

Boys Town Education Model

Tiers 1, 2 & 3

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A wide variety of programs have been developed to serve as school wide behavior models in order to improve overall behavior of students in school settings. The Boys Town Education Model is one of these that has grown out of the specialized school programs run at the home campus of Boys Town in Omaha, NE (for a period the name had been changed to Girls and Boys Town).

What is the Boys Town Education Model?

The Boys Town Education Model (BTEM) is a multi-component program designed to assist schools in addressing challenging behavior through healthy relationships and the explicit teaching of social skills. The BTEM's three components include Well-Managed Schools (general education settings), Specialized Classroom Management (self-contained/residential settings), and Administrative Intervention (procedures to handle office referrals in both settings). It evolved from the Boys Town Teaching Model, which has been in use by Boys Town for more than 30 years (Hensley, Powell, Lamke, & Hartman, 2011). The goal of the BTEM is to create a healthy school environment through effective classroom management techniques, relationship building, and social skills instruction. The Boys Town Education model can also be divided into four topical components: building positive relationships, teaching social skills, reinforcing social skills, and responding to problem behavior. Similar to Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, the BTEM is based on research in applied behavior analysis and social learning theory (Hensley et al., 2011). Portions of the BTEM have been evaluated in both middle schools and high schools, which despite its name, is designed for implementation with both male and female students. It can be adopted at the school or school system level, as well as for specialized programs serving students with behavioral needs.

Components of the Boys Town Education Model

Building positive relationships. At its foundation, the BTEM is about building healthy, positive relationships between students and one another, as well as between students and staff. Staff members are encouraged to build these relationships by being compassionate instructors. Staff members are asked to be kind, express empathy, and communicate respect towards students. Additionally, staff members are seen as role models for students – by engaging in compassionate, respectful behaviors themselves, staff naturally influence students to behave in similar ways.

Staff members are also encouraged to combine firmness with compassion. Similar to their response to parenting styles, students respond best when they know the specific limits of their

behavior and can predict how adults will respond. By communicating expectations and consequences in advance, and then sticking to the plan when students behave or misbehave, staff can reduce students' feelings that the adults are "out to get them" or "unfair" (Hensley et al., 2011).



Teaching social skills. The BTEM emphasizes learning how to interact with others is an important part of the school experience. Therefore, learning social skills sets the groundwork for addressing problem behavior and creating a school environment that emphasizes the importance of healthy relationships. Accordingly, Boys Town incorporates social skills instruction within the day-to-day classroom management procedures. To teach these social skills, the BTEM seeks to task analyze specific social skills – that is, skills such as “apologizing” are broken down into specific steps. The BTEM teaches 16 social skills to all students, including following instructions, accepting consequences, having a conversation, working as a team, asking for help, and using an appropriate tone of voice (Hensley et al., 2011). Boys Town also offers social skill lesson plans and resources for teachers that can be purchased in addition to the material provided in professional development.

When using planned teaching to teach social skills, teachers introduce the skill to be taught, describe its importance, outline the steps to using the skill, and practice the skill in the classroom. Another way to teach these skills is to blend it with the curriculum already being used by the teacher, called blended teaching. In this case, students are taught social skills as a component of other academic lessons, making for efficient use of teacher time (Hensley et al., 2011). The Boys Town workbooks contain several detailed examples of this method.

Reinforcing social skills. The BTEM places much emphasis on the use of praise and a motivation system to reinforce appropriate behavior and use of social skills. A continuum of reinforcement strategies is emphasized such as general praise, behavior specific praise, and effective praise (Hensley et al., 2011). Teachers are encouraged to use a high rate of praise to corrections, preferably 4:1, to increase appropriate behavior while decreasing inappropriate behavior. The use of praise also assists with building positive teacher-student relationships and classroom climate. Teachers trained in the BTEM use a statistically significant more praise than teachers not trained in the BTEM (Oliver, Lambert, & Epstein, 2013).

Responding to problem behavior. No single strategy will eliminate all problem behavior. Accordingly, the BTEM applies several related techniques to addressing this issue including corrective teaching. Importantly, the BTEM seeks to prevent as much problem behavior as possible by creating a school environment that is positive, rewarding of pro-social interaction, and in which consequences are known by students and staff. To do this, the model calls for explicit teaching of expected behaviors and school

procedures and the creation of specific, positive school rules while rewarding students (often through praise) for adhering to these expectations.

Challenging Behaviors

Students with more challenging behavior are also explicitly taught problem solving skills. The BTEM uses the SODAS acronym for handling problem behavior (Hensley et al., 2011, p. 29):

S – Define the Situation – students are assisted in understanding the problem, including where it comes from and how large or small a problem it is.

O – Examine Options available to deal with the problem – several strategies for resolving the problem are outlined.

D – Determine the Disadvantages of each option – the disadvantages and advantages of each option are evaluated to help determine each option’s likeliness of solving the problem, likeliness of creating additional problems, and ease of implementation.

A – Determine the Advantages of each option.

S – Decide on a Solution and practice it – finally, students select the best option and practice it through role play and guided feedback. If the students’ plan is not the best possible option in the adults view, but is not illegal or not going to cause significant problems, they are allowed to implement it and learn from their choice.



Even with these strategies in place, it is predicted that some level of problem behavior will still occur. In the BTEM, teachers and administrators are expected to address these problems using behaviorist techniques, including understanding the strengths, appropriate uses, and limitations of positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, positive punishment, negative punishment, and shaping. The Boys Town materials include definitions for each of these techniques, as well as specific instructions for implementation. Further, the materials describe the importance of accurately and specifically defining problem behavior, both for shaping the students’ behavior and for communicating it to other adults. Behaviors that are loosely defined (e.g., “screwing around”) are more difficult to change because they could involve a number of different behaviors. On the other hand, behaviors that are specifically defined (e.g., “leaving his seat” or “talking with peers during instruction time”) can be addressed much more effectively (Hensley et al., 2011).

Resources for Implementation

Educators interested in implementing the BTEM are encouraged to contact Boys Town for information regarding training (boystowntraining.org). Boys Town offers a variety of options for training, including two-day workshops, online workshops and training, and personalized trainings. Additionally, individual courses are available on the Boys Town website on a variety of common issues including bullying, conflict resolution, behavior management, and more. These individual courses are significantly less expensive than full-scale workshops, and may be ideally suited for educators looking to specifically address a few individual problems.

Beyond the actual training services, Boys Town offers a wide variety of publications available from boystownpress.org. Although implementation guides for the BTEM components are only available with the purchase of professional development, other publications are available such as: children's literature, strategies to address specific problems such as bullying, behavior management, relationship building, and more. These publications are aimed at educators of all kinds including elementary, middle, and high school staff; special educators; parents; and other professionals.

Research on the Boys Town Education Model

The model has been applied in a variety of settings, including residential treatment programs and traditional middle and high schools, and in several states, including Georgia, Connecticut, Nebraska, and California (Boystown.org). Several peer-reviewed articles have been written detailing the implementation of the model and the academic and behavioral effects it has on students. Data suggest use of the BTEM is correlated with significant improvements in social skills and school adjustment (Thompson, Ruma, Nelson, & Criste, 1998), as well as fewer office referrals for students with severe emotional or behavior disorders (Duppong Hurley & Hyland, 2000). The model has been linked to lower levels of suspensions (Thompson, Nelson, Spenceri, & Maybank, 1999). Further, teachers that adhere more closely to the model (as measured by direct observation of program fidelity) have shown stronger positive effects for students, including fewer suspensions, higher grade point average, and increased academic engagement compared to teachers that do not adhere as closely to the model (Burke, Oats, Ringle, O'Neill Fichtner, & DelGaudio, 2011; Oliver, Lambert, Mason, & Epstein, 2013). While these results are positive, most of the research has been conducted by individuals affiliated with the program; more research is needed evaluating the program, particularly by research groups that are not associated with Boys Town. However, the BTEM should be considered a promising program, particularly for students who display challenging behaviors or who have emotional or behavioral disorders.



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Despite this limitation, the BTEM itself is built upon numerous evidence-based strategies that have been shown to be extremely effective for millions of students. These strategies include the emphasis on prevention through the creation, communication, and explicit teaching of procedures and desired behaviors, the reliance on positive reinforcement to shape behavior, the importance of building social skills, and the cautions against the overuse of suspension and expulsion (Hensley et al., 2011). Overall, the limited research on the BTEM has been quite positive, and its foundation of evidence-based strategies further increases confidence that the program can be successful.

Conclusion

The Boys Town Education Model is multi-component approach for creating safe, positive, and healthy schools in which students are more likely to choose positive, pro-social behaviors and less likely to engage in negative, anti-social behaviors. The BTEM is built on a foundation of respectful relationships between students and teachers. The model has been implemented in many different kinds of schools, and research regarding its efficacy, while limited, is promising. Educators who are interested in reducing discipline problems, promoting academic success, and improving relationships within the school are encouraged to seek out the materials presented by Boys Town and to consider full-scale implementation of the Boys Town Education Model.



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