

Family Voice and Choice in the Individualized Behavior Support Process

When you are asked to collaborate with your child's teacher or program staff about your child's behavior, you might feel apprehensive or have questions. You are the expert on your child, and it is important that you feel included and involved in the process to support your child. Most often, teachers and program staff follow a process called Individualized Positive Behavior Support (IPBS) to help children learn to use more appropriate behaviors instead of behaviors that are challenging.

You might be wondering about your role in the IPBS planning process and how your voice and choice will be a part of it. Family voice and choice means that you

are a valued member of the team whose perspective is critical (voice) and who is at the center of decision-making (choice). Teachers and program staff should partner with you to best understand how to support your child. Your participation in the Behavior Support Plan process is critical and will lead to better outcomes for your child.

Below are tips to ensure your family's values, assets, perspectives, and preferences are included in the IPBS process to help your child. The tips include strategies to get information on the process, prepare for meetings, gather ideas to share, and engage in follow-up collaboration.



Individualized Positive Behavior Support (IPBS) is a process for developing a behavior support plan for children with behavior that challenges adults and makes things like classroom transitions, communication, and making friends in the classroom difficult. The goal of the process is to provide support for the child, so they are successful in their early education and care environment. It is a collaborative team process made up of you, teachers, and anyone else who is currently supporting the child. The team will go through a set of steps to develop a plan to prevent challenging behavior from occurring and promote the child's use of social, emotional, and behavioral skills.

Seek Information

If you want to know more about the IPBS process, you might consider gathering information from your child's program. Talking with someone knowledgeable about the program's IPBS process can provide valuable information about what you can expect and how you can prepare. Ask someone you trust, such as your child's teacher, family advocate, front office staff, or other enrolled family members. If you are unsure of who to connect with, you can ask your program the following questions:

- ▶ *Before the meeting, can you connect me with another family that has been through the behavior support process? I want to know what will come next from the perspective of a family like mine.*

- ▶ *As we plan to meet, can you share your process for supporting children with behavior concerns with me?*
- ▶ *Can I connect with a family who had a similar challenge last year?*
- ▶ *Can you connect us with other families or someone in the community as a resource?*
- ▶ *Are there trusted resources, such as handouts or websites, you recommend I review to learn how to get more support for my child's behavior?*

Prepare for a Meeting

If you are invited to a meeting to discuss your child's behavior, spending time preparing for the meeting can be helpful. You might have specific questions about the meeting process. Thinking about what you want to know will help you identify questions to ask in a way that feels safe, productive, and supportive for you and your child.

Here are suggestions for preparing for your child's meeting:

- ▶ Bring a person you trust to the meeting to support you and to take notes.
- ▶ Bring documentation about your child's behavior, such as teacher, physician, or therapist notes.
- ▶ If you want to know more about the meeting, you might ask the program the following questions:
 - *What are some things I might expect to happen in the meeting?*
 - *What questions will you ask in the meeting?*
 - *Who is likely to attend the meeting from the program?*
 - *Who might I be able to bring? Does the program have policies around advocates or other family members coming to meetings? Programs should be open to you inviting others to the meeting. If they indicate they have a policy that does not permit you to bring another trusted person, you might consider asking for a copy of the policy with a question such as, I want to understand the program's policy on this. Can you print me a copy of it to look over?*
 - *Where will the meeting take place? Does it have to take place in the school?*
 - *Who will provide translation to my home language?*
 - *How long might the meeting last?*
 - *Will you send me an agenda for the meeting?*
 - *Can you send any forms that will be used in the meeting to me so that I can review them before I come?*

Who do I have a trusted relationship with that could attend the meeting with me to provide support? Having support during the meeting is a part of family choice.

This might be a:

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| ▶ Partner or spouse | ▶ Family friend or neighbor |
| ▶ Family member (e.g., aunt, cousin, mother, father) | ▶ Therapist or case worker (e.g., speech therapist) |

Gather Ideas

You know your child best, and your ideas will improve any plan. Teams should be asking you about your child's strengths and about what strategies you use to support your child. Having ideas beforehand can help you share ideas and plan activities that encourage your child to use new skills. In a IPBS meeting, families are often asked the following questions:

- ▶ What are your child's strengths?
- ▶ What brings your child joy?
- ▶ What are your goals for your child?
- ▶ What helps your child calm down?
- ▶ What are your child's preferences (toys, activities, people) or interests at home?
- ▶ Have you used toys or activities as a reward for your child? If so, what works best?
- ▶ How does your child tell you they are tired? Scared? Need help?
- ▶ What are some of your family routines? What works to keep them running smoothly?
- ▶ Do the behaviors observed in the classroom happen at home?
- ▶ Have there been any changes in the home environment lately?
- ▶ Are there changes in your child's sleep, eating, or health?
- ▶ Are there any events or experiences that may have been scary or upsetting for your child? (e.g., witnessing community violence, separations from loved ones, experienced a bad accident or disaster.)



During the Meeting

Remember that you are a valued team member who will contribute the development of the behavior support plan for your child. The following tips and strategies will help you fully participate:

- ▶ Share your ideas and provide input when you feel comfortable.
- ▶ Listen to team members as they share their perspectives.
- ▶ Seek clarification when needed. Ask questions that will provide you with the information you are seeking, such as:
 - *Can you explain that a bit more?*
 - *When you said _____, what did you mean?*
 - *Can you share an example of what that looks like for my child?*
- ▶ If you brought someone you trust to the meeting, have them ask questions for you if you are uncomfortable with asking questions to the team.
- ▶ If you feel like your opinions and preferences are not being honored, you can use statements such as the ones that follow to let others know you feel this way:
 - *I'd like to share an idea.*
 - *I'd like to add something.*
 - *It's also really important for our family that...*

Follow-Up

After the meeting, and as your child's teacher and program staff begin to help your child with the strategies you discussed at the meeting, it is important that you have a copy of the Behavior Support Plan and that you know what the next steps are. You will also want to ask questions about ideas or strategies you can use at home. If you have questions after the meeting, be sure to contact your program or child's team members. One way to prepare for follow-up and continued collaboration is to determine the best ways for you and your child's team to stay connected and continue to share information. The following questions can guide these follow-up discussions:

- ▶ *How will team members communicate with each other as we move forward with the plan (e.g., notes home, email, phone)? My preference for communication is... (e.g., email, phone calls, notes home).*
- ▶ *How will my child's progress be measured (or determined) and shared?*
- ▶ *What happens if the Behavior Support Plan needs to be changed? How will changes be communicated to me, and what is my role in making changes?*
- ▶ *What happens if my child does or doesn't make progress?*
- ▶ *How are we celebrating my child's and our team's steps forward along the way?*
- ▶ *I want to continue to meet about my child's progress with the plan. How often will we meet? What is our timeline for a follow-up meeting?*

Sharing Celebrations

It is important that the team also focus on the joyful moments with your child and celebrations. To remind the team about the importance of celebrating your child, you might ask:

- ▶ *It's important to me that I can share my child's strengths and our celebrations as a family with the rest of the team. How can I do that?*
- ▶ *I'd love to hear about when my child is happy in the classroom. Can I let you know what makes them laugh at home?*
- ▶ *What is our plan for taking time to share these happy moments and celebrations?*

