

Behavior-Specific Praise in the Classroom



This guide was produced by Project Support & Include at Vanderbilt University—one of seven projects across the state funded by the Tennessee Department of Education to provide training and technical assistance to schools as they address the academic, social, and behavioral needs of students. This brief was authored by Stephanie T. Villeda, Brooke C. Shuster, Lauren Magill, & Erik W. Carter. 05/2014

Praise is a powerful tool for educators. When used effectively in the classroom, it can increase the social and academic performance of students, as well as improve classroom climate. General praise can be reinforcing for some students, but the most powerful praise is specific to a student's behavior. Behavior-specific praise (BSP) gives students specific, positive verbal feedback indicating approval of social or academic behavior (e.g., "Sydney, I like how you are sitting with your hands to yourself").¹ It is an evidence-based classroom management strategy that improves student behavior by letting students know exactly what they are doing correctly.² BSP can also be easily incorporated into any instructional setting.³ For example, in the cafeteria, students can be praised for standing quietly in line while waiting for food, or in the library for reading quietly to themselves.

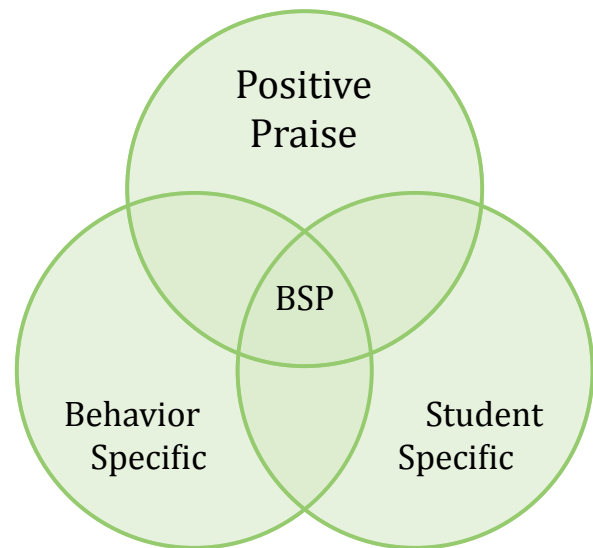
WHAT DOES BEHAVIOR-SPECIFIC PRAISE LOOK LIKE?

BSP is a nonintrusive way to reinforce specific, desired behaviors of your students. This classroom management strategy can be differentiated based on age of students, development, the settings in which you teach, and your school's culture (e.g., "Thumbs up for sitting crisscross on the rug." versus "Thank you for engaging in our discussion about the chapter."). Using BSP can increase students' time on-task and decrease their disruptive behavior.



► How much BSP should you give?

A general 4:1 ratio of praise to reprimand statements is desirable. Using about 6 praise statements every 15 minutes is also recommended.⁴



► BSP Should Be:

1. A description of a desired **B**ehavior (social or academic).
2. **S**pecific to the student or class.
3. A positive **P**raise statement.⁵

For more information about the technical assistance project funded to support schools in your region, please see page 4 of this guide.

EXAMPLES OF BSP

- Thank you for keeping your hands to yourself, Ana!
- Great job being quiet, Joachim!
- Jaime, I like that you are sharing your materials with Mohammed.
- Great job taking turns in group discussions, class!
- Laura, excellent use of our new vocabulary word!

NON-EXAMPLES OF BSP

- Don't touch him!
- Good job!
- Way to go!
- Stop that!
- That's not nice! We don't behave that way in our classroom.

▶ "Jontez, great job sitting in your chair and listening to me while I was explaining the math problem."

WHY IS BEHAVIOR-SPECIFIC PRAISE SO IMPORTANT?

More than 30 years of research has indicated teacher praise is an effective management strategy for increasing students' appropriate behavior in the classroom.⁶ Further, an increase in teacher BSP can also improve academic outcomes for students.⁷

When implemented consistently and correctly, BSP increases instructional time, on-task behavior, and correct academic responses. It may also decrease the teacher's time spent on correcting inappropriate behaviors. This helps create a more positive and productive classroom environment, where students know the behavioral expectations. It also builds students' confidence as they receive BSP for their actions and accomplishments.⁸

HOW DO I IMPLEMENT BEHAVIOR-SPECIFIC PRAISE IN THE CLASSROOM?

First, think about the behaviors you would like to see in your classroom (e.g., listening while others are speaking, giving your best effort). Write down a list of specific behaviors that will help students continue to progress academically and behaviorally in your classroom (e.g., pay attention to the speaker, raise your hand and ask questions when confused). Then use this list to begin noticing and acknowledging student behavior. You may post some of these positive behavioral expectations around your classroom as a reminder for you to praise those specific behaviors. This can also serve as a reminder for students to display the desired, specific, appropriate behaviors.

WAYS TO REMEMBER TO USE BEHAVIOR-SPECIFIC PRAISE (BSP) IN THE CLASSROOM:

- Remind yourself with written prompts (e.g., on the board, on post-it notes, in your lesson plans).⁹
- Create laminated cards of BSP statements and locate them in visible places throughout the classroom.¹⁰
- Set a goal for yourself and tally the number of BSP statements you make during a lesson.¹¹
- Monitor your efforts by recording lessons (e.g., video, audio) to determine whether you are consistently using BSP.¹²

HOW DO I TEACH BEHAVIOR-SPECIFIC PRAISE TO FACULTY AND STAFF?

There are many ways to equip educators to use BSP effectively in their classroom. One way is to provide training to faculty and staff before the school year starts. During this training, provide examples and non-examples, and allow faculty and staff to practice this strategy. Methods to do so will vary to accommodate your school and student needs.¹³ Regardless of method, administrators and team leaders should provide feedback to teachers to improve and reinforce their use of BSP.¹⁴

SUMMARY

BSP is an intervention you can incorporate into your classroom to increase appropriate student behaviors. BSP can help equip students with the academic, behavioral, and social skills needed to be successful. Further, this classroom management strategy may help increase the amount of time students are on-task and



decrease the amount of time faculty and staff spend attending to disruptive behaviors. This will allow more time for academic instruction.¹⁵

FOR FURTHER READING

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ENDNOTES

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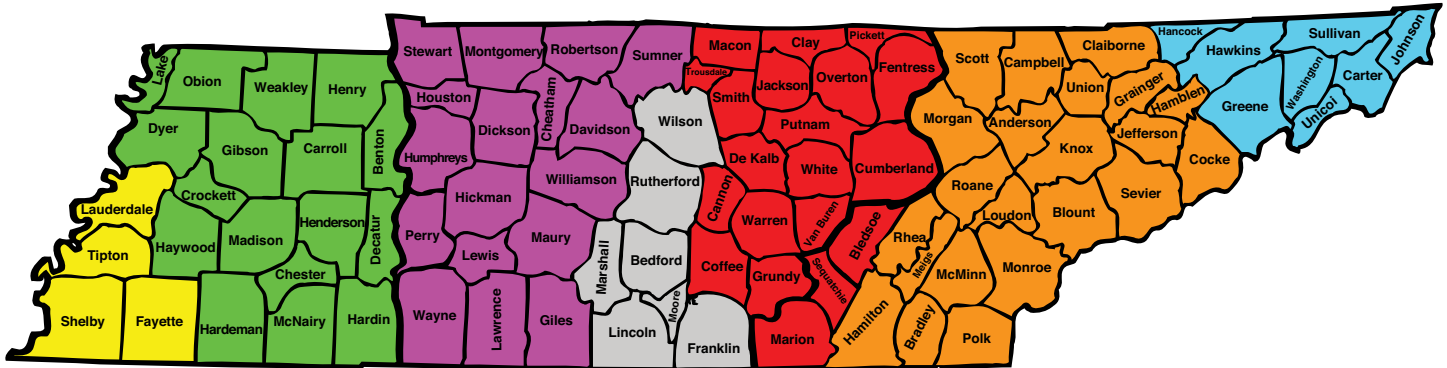


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Graphic services supported in part by NICHD Grant P30 HD15052 to the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development. kc.vanderbilt.edu

CI3T TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECTS BY REGION: 2012-2015

The Tennessee Department of Education has provided funding to seven projects to provide training and technical assistance to schools as they address the academic, social, and behavioral needs of students within comprehensive, integrated, three-tiered (CI3T) models of prevention. To locate the project assigned to your region, see below.



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