



EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE TRAINING SYSTEMS



PURPOSE OF THE BRIEF

The goal of this brief is to identify key issues, challenges, and recommendations for training direct support professionals how to teach skills that enable desired community participation by adults with I/DD. This includes a person-centered focus with consideration of the local environment/culture and the ongoing emphasis on implementation fidelity and validation of meaningful outcomes.

Having direct support professionals (DSP) (staff) who are skilled in teaching adults with I/DD is an essential part of providing Positive Behavior Support (PBS).

- Supporting people with I/DD to have meaningful engagement in their community settings depends on having skills needed in those settings.
- Direct support professionals' impact on quality of life for adults with I/DD depends on their ability to help the individual develop skills needed and desired.
- While their job title typically does not include "teacher" or trainer, an essential function is to build skills for those they support.
- Unfortunately, many community support agencies do not train their staff in evidence-based teaching strategies.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

CHALLENGE

Staff training requires resources and staff turnover rate/stability make this worse.

SOLUTION

Investing in workforce development is essential and needs to be based on clear understanding of the organizational culture and values.

We train all staff during initial orientation, that's all we have time for.

Supervisors are a key asset in the ongoing training of DSPs. A train-the-trainer model has demonstrated effectiveness, especially compared to "one-shot" workshops.

We are not sure if our training is working or if it's worth the investment.

Assessing performance of newly trained skills of DSPs and providing feedback is an evidence-based practice for use on-the-job to increase and maintain performance.

How can we train staff in a way that has meaningful impact on outcomes?

Training needs to be competency-based, assess DSP skills on-the-job on an ongoing basis and include performance feedback and/or coaching.

What are some good steps to take to improve staff skills in "how to teach"?

There are evidence-based practices shown to be effective for this with references provided at the end of this brief (e.g., Reid et al).

Are there ways to build this into our program?

Yes, DSP supervisors and others can be trained to provide training and ongoing performance feedback as part of their routine supervision. It can also be built into employee performance standards.

MORE ABOUT TEACHING TECHNIQUES



Since teaching skills to individuals with I/DD is an essential component of providing PBS it is important to have practical, evidence-based methods to accomplish this. These teaching techniques have been shown to be effective when used by direct support professionals who have been appropriately trained. In addition it is important to consider the individualized context for each individual. Some learners only need simple instruction while others may need a more complex teaching protocol. This should be determined by individualized assessment. It is also important to insure that you have an overall climate of teaching and reinforcing (e.g., building relationships) instead of a focus on just responding and correcting mistakes. Skills in evidence-based methods for prompting and correcting errors in ways that promote effective learning are also needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Train DSPs in effective teaching strategies by:

Focusing on evidence-based procedures such as those detailed by Dennis Reid & colleagues and the AAIDD PBS training curriculum modules on teaching.

Include demonstration/role playing and supervised practice as part of competency-based training to insure that “how to teach” skills are acquired.

Make clear the advantages of training demonstrations in real-world settings and not just a classroom (or virtual learning environment).

Identify and implement strategies for ongoing mentoring & coaching and building observation & feedback into regular supervisor routines.

Ensure that all understand the critical importance of functional skills (what they are) and the appropriate training environments.

Include training on key instructional steps that include prompting, error correction and use of positive reinforcement in teaching.

Recall that data-based decision making is a key component of PBS and that objectively assessing progress is fundamental to effective and sustainable training approaches. This would include clearly identified skills, ongoing progress monitoring and implementation fidelity.

CITATION

Rotholz, D., Jeffrey Pearsall, J., Freeman, R., Moore, M., Leitch, S. & Thomas, J. (2020). Brief Effective and Sustainable Training Systems [positive behavior support brief]. *White paper on positive behavior support in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities*. Association for Positive Behavior Support.

