

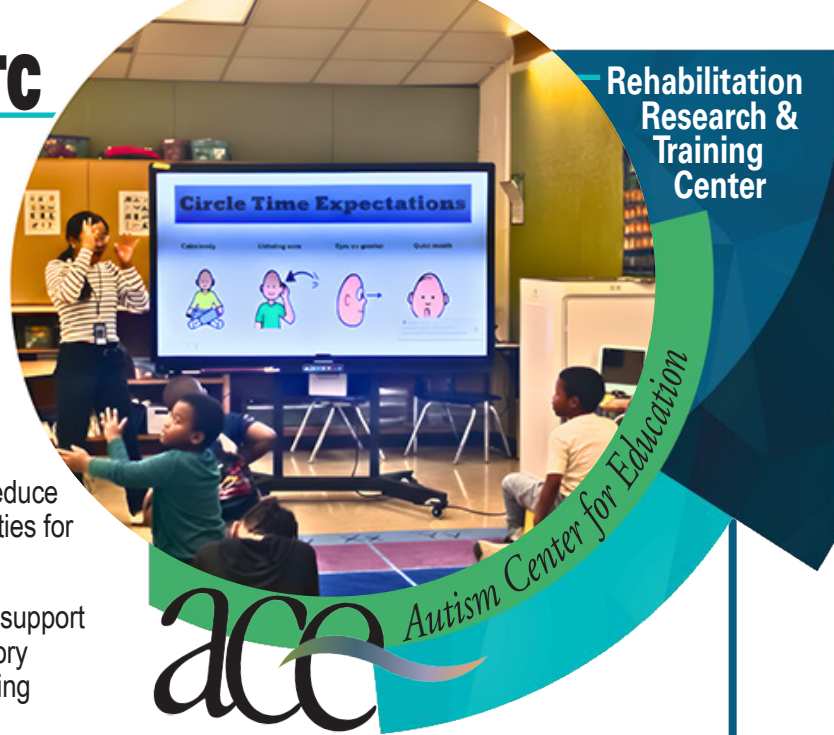
Positive Behavior Support

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is a set of research-based strategies designed to improve the quality of life by teaching new skills and modifying the environment. This person-centered approach uses individualized interventions and supports to help each student work toward their unique goals.

PBS involves identifying situations or events that may trigger interfering behavior, assessing and modifying the environment to reduce the occurrence of the interfering behavior, and providing opportunities for the person to develop and generalize new skills across settings.

People with autism often benefit from consistent positive behavior support strategies to help them navigate communication differences, sensory sensitivities, social interaction preferences, and executive functioning needs. These proactive supports can empower your students to:

- Develop and maintain meaningful relationships
- Effectively communicate wants, needs, thoughts, and feelings
- Learn new skills and confidently approach novel situations
- Manage sensory input in supportive environments
- Increase independence and self-determination



adapted from the Assessment of Positive Behavior Support Practices (APBS, 2014)

● Key Features

The model illustrates the key features of PBS that together help build a person-centered plan.

Build a Support Team

The individual receiving support is the most important member of the team and should be included in the problem-solving and decision-making process. A support team that includes the student, family, friends, educators, coaches, employers, faith communities, and social groups brings together valuable insights and diverse perspectives. This team can identify supports and strategies to help the student develop essential skills needed to thrive in every aspect of life.

Focus on Lifestyle Change: Person-Centered and Future Focused

An individual's life is an ever-evolving, dynamic experience shaped by relationships, experiences, and opportunities. Person-Centered Planning (PCP) empowers individuals by enhancing quality of life and personal satisfaction across key domains. These may include:

- Social relationships (e.g., making and keeping friends)
- Employment (e.g., matching a job to interests and abilities)
- Self-determination (e.g., self-management, independence)
- Recreation and leisure (e.g., hobbies, entertainment, interests, free time)
- Independent living (e.g., personal care and hygiene, financial management, living arrangements)
- Community engagement (e.g., mobility, participation in community activities, school inclusion)

Prioritizing choice and personalizing supports opens doors to new opportunities, often leading to new interests, preferences, and skills.

Assessment of Context and Functions

Assessing the environment and the conditions in which an interfering behavior occurs helps identify the function of that behavior. Assessments can range from simple and informal methods (e.g., observation, student self-assessment, interview) to more complex and formal approaches (e.g., functional behavior assessment). Additionally, factors such as communication needs, social skills, executive functioning, and interests/preferences may contribute to interfering behaviors.

The **SETT** Framework centers the conversation around the following areas:

- **STUDENT:** unique skills, abilities, needs, and preferences
- **ENVIRONMENT:** features of each setting the student will navigate
- **TASK:** activities and expectations relevant to the student's goals
- **TOOLS:** accommodations, resources, services, and strategies that have supported past success and may support future success

Develop a Positive Behavior Support Plan

Effective positive behavior supports can help prevent interfering behavior by modifying and enriching the learning environment, while teaching the individual new and meaningful skills. A PBS plan addresses the function of behaviors, identifies specific goals and environmental adjustments, and outlines instruction and reinforcement strategies for new behaviors. Each component of the plan should be clearly defined to ensure consistent implementation.

Data-Based Decision Making

Data-based decision making relies on data collection and analysis to inform individual goal planning and instruction. This process helps teams identify meaningful skills to target, select effective strategies and supports, and monitor progress as the student builds new skills with confidence and consistency. Teams should include the individual in the data process when appropriate and desired. Self-monitoring is an evidence-based practice that many autistic people find helpful for understanding their own learning and needs. This evidence-based practice can have lifelong benefits, including improved self-awareness and self-management, leading to increased independence and self-determination.

● **Want to Learn More?**

Developing positive behavior support is a complex process that can have a significant impact on an individual's life and well-being. For additional information on topics related to this factsheet, check out the resources below.

- Hieneman, M. (2014). Assessment of Positive Behavior Support Practices. Association for Positive Behavior Support. <https://apbs.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Assessment-of-Positive-Behavior-Support-Practices.pdf?sfvrsn=2>
- VCU-RRTC-ACE Online Course: Data-Informed Decision Making for Educators <https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/courses/decisionmaking.cfm>
- Virginia Department of Education: Assistive Technology (SETT Framework) <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/programs-services/special-education/iep-instruction/assistive-technology>
- Virginia Department of Education: Behavior Instruction and Intervention <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/programs-services/special-education/iep-instruction/behavior-instruction-and-intervention>

Connect with ACE:

- Visit the **ACE Website & Early Childhood Website**
- Sign up for the **ACE Mail List**
- Follow ACE on: **Facebook & Instagram**

QR
Code



For additional information, visit the ACE website:

[**vcuautismcenter.org**](https://vcuautismcenter.org)

Virginia Commonwealth University's Autism Center for Education (VCU-RRTC-ACE) is funded by the Virginia Department of Education, contract #881-APE61172-H027A240107. Virginia Commonwealth University is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution providing access to education and employment without regard to age, race, color, national origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation, veteran's status, political affiliation, or disability. If special accommodations are needed, please contact Jennifer McDonough at jtodd@vcu.edu.