

PBIS in Juvenile Justice Settings

By Anju Sidana

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS, or PBS) is a research-based framework for implementing school-wide systems of behavioral support to help prevent and reduce problem behavior. Through “proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors to create positive school environments” [1], students are taught which behaviors are expected and which are unacceptable.



As data showing the successes of the PBIS model in both schools and institutions spreads, more neglected and delinquent facilities are becoming interested in the possibilities of PBIS for their populations. Two institutions that have implemented PBIS with dramatic results are the Iowa Juvenile Home (IJH), and the Illinois Youth Center (IYC).

To learn more about the use of PBIS at these two juvenile facilities, we talked to Craig Rosen, principal at IJH, and Melva Clarida, principal at IYC. Below we highlight how PBIS was implemented, how it works, and what the results have been at each of these facilities.

Iowa Juvenile Home [2]

IJH, a primarily (67 percent) female facility serving mostly youth who are neglected, is located in Toledo, Iowa. According to Craig Rosen, the administration at IJH sought out PBIS 4 years ago, partly because traditional correctional approaches were simply not working at the facility. Additionally, the administration wanted PBIS to help operationalize two newer behavioral philosophies that the facility had recently made a commitment to practice. These two philosophies were *strength-based programming* (building programming around what the students do well and teaching students to use their traits in positive rather than negative ways) and a treatment model referred to as *Circle of Courage* (a Native American philosophy which asserts that youth act out because they are lacking in the areas of *mastery, belonging, generosity, and/or independence*, and encourages youth to become empowered in these areas). Although both concepts existed previously at IJH, PBIS provided the structure necessary to make them work, Rosen explained.

PBIS was first brought to IJH in 2001 when the facility was chosen by the Iowa Behavioral Alliance as 1 of 14 original grant sites in the State to participate in PBIS trainings. Through the Alliance, the Center on PBIS was contracted to provide a series of trainings on PBIS for 3 years to teams from each of the 14 sites. A leadership committee was formed at IJH to attend the trainings. The team returned from each session with new concepts to implement and was required to submit a checklist detailing the progress made at each subsequent session.

“PBIS is a very complex process and requires a lot of support and commitment,” said Rosen. According to Rosen, establishing commitment to using PBIS was one of the first steps in its implementation at the facility. The administration did this by providing active administrative involvement, creating a PBIS Steering Committee comprised of representatives from the facility’s departments (educational, clinical, etc.), and gaining faculty and staff support through the provision of trainings and information sessions. To help *maintain* this commitment, IJH uses two assessment tools (provided through the Center’s trainings) to collect input from faculty and staff. The first is an audit of the PBIS structure at the school that is completed by the leaders of the various PBIS teams and committees. The other is an online survey completed by all staff to assess their opinions on the status of different aspects of PBIS at the facility, areas of PBIS in need of improvement, and priority of the needed improvements. In addition to the two assessments, data on the numbers of disciplinary removals and referrals are periodically collected and documented so that staff may observe the effects of PBIS on the rates of these actions.

In addition to establishing a commitment to PBIS, the PBIS team was required to identify three to five positively-stated, facility-wide behavioral expectations to serve as the focus of the facility and the primary system of support for all students. The team was also required to identify strategies to be used for secondary (group) and tertiary (individual) levels of support for students with more persistent behavioral problems. Rosen explained that although the student population at IJH consists of the top 1 percent of students with high-risk behaviors throughout the State, dividing systems of support into three levels and breaking the kids out accordingly has nevertheless been successful for the facility. ([Click here](#) to see the traditional school-wide continuum of support triangle and [here](#) to see how IJH has modified this model around its population.)

To form their primary system of support, the team chose expectations based on the Circle of Courage traits ([click here](#) to see the chart). The team then created matrices to help students and staff better understand the expectations and what the corresponding appropriate and inappropriate behaviors looked like in different situations ([click here](#) to see the matrices). To establish the behavioral expectations, faculty and staff teach the expectations formally on a regular basis in both the school and clinical settings. Teaching and defining what the behaviors look like clarifies what is and is not acceptable, said Rosen. "Primary prevention is about improving consistency in terms of behavioral expectations."



For those students for whom the primary system of support is not effective, staff and faculty employ a secondary level of support using targeted interventions. Targeted interventions are applied to groups of 10 or more students (with similar behavioral issues) at one time. These are students who are identified by data collection as needing extra group support. According to Rosen, strategies used at this level provide groups of students with extra support before they misbehave. This may include having students carry a color-specific comment sheet from class to class (all students are required to carry and turn in comment sheets each day) so that they are given extra attention throughout the day, or providing early morning one-on-one attention before school starts each day.

In the tertiary level of support, students are provided with *individual* support. Examples of individual support at IJH include pulling a student aside to discuss an issue when a problem occurs rather than confronting the student in front of her or his peers, or examining a student's problem behavior through the use of a functional behavior assessment (FBA). Rosen described an FBA as an in-depth assessment initially intended for special education students but which, in this context, can serve as a problemsolving process for analyzing which events trigger and reinforce problem behaviors in students with the most persistent referrals.

While some of the tools and strategies used in this continuum of support are unique, explained Rosen, many prevention strategies are the same as those used in public schools.

Another part of developing the school-wide expectations was creating a system to reward behavior consistent with those expectations. One system created by the PBIS leadership team to acknowledge and reinforce appropriate behavior was to have students carry comment sheets with them from class to class (as mentioned above) where teachers could write positive comments as well as any concerns. The team also developed a system based on "courage slips." In this system, students set goals ahead of time for both treatment and education. Students are then given courage slips by faculty and staff for good behaviors that show progress toward these goals or the school-wide expectations. As the courage slips are accumulated, they may be exchanged for goods and services. In addition to courage slips and comment sheets, award assemblies are held to recognize youth for their good behavior.

Along with using positive behavioral supports to foster appropriate behavior, enforcing consequences for misbehavior is also necessary, Rosen said. Negative consequences are necessary to maintain control of an environment and to teach what not to do, but do not *change* behavior, he explained. "Youth need positive reinforcement in order to learn replacement skills."

While the facility continues to work on and improve their PBIS processes, the results so far have been dramatic. Between July 2003 and September 2004, rates of restraint and seclusion at IJH were reduced by 73 percent. Additionally, compared to the baseline average assessed between 1999 and 2003, the average rate of disciplinary removals was reduced by 50 percent when assessed in 2003–2004. PBIS has also allowed the facility to continue providing appropriate behavioral support to its students even when student needs have changed. In February 2005, when the facility began to see a significant increase in the number of incoming youth with mental disabilities and rates of disciplinary referrals began to rise, PBIS provided the data that allowed IJH to restructure its clinical and academic environments (e.g., through revised instructional strategies and the early morning one-on-one program described above). As a result, rates of referrals have again been in decline since July 2005 ([click here to see the charts](#)).

For more information on PBIS at IJH, view Craig Rosen's complete PowerPoint presentation on [Implementing PBIS at IJH](#).

Illinois Youth Center [3]

According to Melva Clarida, Illinois Youth Center (IYC) principal, PBIS was first introduced at the school in the IYC–Harrisburg boys' prison in December 2001. The facility became interested in the program as a potential solution to persistent teacher requests for classroom management techniques and practices. School records indicated that only a fraction of the students at IYC caused most of the problems, a finding that was consistent with the research base of the PBIS framework. As a result, the facility decided to implement the program.

In order to establish staff commitment to PBIS (PBIS doctrine states that a school must have 80 percent staff commitment to the program before it can be implemented), the IYC administration took time to speak to staff both informally and through organized meetings. When staff members expressed interest in learning more about the program, Illinois State PBIS coordinators hosted a 1-day introduction to PBIS for all staff. A vote showed that staff members were overwhelmingly in favor of trying the program, and IYC proceeded to create a PBIS committee comprised of primarily education, as well as security, mental health, and administrative personnel. To maintain staff commitment, IYC holds monthly PBIS team meetings, sponsors PBIS-related professional development sessions for all education staff, and has biannual "Refresh & Review" PBIS sessions in which staff collaboratively discuss what they've done well and what they need to do better.

To begin implementation, IYC's PBIS team planned and trained for 5 months before introducing the program in the school in December 2001. According to Clarida, the way in which IYC implemented PBIS did not differ much from the way in which a public school might have implemented PBIS. "You just take evidence-based practices and adapt them to your situation," said Clarida. "PBIS showed that punishment, exclusion, and counseling do *not* work to correct bad behavior. You have to clearly define the behaviors that you expect, and then teach, exemplify, and reward them."

One of the largest challenges IYC faced in the implementation process was developing school-wide behavioral expectations that could be widely agreed upon. Determining these expectations was a joint effort, said Clarida. The PBIS team eventually decided that all rules could be boiled down to the three basics of *respect yourself*, *respect others*, and *respect property*, and that these particular expectations would also allow staff the flexibility to tie in social skill lessons. Teachers were given the autonomy to define how these behaviors would look in their classrooms and were expected to teach these behaviors to their students.

Given the high rate of student turnover at IYC, the school decided to introduce all students at entry to the school-wide behavioral expectations through a week-long orientation program. In addition, to help students learn the social skills necessary to meet the expectations, the school instituted a policy to teach a social skills lesson during the second hour of class each Monday. Skills taught weekly have included saying thank you, properly entering and exiting a classroom, getting along with others, expressing empathy, following directions, waiting your turn, and more. Teachers devise their own lesson plans to teach these skills and may employ lecture, discussion, videos, or writing

assignments. The skills are taught in terms of themes that run a few weeks each and, in response to the rate of turnover, the facility found that repeating the same, few basic themes was the most effective. To reinforce the weekly lessons, students are randomly rewarded by staff throughout the week for displaying the skill taught.

For students who require additional support beyond these primary prevention strategies, IYC created targeted (secondary) and individual (tertiary) interventions. These included practices such as mentoring, student-teacher mediations and, more recently, peer mediation and peace-keeping circles (a classroom technique in which participants sit in a circle and take turns expressing themselves while others in the circle suspend judgment). For students with the most extreme behavior problems, a 6-week *behavior management program* was created. For the first 4 weeks of this program, the student is separated from the general school population and is required to work with a teacher, his counselor, security staff, and mental health personnel on improving his skills. If the student is successful, he is placed back into regular classes on a probationary basis for the remaining 2 weeks, and then reintegrated with the general population after completing the program.

In addition to creating behavioral expectations and interventions, another challenge for IYC was developing a rewards system that would not be abused. "There is so little the boys can have since many things are contraband, and on the other hand they don't have anything, so anything you give them they want," said Clarida. IYC settled on a system in which students receive rewards in the form of "tickets" (showing both the student's and teacher's name) accompanied by specific praise for the demonstrated behavior. Students may then exchange tickets for such things as penny candy, pocket folders with sports figures/cars on front, notebooks, time with adults, participation in basketball tournaments, digital pictures of the students for them to mail to their families, and in-house movie viewings with free popcorn.

IYC analysis of the data has shown that minor and major infractions at the school have declined appreciably as a result of this PBIS program (*click [here](#) to see the chart*). In the month immediately prior to PBIS implementation, IYC experienced 32 fights in the school. After implementation, the school experienced no fights for 3 years. Additionally, even when problems have arisen, the school has been able to use PBIS data to diagnose the causes of the problems and resolve the issues that led to them, said Clarida.

"Sustaining the program is much harder than just starting it, but we've been pleased with the results," she said. "We were really worried that because of the high rate of turnover, we would have to start over with the program every month. But that wasn't the case, because the school *climate* changed. We have never gone back to the level of problems we had before implementing PBIS."

To learn more about the PBIS program at IYC, you may view Melva Clarida's article, titled "Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports at the Illinois Youth Center-Harrisburg," in its entirety by clicking [here](#).

[1] OSEP Technical Assistance Center on PBIS. Retrieved on January 5, 2006, from <http://www.pbis.org/default.aspx>.

[2] Information on PBIS at IJH was obtained through interviews with and printed information from Craig Rosen, principal.

[3] Information on PBIS at IYC was obtained through interviews with and printed information from Melva Clarida, principal.