

Policy Considerations: Behavior Management

The intent of this policy consideration is to evoke discussion within your jurisdiction regarding best practices and key elements to include in policies and procedures. Jurisdictions should consider these policies in the context of their unique juvenile justice system structure; state and local mandates; risk tolerance level; and other individual needs.

Throughout the policy considerations the acronym “PP” is used. This stands for “policy and/or procedure.”

Purpose and General

- PP clearly states the purpose/intent of the PP and how it links to the agency mission.
- PP clearly states the purpose of the behavior management is to support and foster appropriate behaviors; deter and eliminate inappropriate behaviors; and assist youth in developing skills to effectively cope with situations and be successful in the community.
- PP includes basic information such:
 - Name of the PP owner (department, position, title)
 - Clear definitions of all key concepts related and that appear in the PP.
 - References to other relevant agency policies, state administrative rules, federal mandates, and agency forms related to the specific PP.
- PP requires annual review of behavior management system for revisions/modifications.

Physical Environment in Support of Behavior Management System

- PP requires information regarding the behavior management system (for example: list of incentives, cardinal rules, coping strategies, etc.) and positive, supportive messages be displayed throughout common areas (for example: dorms or other sleeping areas, day rooms, hallways, classrooms, family visitation rooms, etc.) The program rules, regulations, rewards/incentives are posted in common areas.
- PP prohibits posting a youth’s behavioral level or “status” in view of other youth.
- PP requires youth and family handbooks to include explanation of the behavior management system –for example: incentives for positive behaviors, consequences for rule violations, what behaviors would be considered a “rule violation,” etc.
- PP requires staff to review behavior management system information verbally with youth at intake. This verbal review should be in addition to providing a copy of the youth handbook. Information must be shared in a developmentally appropriate manner and take into considerations specific youth needs - for example: low cognitive functioning, reading level, English as a second language (ESL), etc.
- PP mirrors best practices by requiring staff to mentor youth (for example: assigning a Primary Staff to each youth). If yes:
 - PP outlines how staff assigned to youth;
 - PP requires staff to meet a minimum number of times per week with their assigned youth;
 - PP describes the content of these mentor sessions (for example: what should be covered/addressed in these sessions).

- PP requires as part of the behavior management system that the facility requires youth to engage in structured therapeutic activities (in addition to school). The number of hours should be individualized based upon the youth's needs and treatment plan. For example: a minimum of 10 hours per week of social skills groups, anger management groups, life skills, cognitive-behavioral groups, etc.
- PP requires youth get "credit" for attending these groups as part of the overall behavioral management score (daily or weekly), if applicable.

Reinforcers/Incentives/Rewards

- PP directs staff to explain programming expectations at the beginning of each activity.
- PP provides specific youth behaviors that would warrant a reward.
- PP provides guidance on what are "appropriate" and meaningful reinforcers/rewards (short and long-term).
- PP provides directives on how to effectively apply reinforcers.
- PP explains at which times of day/week youth will be assessed and by whom.
- PP explains when youth are not eligible to earn behavioral management points (for example: while youth is in isolation/room confinement).
- PP explains the behavioral management "scoring system" and how the issuance of these rewards will be documented (for example: when and where).
- PP emphasizes importance of positive feedback to youth and directs staff to seek out opportunities to provide positive feedback to youth (research literature suggests a *minimum* of 4:1 for ratio of rewards to consequences to deter negative behavior; many other studies have suggested upward of 7:1 ratio to change behavior).
- PP explains how youth behaviors while in school relate to those on the unit (for example: Is the school tracking behavior in same way? Are these results shared with unit staff?)
- PP clearly describes how staff will teach and reinforce behavior expectations to youth. For example, staff will discuss the rationale for the rules; describe and rehearse positive examples; given youth opportunity to practice the right way, etc.
- PP involves family in decisions, including identifying behavior management strategies to utilize with youth.
- PP provides guidelines for reward by privilege for accomplishments identified on youth's behavior plan.

Consequences/Sanctions

- PP provides clear guidance on the application of consequences.
- PP provides staff a graduated array of options to respond to youth behavior as part of the positive behavior management system.
- PP states staff will only use consequences to correct negative behavior and hold youth accountable and not for retribution for past negative behaviors, retaliation of any sort (for example: reporting of sexual abuse and/or harassment, etc.).
- PP directs staff to engage with youth (when youth is calm) to discuss what youth learned that triggered/caused the behavior and practice skills that will help prevent future occurrences.
- PP requires youth be part of discussion that involves discussing how youth might restore the community following his/her negative behavior.

- PP provide examples of appropriate consequences (for example: writing assignments, loss of game room privileges, etc.)
- PP prohibits certain consequences. Prohibited consequences include denial of youth rights. These include, but not limited to, denying youth meals, clothing, sleep, school, treatment programming, exercise, access to grievance system, or phone calls to approved to parents/legal guardians or attorneys. Food, including snacks, are not withheld nor is the established menu varied as a disciplinary sanction.
- PP prohibit using isolation/room confinement as a form of punishment or consequence.
- PP describes tools staff are expected to use to correct negative youth behaviors prior to issuing a consequence. These include redirecting youth through verbal commands, verbal de-escalation, motivational interviewing techniques, etc.
- PP describes process for issuing a rule violation:
 - Explain to youth the specific behaviors that did not meet program expectations (reason violation is being issued);
 - Consequence must be provided immediately following the negative behavior and be appropriate for the behavior violation;
 - Consequence must be as short as possible to extinguish the behavior;
 - Staff explain and/or role-model appropriate response and behavior to the youth as a way of preventing negative behavior in the future.
- PP describes how youth “get back on track” – for example: once sanction is completed the youth has an opportunity to continue progressing in the program.
- PP describes what to do with youth who are not progressing in program (for example: youth is at level one for 3 weeks due to a violation and still has not completed the mediation session or apology letter...the MDT will review the case and develop a strategy to motivate and engage youth in progressing through the program.)
- PP requires a member of the MDT to review the negative behavior and talk with the youth so s/he has the opportunity to explain prior to the sanction being provided/confirmed (this explanation from the youth does not mean that the sanction will be lifted).
- PP provides guidelines for informal resolution of minor misbehavior.

Specialized Unit, Support, and Suicide Precautions

- PP requires treatment plans or specialized behavior support plans to address underlying causes of displayed behaviors.
- If PP has specialized units with intensive programming to work with/house youth, the PP requires and explains how staff will monitor these youth including managing psychotropic medications, suicidal ideation, progress in treatment (when ready to return to regular living unit), etc.
- PP requires youth on suicide precautions engage in regular programming, unless deemed unsafe to do so by a mental health clinician.
- PP requires clinical staff to formally assess and reassess youth on suicide precautions a minimum of daily to determine status and share this information with designated individuals (for example: direct care staff on duty, document in log, etc.)

Training

- PP describes how staff will be trained to deliver rewards and consequences appropriately and equitably to youth including new employee training and mandatory ongoing training at least annually (and indicates the length of the mandatory ongoing training session).
- PP requires staff to read and sign a form indicating their understanding of the behavior management policy expectations and agreeing to use behavior management tools consistent with the completed training.
- PP requires supervisors to provide booster trainings and information in staff meetings and during individual staff supervision sessions.
- PP sets forth specific topics that will be covered during trainings as it relates to behavior management – for example: adolescent brain development, impact of trauma, cognitive behavioral treatment, behavior modification interventions, positive reinforcement, appropriate consequences, formal discipline, documentation requirements, de-escalation techniques, etc.
- The PP requires and describes coaching staff to assist them in becoming proficient in teaching youth skills and delivering rewards and consequences (consistent with PP expectations).

Quality Assurance

- PP describes a formal quality assurance process/system for ensuring rewards and consequences are applied consistently and equitably (for example: certain youth are not being singled out unfairly)
- PP identifies the individual(s) responsible for these quality assurance checks (i.e., monthly reports; weekly audits by Multi-Disciplinary Team; etc.). QA checks will also ensure that youth receive rewards.
- PP establishes a formal committee (Behavioral Management Committee, BMC) whose responsibilities include monitoring and oversight of the behavioral management system (for example: review reports, determine if staff delivering appropriate rewards and doing so consistent with PP).
- If PP establishes a BMC, PP directs the committee to meet a minimum of monthly to review data and develop corrective actions to increase staff performance as it relates to the behavior management system.
- If PP establishes a BMC, PP requires a diverse membership to include various disciplines – for example: mental health clinicians, directors, teachers, trainers, case workers, etc.
- If PP establishes a BMC, PP provides specific calculations and specific measures to review during regular meetings – for example: number of timeouts earned by residents per day; % of point sheets accurately completed; number of incentive points or coupons earned; number of major rule violations; number of incidents of room confinement; number of incidents of mechanical restraints; etc.
- PP requires gathering and reviewing data to assess fair and equitable distribution of incentives and sanctions, identify any disparities and resolve any identified issues.
- If PP establishes a BMC, PP directs how committee meeting discussions and decisions should be formally documented.

- PP requires regular outcome reports be shared with and discussed amongst high level facility administrators and agency executive staff (as deemed necessary) a minimum of quarterly to determine additional ways to improve in areas related to the behavior management system.
- PP establishes a formal mechanism by which input is gathered from youth on effective incentives, the point system, treatment groups, etc. –for example: agenda on quarterly community meetings
- PP describes and/or references the agency/facility appeal process if youth does not feel consequence was fair (this may be part of another PP but should be stated that there is a formal process a youth can use as part of their basic rights).