



Developing Social and Behavioral Skills in Early Childhood: A TAPP Research Brief

Rachel E. Meisinger, Samantha R. Angell, & Susan M. Sheridan



Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools

This research brief is funded in part by a grant awarded to Susan Sheridan by the Institute of Educational Sciences (IES Grant Award Number: R324A100115). The opinions expressed are strictly the authors' and do not reflect the opinions or ideas of the funding agency.

What is TAPP?

Bridging the Gap between Home and School

Parents and teachers have unique knowledge, information, experiences, and perspectives about their children or students. Unfortunately, this information is not always shared effectively between the home and school. Two-way sharing between teachers and parents is important for all children, but *essential* for students whose learning and achievement are at risk due to challenges with behavior, social-emotional functioning, or learning skills. Teachers and Parents as Partners, or TAPP (previously known as Conjoint Behavioral Consultation; CBC), creates a bridge between home and school to promote successful outcomes for students with academic and behavioral concerns. Through TAPP, parents and teachers (led by a consultant) come together to engage in problem-solving strategies to create a plan of action that addresses the needs of students at home and school, and sets them on a positive course.

What it Looks Like

The TAPP consultant, a teacher, and parent(s) meet three to four times over approximately eight weeks. At these meetings, the teacher and parent discuss goals for the student, the students' strengths and needs, and the behaviors in need of change. They select and develop methods for promoting positive student change, implement new strategies at home and school, and monitor whether the student is making desired progress in achieving his or her goal. Throughout the process, teachers and parents learn new strategies to manage challenging situations and promote students' positive skill development. Between meetings, teachers and parents use the plan to promote student success, monitor the progress of the student as they work toward achieving their goal, and communicate using two-way systems to ensure consistent sharing across school and home.

The table below provides an in-depth look at the TAPP meeting process.

| TAPP Meeting | What Happens? |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Building on Strengths | Talk about students' strengths, needs, and goals Identify a behavior in need of change Create a plan to keep track of the behavior |
| Planning for Success | Review behavior information Determine why the behavior is occurring Create an individually tailored plan to address problem behavior |
| Checking and Reconnecting | Decide if the plan worked Decide to keep the plan, change it, or end it |

Better Outcomes for Students, Parents, and Teachers

Federally and locally funded studies examining TAPP outcomes have been conducted using state of the art methods, rigorous research procedures, and reliable measures. The effectiveness of TAPP has been explored across a range of students (i.e., preschool, elementary, and middle school students) as well as a range of student concerns (i.e., academic behaviors, disruptive behavior problems, and social skills). TAPP has even been used to address and minimize issues regarding the relationships between teachers and parents.

Over the past two decades, research has consistently shown that TAPP *helps students* decrease their problem behaviors and learn positive skills at home and school. Participating in TAPP also *helps parents and teachers* use effective strategies, while building strong and positive relationships, to create intervention plans tailored to their specific student's academic needs. In addition, parents and teachers report that they like and prefer TAPP as an acceptable way to approach change behaviors for their child or student.

Early Childhood

Early childhood (from birth to age 8) is an important time in the life of a child, during which rapid physical, mental, and socio-emotional growth occurs¹. It can also be a time when children begin to exhibit problem behaviors at home and in school or childcare settings. Common behaviors often exhibited in early childhood include noncompliance, poor social skills, and disruptive behaviors such as temper tantrums, yelling, and hyperactive behaviors. Unfortunately, these tricky childhood behaviors often make the transition from home to school more difficult, and predict serious behavioral and academic problems later in life. However, improving collaborations between home and school can help ease this transition and strengthen children's learning and development. TAPP can help foster positive early collaborative experiences between parents and teachers and promote future parental involvement in their child's education².

A child's environment can have a large impact on their development *and* their behavior. When a young child is displaying problem behaviors, it is important to intervene early by making positive changes to their environment. Through TAPP, parents and teachers come together to collaborate and problem-solve to decrease problem behaviors and create the optimal environment for children's success. Research has shown that TAPP is a highly effective strategy for teaching children more adaptive skills, such as compliance and social skills, and addressing several of the maladaptive behaviors exhibited by young children^{3,4}. In addition, creating partnerships between home and school during elementary years results in several positive academic and social outcomes for children, including increased academic achievement, improved school attendance, better study habits, stronger self-regulatory skills, and fewer discipline problems².

Increased Compliance

Noncompliance is a common early childhood behavior that can have more serious consequences as a child ages. Research has shown that TAPP is an effective method for increasing compliance both at home and at school^{5,6,7,8}. In one study conducted with preschool-aged children and their parents, children began to show increased compliance after just nine days of TAPP intervention⁵. In another study, researchers were able to increase compliance for a student with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the classroom through a combination of TAPP and a procedure called transferring stimulus control. This means that with the support of the TAPP approach, the parent, teacher, and consultant were able to transfer the student's high levels of compliance at home to the school setting⁶. TAPP was also implemented successfully in another study that used a ladder-type chart to help a young boy comply with directions to sleep in his own room at night⁸.

Decreased Disruptive Behaviors

Disruptive behaviors can include throwing temper tantrums, talking out of turn, and aggression towards others or objects. These behaviors are not tolerated in a classroom setting, and it is essential that children learn more appropriate behaviors as they transition into school. TAPP research has shown that it can be effective in reducing many different types of disruptive behaviors for young children^{2,9,10}. Interventions for disruptive behaviors created by parents and teachers during the TAPP process often include positive reinforcement and praise². TAPP can also be incorporated into a variety of existing interventions to reduce students' disruptive behaviors. In one TAPP study, TAPP was paired with several types of video-taped therapy sessions. Regardless of the type of therapy, disruptive behaviors (e.g., aggression, tantrumming, impulsivity, socially inappropriate behaviors, noncompliance) for the participating children decreased significantly⁹.

Improved Social Skills

It is important that young children are given opportunities to learn and practice appropriate social skills. The development of positive social skills is critical for building a foundation for children's future relationships and later academic achievement. Social skills include behaviors such as showing empathy, participating in group activities, communicating with others, helping others, and solving problems. TAPP interventions may target social skills and peer interactions in both the home and school settings^{2,7,10}. In addition, children with disruptive behaviors often experience poor peer relationships and have below-average social skills. In one study targeting disruptive behaviors, children exhibited significantly improved social skills following TAPP interventions⁷. Children receiving social skills training in the context of the TAPP process were reported to have improved behavioral outcomes (e.g., more cooperation, empathy, self-control) and better peer interactions following the intervention^{2,7,10}. TAPP has also been found to increase students' participation in school activities and discussions⁷.

Moving Forward

Although research examining TAPP in early childhood settings is still emerging, these findings from rigorous research studies suggest that TAPP is an effective method for establishing relationships between home and school, addressing young children's problem behaviors, and promoting school readiness and early academic success. Creating partnerships between home and school is especially important during early childhood, as this is the time period during which parents begin to recognize and create for themselves an important role in their child's education. The "curriculum of the home" during early childhood (including positive attitudes, habits, and encouragement toward learning¹¹) has

lasting effects on a child's cognitive development, academic performance and social-emotional skills. Promoting high-quality relationships between parents and teachers and intervening early on is essential for maximizing young children's success. If your young child or student is struggling with noncompliance, disruptive behaviors, or poor social skills, there are steps you can take to put them on the path to success:



Parents are Children's First Teachers

Creating an enriched home environment that provides children with structure and routine, access to various learning materials, and behavioral supports prepares children for the transition to school.



Know the Signs

Be aware of your children and students' actions! Difficulties getting along in school and demonstrating inappropriate or troubling behaviors are often signs of a problem, and if addressed early, can prevent more serious problems from developing down the road.



Address the Problem Immediately

The moment a student is showing signs of behavioral struggle, inform the school psychologist so that the problem may be addressed appropriately. Early intervention can help reduce problem behavior and put students on a path towards success.



Ask Your School Psychologist About TAPP

TAPP is relatively new in the world of consultation and school psychology. By discussing it with your school psychologist, you may be able to develop a more comprehensive and effective treatment plan more quickly and effectively.

Tips to “Partnerize”

How to Make the Most of the TAPP Process and Create Healthy Parent-Teacher Relationships

Form Relationships

- Get to know one another! Children benefit most when their caregivers and teachers know one another and have some basic information about “how things work” at home and school.
- Focus on strengths! One of the basic building blocks of a strong parent-teacher relationship is that teachers and parents stand united on helping children by focusing on their strengths, and the strengths of the partnership.

Create Ways to Become and Stay Engaged

- To build a healthy partnership, parents and teachers can find ways to be engaged with each other and their student. Such engagement is essential to help children feel valued and important.
- Over time, efforts to remain connected – no matter how small – will help create deep and meaningful consistency for the child at home and at school!

Communicate Two Ways

- Share ideas! Both parents and teachers have important information to share when it comes to a child they both know well.
- Make sure that communication is frequent and clear, and that everyone has an equal chance to speak and to listen.

Structure Consistent Opportunities for Learning and Behavior

- Look for similar ways to create structured learning opportunities across home and school, because these connections can help children be successful in both places.
- Reinforce children’s positive behaviors at home and school to help them experience consistent messages.

Collaborate to Achieve Goals and Solve Problems

- Both parents and teachers have important information and ideas that can help when a student is having a problem. Children show more improvement when teachers and parents work together to create a plan, decide on strategies, and practice them at school and home.

References

1. Phillips, D. A. & Shonkoff, J. P. (Eds.). (2000). *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Washington, D. C.: National Academy Press.
2. Sheridan, S. M., Clarke, B. L., & Knoche, L. L., & Edwards, C. P. (2006). The effects of conjoint behavioral consultation in early childhood settings. *Early Education and Development, 17*, 593-617.
3. Sheridan, S. M., Bovaird, J. A., Glover, T. A., Garbacz, S. A., Witte, A., & Kwon, K. (2012). A randomized trial examining the effects of conjoint behavioral consultation and the mediating role of the parent-teacher relationship. *School Psychology Review, 41*, 23-36.
4. Sheridan, S. M., Ryoo, J. H., Garbacz, S. A., Kunz, G. M., & Chumney, F. L. (2013). The efficacy of conjoint behavioral consultation on parents and children in the home setting: Results of a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of School Psychology, 51*, 717-733.
5. Brown, M. S. (2004). Effects of early childhood-Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (EC-CBC) on preschool child compliance. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 65*(08), 2894A.
6. Ray, K. P., Skinner, C. H., & Watson, T. S. (1999). Transferring stimulus control via momentum to increase compliance in a student with autism: A demonstration of collaborative consultation. *School Psychology Review, 28*, 622-628.
7. Cagle, M. L. (2002). Conjoint behavioral consultation with parents and teachers of Hispanic children: A study of acceptability, integrity, and effectiveness. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 64*.
8. Sheridan, S. M. & Colton, D. L. (1994). Conjoint behavioral consultation: A review and case study. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 5*, 211-228.
9. Finn, C. A. (2003). Remediating behavior problems of young children: The impact of parent treatment acceptability and the efficacy of conjoint behavioral consultation and videotape therapy. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 63*(07), 2456A.
10. Myers, L. W. (1997). Conjoint behavioral consultation as an intervention for young children with disruptive behaviors. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 57*(12), 7714B.
11. Walberg, H. J. (1984). Improving the productivity of America's schools. *Educational Leadership, 41*, 19-27.

Recommended Citation:

Meisinger, R. E., Angell, S. R., & Sheridan, S. M. (2016). *Developing social and behavioral skills in early childhood: A TAPP research brief*. Lincoln, NE: Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools.