

# Chapter 1

## *Partnerships in Place*

### **A School Social Worker's Guide To Teaching Social Skills**

Education takes place in a social environment. To be successful in school, students are expected to behave and act appropriately, get along with adults and classmates, make good choices and decisions, and communicate effectively. All students will at times demonstrate difficulty in social situations—but students who consistently demonstrate inappropriate social behaviors tend to be at risk for more serious behavioral and emotional problems.

Increasingly, school social workers are being called upon to help students with emotional and behavioral difficulties develop appropriate social skills. To this end, school social workers are forming partnerships with teachers and other mental health practitioners to implement school-based social skills programs.

The *Partnerships in Place* approach describes how school social workers are organizing social skill programs to address a wide range of student needs at different levels.

- **Prevention.** At the prevention level, school social workers may assist teachers in establishing positive classroom environments. Working collaboratively with teachers, school social workers teach students social skills that underlie positive classroom conduct and group participation.
- **Responsive support.** At the responsive support level, school social workers may intervene with students who pose discipline problems primarily because they lack appropriate social skills. In small groups, school social workers respond to students' behavioral difficulties by replacing antisocial behaviors with prosocial ones.
- **Intensive support.** At the intensive support level, school social workers may intervene individually with students who have serious social skill deficits that undermine their interactions with peers and adults. In these cases, social skills instruction is integrated into the student's total intervention plan.

At all levels of intervention, school social workers are finding that social skills instruction is an invaluable tool in supporting the behavioral and emotional development of all students.





In the chapters that follow, you will learn how to teach social skills as part of the **Partnerships in Place** approach. You will see how school social workers and other school practitioners are working together to ensure a successful experience for students. With social skills, they have made an important difference in the lives of students. We believe that you can make an important difference, too.

## About **Partnerships in Place**

This successfully field-tested program offers you the opportunity to practice cutting-edge, effective approaches for working with students at-risk for behavioral and emotional disorders. As a school social worker, you will support the behavioral and emotional development of all students in the school. Your role is defined by the school context. Often, this means you may be expected to apply social work techniques in the classroom, with small groups of students, with individual students, and in family-centered wraparound meetings. Unlike other contexts where social workers practice, your social-educational focus is on helping students achieve academically and socially in the school setting. To do that, you will apply social work skills at the following levels:

- Prevention.
- Proactive and responsive support to individual students either in small groups or one-on-one.
- Intensive, temporary support to students and their families.

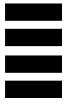
This guide is designed to help you

develop the skills you will need to implement the **Partnerships in Place** model.

**Partnerships in Place** provides a framework for establishing a strong system of support in the school setting for all students, especially those who are at risk for failure as a result of behavioral difficulties and/or life circumstances. Positive behavioral support delivered at the school or district level can take many forms. However, it always is directed toward ensuring high student achievement, the cornerstone of all school programs.

At its core, **Partnerships in Place** is about change—it is about a revision of the ways that people and institutions think, behave, and use their resources to affect the type, quality, and degree of service delivery to students and families. There are several underlying principles of the **Partnerships in Place** approach. They are:

- Collaboration and partnership building is at the heart of the change effort. The **Partnerships in Place** approach promotes a participant-driven orientation in which the student, the family, school personnel, and community agency staff have a voice and a specific function in planning, implementing, and evaluating support.
- All support is directed toward helping students develop their strengths and capabilities so that they can learn and succeed. Unlike a deficit model of service that focuses exclusively on remediation, the **Partnerships in Place** framework is designed to capitalize on the strengths, as well as the needs, of the whole student by enhancing that student's ability to succeed in the standard curriculum.



- Supports are culturally competent and respect the diversity of the students, their families, and the communities in which they live. The **Partnerships in Place** approach advocates for programs that respect the competencies of all students, and ensure equal access of all students to an appropriate curriculum and school environment.

The goal of the **Partnerships in Place** approach is for school districts to have in place a solid continuum of positive behavioral support, from prevention to intensive intervention, in which internal and external resources, programs, and organizations are integrated and offered in a consistent and reliable manner. This continuum of support is integrated into the school/district organization and serves as a comprehensive and coordinated service delivery system. The structure eliminates fragmentation and allows for the identification of gaps in services.

**Figure 1.1** presents the systemic structure that underlies the **Partnerships in Place** framework. Prevention is the goal at the classroom and schoolwide levels, short-term support is the goal at the responsive level, long-term one-on-one support is the goal at the intensive intervention level, and immediate stabilization of the student and family is the goal at the wraparound level.

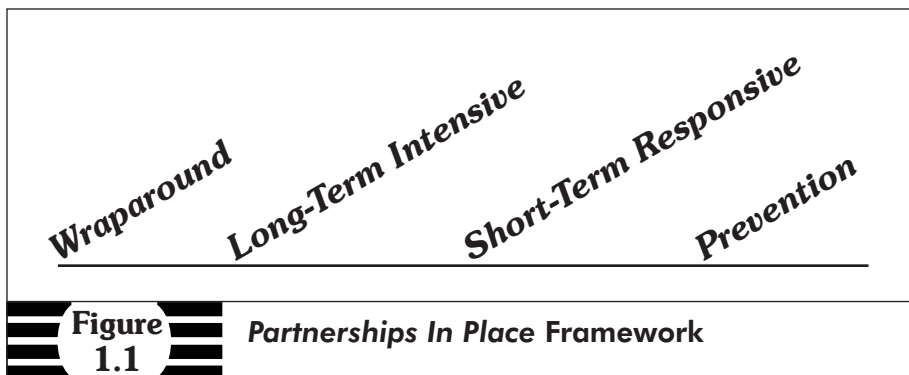
## Prevention Level

Generally speaking, a continuum of support at the prevention level includes features that reflect sound research and practice on effective school and instructional practices. Buildings and classrooms must be safe for learning; curriculum and instruction must be appropriate for the students; and fair and equitable discipline policies and strong classroom management systems must be in place to ensure an environment in which students can learn.

The absence of positive support features at the prevention level may severely impede participation by students with behavioral difficulties in mainstream activities. In the **Partnerships in Place** approach, there is an explicit and coordinated effort by all school staff to identify and fix aspects of the instructional program that deny students access to learning and a safe learning environment.

A variety of programs exist that can be used to provide positive behavioral support at the prevention level. Examples include:

- Social skills training to ensure that students can participate in the mainstream classroom and learn in the standards-based curriculum.





- Schoolwide discipline policies that incorporate positive behavioral management strategies to ensure that students have the skills necessary to manage their own behavior.
- Extended day programs that encourage reinforcement of academic skills while providing students with a safe alternative to hanging out on the street.
- Curriculum modification.

The task is to organize and select programs that meet the behavioral needs of the students. Those programs should reflect the culture and needs of the students, their families, and the community.

### ***Short-Term Responsive Support***

Even when positive behavioral support programs exist at the prevention level, some students will need additional support. Short-term responsive support allows educators to target individual students' needs and redirect them to learning tasks. Short-term support may include:

- Standard counseling services or group work (e.g., anger management, conflict resolution).
- Skill remediation, such as tutoring in basic literacy skills or social skills instruction geared at helping students develop peer-to-peer skills (e.g., respect, responsibility, conflict resolution, anger management).
- After school enrichment programs.
- Teacher collaboration and consultation designed to solve problems.

In the ***Partnerships in Place*** approach, social skills training is the focus of responsive support.

### ***Long-Term, Intensive Intervention***

Many students can be successful when a strong system of support is available to them at the prevention and short-term intervention levels. However, a small percentage of students will need more long-term, intensive, one-on-one support programs. Although students and families at this level have a range of service needs, with assistance, improvement can be expected.

Positive behavioral supports at this level may include counseling, social work intervention, and other related mental health services. This level often extends services to families, sometimes with an emphasis on providing multi-system services. For example, in addition to in-school counseling and tutoring services, the needs of the student may extend into the home and include substance abuse services, parenting support, assistance paying utility bills, etc.

Although programs at this level may be school-driven, many will be by the community agency. However, it is important to note that while services may be community-driven, it is important to offer them in the least restrictive environment. That is, services should be delivered to the extent possible in the student's own school, home, and neighborhood.

Social workers may provide school-based counseling services, cognitive behavior therapy (social skills), and other services directed at helping the student adapt to the school environment and achieve high academic standards as part of long-term intensive intervention.



**Wraparound Level.** Some students may require more intensive services. Wraparound refers to the approach of wrapping of a network of services around the student and the family in the home, school, and community environments. Plans are driven by needs rather than by program parameters. The primary purpose of a wraparound structure is to stabilize the family and the student. A wraparound approach allows for an accelerated time frame in accessing resources; it also provides supports that typically might be considered nontraditional (e.g., family outings; collaboration of multiple service systems). Services provided at this level are temporary, intensive interventions that enable the student and family to direct the service, building on their strengths and competencies. It is self-directed programming; a family team comes together with others interested in the student's success. A major function of the family team is to develop a family action plan that articulates the strengths and needs of the family.

The ***Partnerships in Place*** approach acknowledges the importance of wraparound services. Social skills instruction may become part of the family action plan. However, in most cases social skill instruction will not be the focus at this stage.

Although school personnel may coordinate the wraparound program, most services delivered at this level are driven by community agencies. Examples of wraparound services include: diagnosis and evaluation; outpatient services; crisis services; intensive home-based services; case coordination or management; respite care; behavioral aide or attendant; assistance in establishing the

student's eligibility for other financial assistance and services under federal, state, or local programs; transportation assistance; and job training.

## **The Social Worker and Social Skills Instruction**

Across the nation, school social workers increasingly are being expected to implement social skills programs. Cognitive behavioral therapy is the foundation of the social skills training that underlies the ***Partnerships in Place*** approach. This guide will assist you in developing such skills.

Your first step is to learn how to teach social skills. Once you have a firm grounding in how to teach social skills, you will begin the process of implementing social skills training into your work. You may integrate social skills in the following ways:

- Serving as a prevention specialist in the classroom.
- Supporting a large group of students with positive social skill development.
- Working with small groups of students to replace antisocial behaviors with prosocial ones.
- Designing a positive behavior management plan as part of the therapeutic contract with an individual student.

The remainder of the guide is organized to help you with these tasks. Each chapter presents an overview of the topic, followed by specific activities that social workers may implement. We suggest that you work through the chapters in the order they are presented. Chapters include:



- **Chapter 2: Social Skills Instruction: The Role of the Social Worker.** This chapter explains how to teach social skills. *Partnerships in Place* uses *A Collaborative Approach to Teaching Social Skills* (Warger and Rutherford, 1996) as a foundation. This approach is based on cognitive behavioral therapy and has been found effective in helping students develop positive social skills in the school setting.
- **Chapter 3: Prevention in the Classroom.** Building a collaborative relationship with general education classroom teachers and assisting in the classroom as a behavioral specialist is a major component of *Partnerships in Place*. You will find useful information in helping you act as a prevention specialist.
- **Chapter 4: Proactive Support: A Unit on Respect.** Students need proactive support in developing the social skills and understandings that constitute “respect.” Specific steps for leading this intervention in collaboration with teachers are presented.
- **Chapter 5: Responsive Support.** Group and/or individual counseling for students who have adjustment problems is a major part of *Partnerships in Place*. In addition to providing proactive support, social workers play an important role in providing responsive support, particularly as it relates to conflict resolution. Specific steps for leading this intervention in small, problem-based groups are presented.
- **Chapter 6: Intensive Support.** Students who need counseling support and at least one additional service are targeted for intensive services. These services include such things as: provision of food, shelter, and clothing;

substance abuse intervention; psychological services; health treatments; and physical abuse/neglect referrals. An important part of intensive support is the identification of replacement behaviors. In almost all cases, students at this level are behaving in ways that do not result in success. It may be the role of the social worker to use cognitive behavior therapy in conjunction with other services to help the student develop appropriate and adaptive behaviors.

## Moving Ahead

*Partnerships in Place* provides school social workers with an approach for improving opportunities for its students to learn. It is built upon a continuum of support in which the focus is on fostering partnerships in the school system.

*Partnerships in Place* incorporates several social skills materials. They are published by Exceptional Innovations, and include:

Aldinger, L., Warger, C., & Eavy, P. (1992). *Strategies for teacher collaboration*. Reston, VA: Exceptional Innovations.

Bryan, J., & Bryan, T. (1996). *Amazing discoveries*. Reston, VA: Exceptional Innovations.

Bryan, T., & Warger, C. (1998). *Amazing discoverers club*. Reston, VA: Exceptional Innovations.

Montague, M., & Lund, K. (1993). *Job-related social skills*. Reston, VA: Exceptional Innovations.

Rutherford, R., Chipman, J., DiGangi, S., & Anderson, C. (1994). *Teaching social skills: A practical instructional approach*. Reston, VA: Exceptional Innovations.

Warger, C., Aldinger, & Eavy, P. (1996). *Instructional solutions*. Reston, VA: Exceptional Innovations. [Available in eBook format at [www.exinn.net](http://www.exinn.net).]

Warger, C., & Rutherford, R. (1996). *A collaborative approach to teaching social skills*. Reston, VA: Exceptional Innovations.