

# Research Highlights

## Topic: Positive Behavior Support

Ruef, M., & Turnbull, A.P. (2001). Stakeholder opinions on accessible informational products helpful in building positive practical solutions to behavioral challenges of individuals with mental retardation and/or autism. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 36(4), 441-456.

### BOTTOM LINE

Participants, representing six stakeholder groups, discussed in focus group interviews the kinds of useful informational products they believed would be most helpful in building positive, practical solutions to behavioral challenges. Findings indicate the importance of receiving condensed positive behavioral support information on both awareness and skill levels. Results also suggest a continued existence of a long-standing gap between research and practice despite an extensive research base on effective dissemination and techniques.

### TIPS

- Incorporate the participatory action research model into behavioral support research design to create useful, useable information.
- Provide technical assistance in the use of research-based information to individuals who give on-going support to persons with challenging behaviors.
- Develop access to research-based information for direct service providers that is at low or no financial cost, easy to comprehend and redundant (repetitious information can increase message absorption).
- Provide a variety of information levels from awareness to in-depth and skilled levels.
- Match informational formats with audience preferences.

- Provide awareness-level information of research through popular media or one-page fact sheets.
- Present more advanced or skill level information through mentoring by similar, trusted people.

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## KEY FINDINGS

- Participant responses were organized into five primary themes: (a) information sources, (b) information strategies, (c) information content, (d) information formats, and (e) information audiences.
- *Information sources:* All stakeholder groups commented on information sources.
  - ◆ Individuals with disabilities indicated they received information from those they knew or trusted.
  - ◆ All other stakeholder groups commented directly on informational sources that they had already found to be or potentially were credible and useful.
  - ◆ Families, friends, and teachers all ranked information from like stakeholders as most valuable.
- *Information strategies:* All but two groups suggested information strategies.
  - ◆ Administrators and policy makers suggested involving stakeholders in determining how to effectively disseminate information.
  - ◆ Friends and teachers stressed disseminating information person-to-person.
  - ◆ Researchers mentioned working with media to popularize positive approaches to behavioral support.
- *Information content:* Parents, friends, researchers and teachers contributed more to this theme than did other groups.
  - ◆ Parents and friends distinguished between information available and information desired.
  - ◆ Researchers' comments divided into those adhering to positive procedures only and those open to the use of aversives.
- *Information formats:* All groups commented on information formats. This theme was organized into three subthemes: (a) written, (b) interactive, and (c) multi-media.
  - ◆ Written: Friends and families emphasized that written information be brief and readable. Researchers suggested a book written in a popular style rather than relying on journal articles.
  - ◆ Interactive formats: Most stakeholder groups discussed the importance of hands-on assistance in utilizing information. Individuals with disabilities expressed the desire to learn interactively in a way that complemented their learning styles.

## KEY FINDINGS cont.

- ◆ Multi-media formats: Various forms of helpful multi-media discussed included video-conferencing, the internet, and videotapes.
  - *Information audiences*: Participants recommended that the type of information be matched both by purpose and by audience. The audiences included (a) the general public, (b) administrators and policy makers, (c) families, and (d) teachers.
  - Five themes emerged in bringing together divergent stakeholder perspectives on useful information:
    - ◆ Establishment of trust relationships as a prerequisite to research and information dissemination and utilization.
    - ◆ Provision of technical assistance in the use of information provided.
    - ◆ Provision of easy access to relevant research-based information
    - ◆ Provision of tiered levels of information in a variety of formats.
  - Inconsistency in how stakeholder groups perceived their own needs versus the needs of other groups.
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## METHOD

- This qualitative study used a participatory action research (PAR) approach, which emphasizes useful outcomes and collaboration between researchers and intended beneficiaries.
- The 63 focus group participants representing six stakeholder groups (administrators and policy makers, families, friends, individuals with mental retardation and/or autism who display challenging behavior, researchers, and teachers/practitioners) were selected using purposive sampling.
- Data were collected through a combination of conference call and face-to-face focus groups.
- Data were analyzed using a transcript-based, constant comparative method of analysis.
- A formative confirmatory analysis was conducted to ensure soundness of research results.

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- Ruef, M.B., Turnbull, A.P., Turnbull, H.R., & Poston, D. (1999). Perspectives of five stakeholder groups: Challenging behavior of individuals with mental retardation and/or autism. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 1*(1), 43-58.
- Turnbull, A.P., & Ruef, M. (1997). Family perspectives on inclusive lifestyle issues for individuals with problem behavior. *Exceptional Children, 63*(2), 211-227.

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