



Using Family–School Partnerships to Decrease Problem Behaviors at Home and School: A TAPP Research Brief

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What is TAPP?

Bridging the Gap between Home and School

Parents and teachers have unique knowledge, information, experiences, and perspectives about their children and students. Unfortunately, this information is not always shared effectively between homes and schools. 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, engage in problem-solving strategies, and create a plan of action that addresses the needs of students at home and school, thereby setting 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, 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 change behaviors for their student.

Externalizing Behaviors

Externalizing behaviors are negative childhood problem behaviors that are overt, occur in excess, and can result in harm to others or property¹. They are inappropriate responses in everyday situations, and include behaviors such as yelling, throwing temper tantrums, defying adults, and engaging in aggressive acts towards people or items (throwing things, kicking, etc.). Noncompliance is generally considered a “kingpin” behavior, or the behavior

around which other behavioral excesses revolve². Noncompliance is defined as not following a direction within a reasonable amount of time. When a child is noncompliant, he or she does not do what is requested; instead, he or she may break rules, argue, make excuses, delay the activity, and/or do the opposite of what is asked. Often times, behavioral excesses such as arguing, fighting, tantrums, and rule breaking are secondary to avoiding requests or required tasks².

Many children will display negative behaviors at some point, but for some children these behaviors become so disruptive, or so frequent, in the home and classroom settings that they keep families, teachers, classmates, and the student from continuing with normal activity. What sets “tough kids” apart from the average student is the degree, or frequency, of these behavioral excesses^{2,3}. For example, the child may frequently not comply with adult requests or they may habitually break classroom rules. These externalizing behaviors are disruptive to classroom setting and can interfere with a student’s and his or her classmates abilities to learn. It is not surprising that excesses of these types of behaviors place children at a greater risk for academic and social problems in school⁴. Children who display externalizing behaviors are also at risk for negative outcomes later in life, such as mental illness, juvenile delinquency, and substance abuse^{5,6}.

When a child is arguing excessively, not following directions, being aggressive, or engaging in other externalizing behaviors, the first step to putting them back on a track to success is to find a way to decrease these behaviors. It can be difficult for parents and teachers to stop externalizing behaviors, and even more difficult to replace them with positive, appropriate behaviors. Effective treatments for addressing externalizing behaviors should involve both parents and teachers in order to create continuity across home and school and to establish consistent expectations and consequences for behavior. TAPP is a useful model for decreasing disruptive externalizing behaviors, teaching socially acceptable behaviors, and providing parents and teachers with the additional skills and strategies they need to respond consistently to those behaviors as well as future problems that may arise.

During TAPP meetings, common plans developed to address externalizing behaviors at school and home often include:

1. A school-home note system to communicate about students’ academic and behavioral performance
2. Reinforcement, such as praise or small rewards, for positive behavior
3. Skill building or self-management strategies

TAPP Works to Decrease Externalizing Behaviors

Research has demonstrated that TAPP is an effective method for addressing preschool and elementary students' externalizing behaviors. Across studies, students whose parents and teachers engaged in the TAPP process demonstrated significantly fewer externalizing behaviors and were rated as meeting their overall behavior goals following TAPP interventions^{7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15}. Following TAPP, most students' frequency of externalizing behaviors was comparable to the average student^{4,12}.

Parents and teachers in TAPP studies often identified noncompliance, or children not following directions, as one of the most problematic behaviors targeted for change. As a “kingpin” behavior, noncompliance often co-occurs with the expression of externalizing behaviors such as yelling and verbal aggression as the child becomes more and more noncompliant and argumentative². In one TAPP study, parents and teachers collaborated to develop a self-management intervention plan for a child described as “highly argumentative and resistant” to the point that his noncompliance significantly interfered with his learning¹³. The student rated his own levels of compliance throughout the school day by giving himself a score on questions such as “I followed teacher requests.” The student's self-monitoring checklists were sent home each day to encourage home-school communication. In addition, the student's parents and teacher provided consistent reinforcement for compliant behavior across the home and school settings. After the TAPP process, noncompliant behaviors for that child had decreased by 69%¹³.

Sometimes children exhibit significant noncompliant behaviors at school, but not at home. Thus, TAPP interventions can capitalize on this difference by incorporating parent involvement in compliance training at school. Behavioral momentum interventions delivered in the context of TAPP have been shown to decrease students' rates of noncompliance at school, and to decrease related externalizing behaviors¹⁴. In one particular study, the mother of a noncompliant kindergarten boy participated in compliance training with her child's teacher, and learned a strategy to increase his compliance with his teacher's instructions¹⁴. Because the child was more likely to follow directions given by his mother, these directions were paired with directions from the teacher. By pairing directions from the mother with directions from the teacher, the student's compliance with directions from the teacher significantly increased¹⁴. This particular intervention could not have been implemented if the student's parent was not involved in the consultation process.

TAPP Works to Increase Adaptive Behaviors and Social Skills

As teachers and parents are working to decrease externalizing behaviors, it is important to promote the use of appropriate replacement behaviors. Because children with many externalizing behaviors often use these behaviors to get access to things that they want, or to get out of doing things they do not want to do, their ability to learn and use appropriate behaviors to achieve these same goals is stunted². TAPP plans created collaboratively by teachers and parents often include a reward for positive behaviors, so that children learn appropriate skills to replace the inappropriate behaviors they were using before. TAPP interventions in research studies have focused on building students' social skills and prosocial behaviors, including cooperation, self-control, assertion, responsibility, and empathy^{4,7,9,15,16}.

In one large-scale TAPP study, parents and teachers collaboratively identified strength-based goals that were focused on producing positive behaviors related to academic outcomes rather than focusing on negative behaviors¹⁵. Skill building strategies, such as social skills training and behavioral rehearsal, were implemented across both home and school environments to promote prosocial behaviors. Students who received TAPP interventions were rated by both parents and teachers as having significantly improved adaptive skills and social skills compared to students who did not receive TAPP¹⁵. Thus, providing parallel supports across settings appeared to have a cumulative effect on students' social skill development.

In another study, researchers used TAPP and social skills training to improve the cooperative play behavior of young boys with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)¹⁶. Parents and teachers in this study wanted the students to be able to play with other children successfully by showing skills such as smiling while playing with others, making positive comments, sharing toys, and waiting their turn. As part of the social skills training, parents and teachers modeled cooperative play behaviors for the children. A self-monitoring system was also used, in which the children rated themselves on how well they performed the skills they had learned. After TAPP and the skills training, the children showed an increase in positive play behaviors during observations. The children themselves also reported having more positive play skills on their self-monitoring forms on days when they practiced their new skills¹⁶.

TAPP studies do not always focus on building positive behaviors or report these findings, so more research is needed in this area. However, the results that have been observed so far suggest that TAPP is just as effective, if not more effective, at increasing adaptive behaviors and social skills as it is at decreasing externalizing behaviors¹⁵.

TAPP Works to Strengthen Parent and Teacher Skills and Relationships

Compared to some other childhood problems, externalizing behaviors can be especially taxing to parents and teachers. In particular, noncompliance and other negative behaviors make it difficult for parents and teachers to respond in a calm, constructive manner. In these situations, the TAPP process doubles in effectiveness; not only are children beginning to exhibit fewer externalizing and more positive behaviors, but parents and teachers are building on the strategies and competencies they already possess to manage their child's behavior problems. For example, in one study, parents and teachers were taught to use effective commands (e.g., using clear directive and telling the child what *to* do instead of what *not* to do) to help improve the child's compliance⁴.

TAPP has also been shown to result in teachers' increased use of praise and positive attention in the classroom, increased provision of positive tangible consequences¹¹, and decreased use of ineffective strategies, such as raising their voice⁹, compared to teachers who did not participate in TAPP. Teachers participating in TAPP also reported greater skills in problem-solving¹¹. Thus, teachers appear to develop lasting skills during the TAPP process that can be utilized with other challenging students in the future.

The TAPP process also provides parents with new skills and improved competencies. Parents participating in TAPP reported greater competence in problem-solving and greater efficacy for helping their child succeed compared to parents who did not participate in TAPP¹¹. In one study, participating in TAPP resulted in parents' decreased use of threats or raising their voice to control their child's behavior⁹. Overall, parents who participate in TAPP reported greater involvement in their children's education¹¹ as well as greater knowledge and ability to address future problems and to communicate with their child's future teachers¹⁰.

In addition, both parents and teachers rated their relationship with one another more highly following TAPP^{11,15}. In one study investigating TAPP with students demonstrating disruptive behaviors, parents who did not participate in TAPP reported a significant decrease in their relationship with their child's teacher, whereas parents participating in TAPP reported a significant increase¹¹. This finding further highlights the strengths of TAPP in helping parents and teachers of students with behavioral problems develop strong, positive relationships with one another.

Moving Forward

Externalizing behaviors can be challenging to address, and it can be even more challenging to replace them with appropriate behaviors. Research shows that TAPP is an effective model for decreasing externalizing behaviors *and* increasing adaptive behaviors. Furthermore, TAPP research suggests that parents and teachers benefit from the process as well, and not just because the children they care for have better behavior! TAPP builds on the skills parents and teachers need to address externalizing behaviors in the future.

Students who display externalizing behaviors are at risk for negative outcomes later in life, so it is important to intervene as soon as you notice a serious problem. If your child or student is struggling with externalizing behaviors, there are steps you can take to put them on the path to success:



Know the Signs

Be aware of your children and students' actions! Struggling in school and demonstrating inappropriate or troubling behaviors are often signs of a problem that needs to be addressed.



Address the Problem Immediately

If a student is having behavior problems, inform the school psychologist so that the problem may be addressed appropriately.



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 better treatment plan more quickly and effectively.

Tips to “Partnerize” Your School

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.

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