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Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

The Importance of Teachers, Specialists, and Parents Working Together to Improve Behavior

Krista Kutash, Ph.D. • April 2009

Topic: Reducing Behavior Problems

Practice: Collaborative Relationships

Highlights

- Krista Kutash, Professor at the University of South Florida, talks about the importance of teachers collaborating with their colleagues, behavior specialists, and parents to manage student behaviors in their classrooms.
- When teachers work together, they can learn new behavior management skills. This is often done through both formal and informal coaching where teachers observe one another and provide feedback on the management strategies used and suggestions for improvement.
- Behavior specialists can provide support, bring new ideas, and provide additional perspectives on managing disruptive behaviors.
- Establishing strong relationships and good communication with parents is an important component to managing student behavior. Communication with parents should go beyond routine activities, e.g. positive notes.

About the Interviewee

Krista Kutash, Ph.D. is Professor and Deputy Director of the Research and Training Center for Children's Mental Health at the University of South

Florida and has been associated with the Center since its inception in 1984. She has a B.S. in Social Work from Florida State University, an M.B.A. in Econometrics and a Ph.D. in Measurement and Statistics from the University of South Florida. The Center is jointly funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) with the mission to conduct and disseminate findings from an integrated set of research and training activities focusing on the implementation of community-based mental health services for children with serious emotional disorders (SED). Dr. Kutash has conducted field research in 27 states that included over 200 school districts and 60 mental health facilities. In addition, she has extensive experience in knowledge transfer through teaching, workshop presentations, consultation, and manuscript development. Target audiences include educators, social services providers, families, and researchers. She recently published a guide for the prevention and treatment of violence in schools (The role of mental health services in promoting safe and secure schools). She is the co-editor of the *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders* and serves as Vice Chair of the University's Institutional Review Board. Dr. Kutash holds a joint appointment in the Department of Special Education where she trains doctoral students in the techniques of program evaluation.

Full Transcript

Hello, I'm Krista Kutash. I'm a Professor in the Department of Child & Family Studies at the University of South Florida, in Tampa.

It is very important for teachers to collaborate with other teachers. There's no reason for a teacher to feel alone when they're dealing with behavior disruptions in their classrooms or behavior that they're not used to seeing. In fact, the behavior is usually not limited to their own classroom. Other people in the school probably have seen the same behavior.

The best way for teachers to adopt new instructional practices or behavioral management practices is through their peers. Peer coaching can be either formal or informal. A teacher can ask another teacher to observe them implementing a new behavioral management strategy or instructional strategy and get feedback from this other teacher. Or the coaching can be very formal, with the resource teacher or an experienced teacher mentoring a teacher in a technique or strategy over many months' period of time, or can even take the form of in-service training.

Dealing with behavior is complex and teachers have a source of help when dealing with especially complex behavior that's going on in their classroom. These people include the school psychologists, pupil services personnel, resource teachers, behavioral consultants, behavioral specialists. Districts all have different names for them, but they bring new ideas, training, and perspectives on a behavioral challenge that may be going on in a classroom. In fact, many of them have seen the behavior previously or in other classrooms, so they bring that insight as well.

Research has documented that working with behavioral consultants reduces behavior problems in children when compared to teachers who do not have access to behavioral consultant, but it's a two-way street. Teachers should be seen as the expert on the context of how the behavior is manifesting itself in classrooms. They know when the behavior occurs, under what condition occurs. The behavioral consultant is going to bring in new ideas and new strategies to deal with that behavior. Teachers have to be open to that idea of new approaches and strategies. So, it's a give and take: the teacher will explain, the behavioral consultant will suggest, and they have to find the proper fit for that teacher's classroom.

Behavioral consultants can also help the teacher judge the feasibility of implementing an intervention in the classroom. Is there a good fit? Will it work in that classroom? The behavioral consultant can also monitor implementation to make sure the intervention is going smoothly as planned and with fidelity. What's also interesting is sometimes behavioral consultants notice that the intervention's working great at the classroom but, due to school climate or other factors, the behavior is manifesting itself differently in the area of recess or the cafeteria. So, the behavioral consultants can go back to the teacher. They can discuss what types of strategies and interventions can be put in place so that the issues of the classroom as well as issues on the playground can be addressed. And this is so important, that the teacher and the behavioral consultant manage and observe the outcomes to make sure they're getting the desired results in all of the environments that the behavior's occurring in.

The relationship a teacher has with a parent is probably one of the most important components of managing behavior in the classroom. Two rigorous studies have demonstrated that schools that have efforts aimed at creating positive parent-teacher relationships and communication systems have less behavior problems than schools that don't have this effort. Teachers told me that building effective communications has to go beyond the routine school activities such as open houses and parent nights. They have suggested several things that help lay this foundation of effective communication between themselves and parents. They suggest, for example, sending positive notes that build on the strengths of the child home every once in a while to let the parent know what's good about school that day. Also, phone messages or a phone call is a powerful strategy in building that relationship between the teacher and the parent. This lays a foundation for when or if you have to call to discuss a behavioral issue. The parent is used to your calls. They know that you realize their strengths in their child. And they recommend that when you do call a parent about a behavioral challenge or issue that's happening in the classroom that you really be clear with the parent about the frequency, the nature of the behavior, what the teacher has tried in the classroom without success, and then, most importantly, ask the parent how they've dealt with the behavior if they've seen it at home. So you're really inviting that parent to be a partner with the teacher in addressing this behavioral issue.

Research has shown that a teacher that's an effective collaborator is a strong protective factor in reducing behavior problems in their students in the classroom. While building these collaborative relationships with other teachers, personnel, service personnel, as well as parents or the student takes a long time, it is well worth the effort.