



CENTER ON
PBIS Positive Behavioral
Interventions & Supports

RESPONDING TO THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) OUTBREAK THROUGH PBIS

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March 2020



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Author Center on PBIS

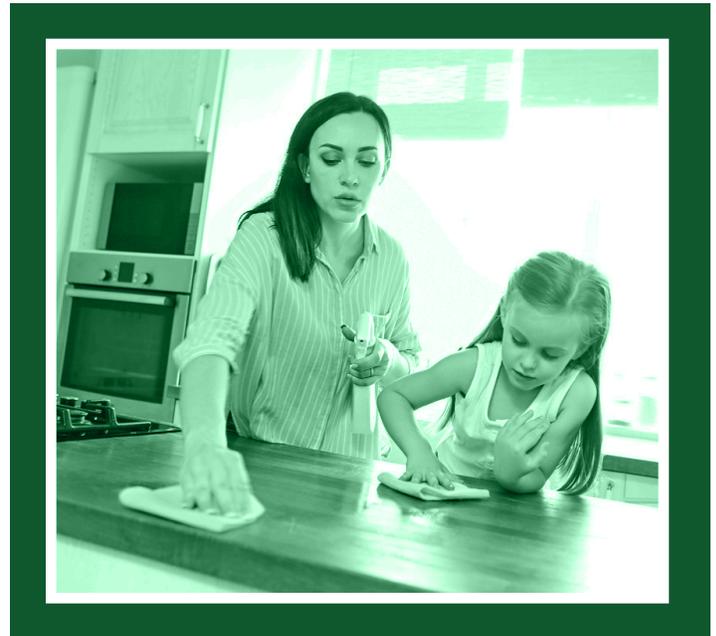
Introduction

One of the key principles of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is to focus on building prosocial skills, not simply attempting to eliminate challenging or problem behavior. We encourage all schools to continue that focus, as well as other key principles of PBIS, as you address the COVID-19 pandemic. The following are a few simple recommendations educators can embed across a continuum of supports.



Prompt, teach, and reinforce “wash, cover, clean, and maintain distance behaviors.” That is, explicitly teach prevention measures such as frequent hand washing (20-30 seconds), keeping hands away from face, coughing into the crook of your arm, and wiping shared materials with disinfectant after use within your school routines. Tie these practices to your current school-wide expectations (e.g., be responsible by washing your hands, be respectful by keeping hands and feet to self – use “air” high fives to encourage others). Make sure all staff are teaching these prevention strategies, creating routines to ensure they occur (e.g., extra hand washing and sanitizing breaks in the day), and delivering high rates of positive specific feedback. Make sure to emphasize the use of your school-wide expectations when students follow the intensified routines. Consider teaching and reinforcing an incompatible behavior (e.g., holding hands in lap) to touching one’s face. Teach the facts about the virus and the system’s response. Share information about the virus and steps the school and district are taking to keep students, families, and staff healthy and safe. Do not overemphasize, simply embed factual information into your daily instruction.

Emphasize respect and sense of community. There have been reports of individuals from groups being harassed based on perceived race or national origin. Re-teach, prompt, and reinforce respectful behavior in the context of your expectations. If you observe a student being disrespectful to others, (a) quickly



correct signal the error (“That was not respectful”), (b) re-state expectations (“We speak kindly to each other to show respect”), and (c) provide an opportunity for the students to engage in a positive interaction (“Let’s try that again. How would you show respect?”) and receive positive feedback (“That was a kind thing to say.”). If the comment reflects a lack of understanding or bias, provide factual information to counteract the misunderstanding (e.g., “Anyone can get sick, and we are a community that takes care of each other.”).

Support and engage families. Communicate with families about these prevention strategies. Encourage families to engage in similar prompting, teaching, and reinforcing at home. Also, encourage families to increase their usual health and safety behaviors—keep their children home if they are sick.



Plan for disruptions.

Given that school serves a very important function for students—a place of safety, consistent meals, service delivery, in addition to being a rich instructional and social environment—consider how to provide these supports to students who are not able to be at school (due to their own health or a school closure). For example, consider making work available online so students can stay on track, providing access to families to access school meals, and send out regular communications to families and students to maintain positive connections to school.

Emphasize the continuum of support. Monitor students and create a simple referral process for teachers to report any students who are especially anxious about the situation. Consider small groups or individual work with a school-based mental health provider to teach them coping strategies.

Maintain health and safety as a priority. If students, staff, or visitors are sick and show up to school, alert district health providers to create a plan of supports to quicken recovery and reduce spread. Work in accordance with district, state, and federal guidance



to consider when it may be necessary to “pause” school for cleaning and re-establish a healthy and safe learning environment.

Once the risk has decreased, make sure you revisit universal rules and routines to restore your school climate to a safe and healthy environment. For more recommendations, see our resource on [Getting Back to School After Disruptions](#)¹ and [Supporting Schools During and After Crisis](#).²



Additional useful resources from the US Department of Education:

- [US Department of Education COVID-19 Resources for Schools and School Personnel](#)³
- [Providing Services to Students with Disabilities during COVID-19](#)⁴
- [CDC Guidance to Schools Before and During an Outbreak](#)⁵
- [FAQ on FERPA and COVID-19](#)⁶
- [Fact Sheet: Impact of COVID-19 on Assessments and Accountability under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#)⁷

Embedded Hyperlinks

1. <http://www.pbis.org/resource/getting-back-to-school-after-disruptions-resources-for-making-your-school-year-safer-more-predictable-and-more-positive>
2. <https://www.pbis.org/current/returning-to-school-during-and-after-crisis>
3. <https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus>
4. <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/qa-covid-19-03-12-2020.pdf>
5. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>
5. https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource_document/file/FERPA%20and%20Coronavirus%20Frequently%20Asked%20Questions_0.pdf
6. <https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/03/COVID-19-OESE-FINAL-3.12.20.pdf>

This document was supported from funds provided by the Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports cooperative grant supported by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education (H326S180001). Dr. Renee Bradley served as the project officer. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, or enterprise mentioned in this document is intended or should be inferred.

Suggested Citation for this Publication

Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (March, 2020). Responding to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak through PBIS. University of Oregon. www.pbis.org.