way out via alternate activities
Take a break

Clear Rules/Expectations (CRE)

No matter how obvious rules appear to be, it is important to systematically and directly teach them to students.
In addition to traditional approaches of modeling and reinforcing the rules and using prompts or cues, other school-wide approaches can improve outcomes even more.

Include students in establishing and reinforcing expectations

Use of token systems

Utilize school-wide behavioral supports

Use clear, concise and explicit expectations that are brief and positively framed

Teach these at the beginning of the school year and reinforce them throughout the year

May need to re-teach students who have difficulty following classroom expectations

Crisis Intervention Planning (CIP)

Schools require clearly defined plans in advance for addressing crisis situations such as students being in danger of harming self or others

Clarify the roles of school staff (e.g., social worker) vs. county crisis team vs. corrections officer vs. co-located therapist, if all are potentially available to intervene in a crisis)

Have a clearly defined suicide protocol for imminent or potential risk, that maintains safety and provides appropriate interventions

Have crisis teams at each school, with school-wide communication of whom to contact, and when they should be contacted

Utilize student education (e.g., what to do if a friend tells you that he/she is suicidal)

Classroom Level Practices

E.g.: Balanced curriculum that is

Rigorous

Relevant

Promotes relationships

Based on developmental stages

Creates active participants

Encourages whole-brain learning

Curriculum should be:
Integrated
Empowering students to take ownership of it
Should be differentiated regarding content, process used, the product expected, and the physical factors of the environment
Active, hands-on learning should be encouraged

Academic Supports and Curricular/Instructional Modifications (CIM)

May include modifications of learning strategies, may simplify concepts, and may teach different sets of knowledge and skills

Reducing distractions

Presenting smaller amounts of work

Incorporate students' interests

Identify motivational factors

Take into account symptoms of a student's mental health disorder

Systemic Approach to Cooperative Learning (CL)

Students work in teams on an assignment that has specific criteria to satisfy

Team members are held individually accountable

Stresses positive interdependence, shared interactive work, collaborative skills and group processing

Specialized Instruction to Promote Learning and Study Skills

Modifications, adaptations and alterations of:
Instructional methods
Teaching techniques
Materials
Physical setting
Media
Takes mental health symptoms (e.g., distractibility, agitation, etc.) into account

Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)

Students work in pairs or small groups to provide tutoring in reading strategies:
Information sequencing
Generating main idea statements
Generating and evaluating predictions
Etc.

Peers provide corrections and positive reinforcement
Half hour sessions 3-4 times a week
Peers are carefully chosen for compatibility and cooperativeness, and can switch roles from learner to coach

Peer-mediated Intervention to Promote Positive Behavioral Skills (PMI)

Can be used for teaching life skills, social skills etc.
E.g., is helpful for ASD students
Learning from the peers with whom one is interacting on a daily basis produces an immediate, generalizable effect

Conflict Resolution Program (CRP)

Rather than responding to threats with anger, fear and confusion, students learn methods of peaceful conflict resolution This is especially helpful for students who are impulsive, traumatized, who have poor social skills, who have cognitive limitations or other mental health disorders

Social Skills Instruction Taught as part of Regular Classroom Instruction (SSI)

Best to teach skills in real-life classroom situations
They are more generalized than if taught in a mental health professional's office
Cooperation
Interpersonal communication
Listening skills
Self discipline
Problem solving
Awareness of non-verbal communication

Anger Management Program (AMP)

Teaches skills of
Communicating effectively when angry
Appropriate assertiveness
Learning appropriate responses
Improved ability to understand others' feelings and motives and behaviors

A Behavior Support Management Plan (BSM)

Focuses on pro-social behaviors
Utilizes
Respondent and operant conditioning
Shaping
Extinction of undesirable behaviors
Redirection
Social modeling

Least restrictive interventions should be used whenever possible
Verbal directives
Redirection
Prompts
May require more restrictive interventions if the student poses a clear danger to self or others
Works best when there is school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports

Pre-correction Instructional Strategies (PCIS)

Students are reminded of expectation prior to situations where there is a history of high-risk or failure

Done through gestures, visually, through modeling or with physical assistance

Start with minimal prompting and increase if necessary

Use positive reinforcement

Using specific contingency statements of praise and increased student supervision significantly reduces inappropriate behaviors

Group-Oriented Contingency Management (GOCM)

Used in classrooms where there are multiple students displaying inappropriate behaviors
Reinforcers are in response to an individual, a subset of the group, or the entire group of students
Capitalizes on peer influence
Peers become the major change agents

Choice-Making Opportunities for Students (CMOS)

Enables students to have a sense of increased control over their lives

Promotes independence, self-monitoring, active participation, self-esteem, a sense of responsibility and reduces inappropriate behavior

E.g., choices of the location where the student works, the time a project is worked on, the materials used, etc.

Instruction in Self-monitoring of Student Performance (SMSP)

Rather than "Am I paying attention":
Am I at my desk?
Am I doing my assignment?
Am I listening to the teacher?
Am I asking for help?

Need to collect baseline data and to monitor behavior over time
The student learns to self-assess and to record target behaviors
Provides immediate feedback, documents improvement over time, increases self-awareness, saves teacher's time and results in improved behaviors

A System of Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS)

Continual teaching combined with feedback about positive behaviors reduces the need for discipline and promotes a climate of productivity, safety and learning
Three tiered pyramid model:
Universal at base
At risk in middle
High needs at top

Peer Reinforcement to Promote Appropriate Student Behavior (PR)

Emotionally and behaviorally disturbed students tend to be shunned by peers.

This leads to increased rejection and a vicious cycle of emotional and behavioral problems

Peers can encourage prosocial behaviors

Brief daily sessions of peer praise can improve peer acceptance, social interactions and social involvement

Instruction in Self-Monitoring of Non-Academic Behaviors (SMAB)

Behavioral Contracts

Holds students accountable
Provides structure and consistency
Promotes responsibility
Assists in communication with parents
Improves grades

Uses observable and measurable behaviors and simple, motivating reinforcers

Contracts are signed by all parties

Self-monitoring is encouraged

A Formal Procedure for Developing Function-Based Interventions (FBA)

Works best on the "behavioral" part of the Clinical-Behavioral Spectrum
It is important to recognize which clinical manifestations have no function due to being intrinsic causes of the behavior