BEST PRACTICE STANDARDS FOR BEHAVIORAL SUPPORTS SERVICES

The following features constitute a broad description of best practices associated with planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating behavioral support services. These practices are well established in the field of Applied Behavior Analysis and should be used as guidelines for personnel delivering behavioral support services. However, all providers of services to individuals with developmental disabilities should be familiar with these best practices.

A. Developing behavioral supports goals

1. All goals of behavioral supports involve increasing the person's ability to interact appropriately and effectively with the environment. Goals therefore address the development of skills that permit the person to depend less upon others who provide needed supports, to participate in the community, or to engage in appropriate communication and social interactions with others.

2. Behavioral supports programming is directed toward behaviors that need to be exhibited in order to participate in least restrictive, natural environments that do not otherwise constrain progress toward appropriate goals.

3. Short-term programmatic efforts are consistent with the person's long-term goals.

4. Behavioral supports goals are agreed upon by the person or his/her legal representative.

5. Behavioral supports goals are sufficiently important in terms of their impact on quality of life to and for the person and realistic in terms of their ability to master the necessary behavior in a reasonable time frame.

6. Goals are used to generate specific objectives that identify an observable and objectively defined behavior to be measured. These objectives are realistic, measureable, attainable, and lead toward fully effective and satisfactory outcomes within a reasonable time frame.

7. The appropriateness of behavioral supports goals is evaluated in terms of whether accomplishing it is functional for the person and will minimize or remove the need for those supports.
8. Skill deficits preventing the person from effective communication and social participation in community settings are addressed by development of specific skills that will remove barriers to effective communication and social participation.

9. Behavioral supports interventions are necessary whenever limited communication skills or challenging behavior places a person or others at significant risk of harm or interferes with his or her accomplishment of goals.

10. Programmatic intervention is implemented whenever use of emergency procedures occurs more than three times in six-month period and should be designed to resolve the behavior problem otherwise requiring emergency procedures.

B. Assessing behaviors

11. Behavioral supports programming designed to address skill deficits includes a recent assessment of the person's skills. Assessments of adaptive behavior are based on direct observation or assessment of performance rather than on anecdotal reports.

12. Behavioral supports programming designed to address challenging behaviors is guided by an assessment of the functions served by the challenging behavior and the communicative repertoire of the person.

13. Functional assessments of challenging behavior examine the function that this behavior serves in that person's environment. Functional assessments include structured reports of caregivers, direct observation of behavior(s) under review, and data describing the challenging behavior. In some cases, systematic probes of the behavior in different environmental conditions may be necessary.

14. Behavioral supports interventions must be preceded by appropriate medical assessment of conditions that might contribute to the challenging behavior.

C. Measuring behaviors

15. Skills building programs begin by measuring the skill level of the person prior to training so that the effects of programming can be clearly evaluated.

16. Behavioral supports interventions focusing on challenging behavior include measuring the occurrence of the target behavior so that the effects of the intervention can be clearly evaluated.

17. Behavioral measurement procedures involve direct observations of target behaviors made on a systematic schedule by trained observers that result in quantitative records.

18. The schedule of observations is sufficient to provide a clear and up-to-date picture of changes in the target behavior.

19. Observational data are plotted on graphs on an ongoing basis. These graphs are continually reviewed by the person responsible for the program in order to guide decisions about the course of the intervention.

D. Designing and implementing intervention procedures

20. Reasonable and relatively simple environmental interventions that do not require continuing programmatic efforts are considered before a behavior support plan is implemented.

21. Behavioral interventions are selected to insure needed environmental support for the target behavior over time and across settings in which the behavior change needs to occur.

22. The procedures comprising the behavioral supports intervention are based on applied research literature that provides empirical justification for their application.

23. Interventions addressing challenging behaviors are shown in the literature to be effective in decreasing behaviors serving the same function.

24. Interventions use the least intrusive and/or restrictive procedures likely to be effective and are selected to produce minimal unwanted effects.

25. Behavioral supports interventions addressing challenging behaviors include reinforcement-based procedures as a preferred alternative or supplement to more restrictive procedures, although timely effectiveness remains a key consideration.

26. Behavioral supports programming addressing challenging behavior includes arranging appropriate reinforcement for desirable behavior, including behavior that may serve as a replacement for the challenging behavior.

27. Reinforcers used in skills building or behavioral supports programs are evaluated for effectiveness to increase the likelihood they will be effective in changing target behaviors.

28. Obtaining desirable behavior may initially require using prompts, which are faded as soon as they are no longer needed.

29. Personnel implementing behavioral supports interventions are sufficiently well trained in program requirements to provide effective services.

E. Evaluating the effectiveness of interventions

30. The effectiveness of behavioral supports interventions is monitored on a regularly scheduled basis by designated personnel who have sufficient skills to evaluate program effectiveness and recommend any needed adjustments.

31. Oversight monitoring is based on graphed data showing progress toward program objectives, as well as direct observation of adherence to program requirements.

32. Progress in a behavior support plan is continually evaluated in terms of the objectives of the intervention using graphed data.

33. When graphed outcome data indicate the program objectives are not being met in a timely manner, adjustments are made to the procedures to increase effectiveness.

34. When graphed outcome data indicate the program objectives have been met, the intervention is modified to be less intrusive or discontinued.

35. Graphical data documenting the effectiveness of an intervention should be supplemented by other evidence that the behavior change represents a functional outcome for the person.