

Trends is published regularly throughout the school year by **Cornerstone Day School** as a service to New Jersey school professionals. Written by the educational professionals at Cornerstone, each issue highlights one important topic with practical applications for those working with students with emotional and behavioral problems.

TRENDS

COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM



"Integrating state of the art psychiatric treatment and outstanding academics within a dynamic school environment."

"Cognitive behavioral interventions are evidence-based approaches that address student behavioral deficits and excesses, by providing students with the tools to manage their own behavior."

References:

- University of Florida, College of Education. Take Charge Curriculum <http://education.ufl.edu/behavior-management-resource-guide/take-charge-anger-management-curriculum/>
- Algozzine, R., Daunic, A. P., & Smith, S. W. (Eds.). (2010). Preventing problem behaviors: A handbook of successful prevention strategies (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Smith, S.W., & Daunic, A.P. (2004). Research on preventing behavior problems using a cognitive-behavioral intervention: Preliminary findings, challenges and future directions. Behavioral Disorders, 30, 72-76.

Classroom management can be difficult and complex, frustrating and time consuming. For this reason, educators are continually seeking behavior management programs that may be implemented for all students, and specific interventions for students that need individualized attention and support. Cognitive behavioral interventions are evidence-based approaches that address student behavioral deficits and excesses, by providing students with the tools to manage their own behavior.

Cognitive Behavioral Intervention (CBI) incorporates strategies of behavior therapy (modeling, feedback & reinforcement) and cognitive therapy (e.g. self talk & think-alouds) to develop coping and self-management skills. The basic concept of CBI is that overt behavior (hitting a peer when teased) is mediated by cognitive events (I'll get him back) and that students can learn to modify their behavior by changing their thoughts. Cognitive behavioral interventions involve "how to think strategies" that teach students to modify their behavior, in place of "what to think and do" instruction from adults. CBIs are student-implemented systems, enabling students to generalize their newly learned behavior more effectively than teacher implemented systems that rely on external rewards and punishments.

Adult modeling is an essential component of cognitive behavioral intervention. It is important for teachers to model the behavioral and cognitive skills they are teaching. For example, teachers can "think out loud" about how they might manage their own anger ("What she said makes me really angry, but I won't say anything now. I'll wait until I'm calm to speak to her about it") and evaluate the outcome ("I'm glad I didn't say anything. It turned out to be a misunderstanding"). A teacher's explanation of the cognitive strategies they use and their meta-cognitive awareness (thinking about their thinking) can serve as an influential model for students to emulate.

Cognitive Behavioral Intervention has been used effectively to decrease aggressive behaviors in students with emotional behavioral disorders. CBI provides students with strategies to change aggressive responses into adaptive alternatives by modifying their thinking processes about people and situations. Instruction assists students to develop, evaluate and select appropriate alternative responses. Students may be taught individually or in small groups to use the following sequential strategy:

- 1) Stop and think before acting. Students are taught to manage aggressive responses through the use of covert speech.
- 2) Identify the problem. Students are taught to distinguish the specific aspects of a problematic situation that may trigger an aggressive response.
- 3) Develop alternative solutions. Students identify at least two alternative solutions to a specific problem situation: think about something else until calm, and/or move to another location to avoid further provocation.
- 4) Evaluate the consequences of possible solutions.
- 5) Select and implement a solution (students can role-play and discuss).

CBI curricula such as Take Charge (for middle school students) provide instructional techniques such as direct instruction, modeling, role-playing, feedback, reinforcement and cognitive modeling using teacher "think alouds". Teaching students to modify their thinking and inner speech assists them to develop and use self instruction to make more positive and effective behavioral choices. Using CBI in the classroom gives students the skills to self manage their behaviors in a variety of settings, strengthening pro-social behavior and decreasing maladaptive behaviors like hyperactivity/impulsivity, disruption and aggression.