



This guide was produced by the Tennessee Behavior Supports Project at Vanderbilt University. This tip sheet was authored by Justine B. Katzenbach, Brooke C. Shuster, Becky H. Shafer, Blair P. Lloyd, and Erik W. Carter. For more information, visit <http://tennesseebsp.org>.



What is Behavior-Specific Praise?



Behavior-specific praise (BSP) is an evidence-based classroom

management practice that can improve student behavior by providing specific acknowledgment of appropriate behavior.¹ Praise can be a powerful tool for improving students' academic and social outcomes, while also improving classroom climate.² Praise is frequently categorized as general or behavior-specific. The most effective form is **behavior-specific praise (BSP)**, when a teacher verbally acknowledges a specific academic or social behavior.³ By consistently acknowledging appropriate behavior, teachers can increase the likelihood students will demonstrate this same behavior in the future.⁴

When used effectively, BSP is a nonintrusive strategy for increasing

BSP is...

- Nonjudgmental
- Specific
- Sincere and credible
- Delivered immediately

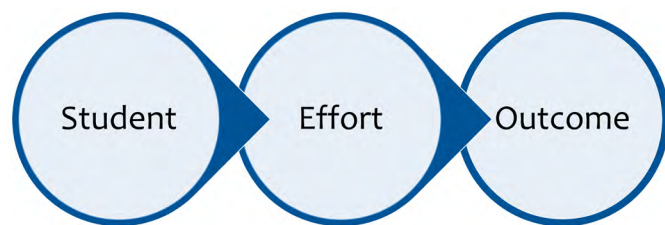
time on-task, instructional time, and correct responses.⁵ A teacher's use of BSP may decrease the time spent correcting inappropriate behavior. This can build a more positive classroom climate as the teacher brings attention to desired behaviors and makes class-wide expectations clearer.

When is BSP most effective?

BSP is most effective when it is immediate, sincere, and nonjudgmental. Though BSP is particularly rewarding for students who are motivated by adult attention, it can be instructive and build confidence for all students. BSP will also be most effective when it is delivered in a way that matches student preferences. For example, some students respond better to public praise (e.g., statements made in front of the class), while other students respond better to private praise (e.g., one-on-one acknowledgment in the hall).

How do I make BSP statements?

The format "Student + Effort + Outcome" can be used for BSP statements. This is described below:



Step	Task	Example
1	Identify the student by name.	"Megan ..."
2	Acknowledge the student's effort by referencing a specific behavior.	"Megan, you did a great job showing work on each problem ... "
3	Identify the outcome or potential results .	"Megan, you did a great job showing your work on each problem. I can tell you worked through every step on your own. "



Examples of BSP

Though BSP is helpful for students of all ages, it might look and sound different by grade level. Below are examples and non-examples of BSP across elementary and secondary school levels.⁶

Elementary examples of BSP	Secondary examples of BSP
"Jenny, I like the way you walked calmly and quietly into our classroom. This helps us start our lesson faster!"	"Clarence, you have been keeping up with your algebra homework every night. This is going to improve your grade!"
"Sam, excellent work getting your materials out. You are ready to learn."	"Lucy, you've been answering every question in class. You're going to do great on today's test."
"John, I like how you are taking your time. This helps avoid mistakes!"	"LeShon, you have been listening and following directions during class. This helps us all learn more."

Non-examples of BSP

"Good work!"

"Excellent effort!"

"John isn't talking, unlike the rest of the class. Good job, John."

"Try those problems again."

Using BSP in the Classroom:

Generally, BSP is more successful when combined with strong and consistent classroom expectations and procedures. Clear expectations will help you know which behaviors are worth reinforcing. To do this, first consider the behaviors you would like to see in your classroom (e.g., cooperative partner-work, listening to the speaker).⁷ If applicable, it may be helpful to refer back to the school-wide expectations when developing this list. Write down a list of behaviors that may help create a positive classroom climate (e.g., raise your hand to participate, ask and answer questions). You can post these behaviors around your classroom to help remind you of what to look for and communicate to your students of what desirable behavior looks like. Use this list of behaviors to notice and acknowledge appropriate student behavior.

Helpful Tips

Tally the number of praise statements you make during an instructional activity and set a goal for increasing the frequency of BSP. Research indicates that 6 praise statements every 15 minutes is an appropriate goal.⁹

Use a grade book or roster to track the number of students who receive BSP during an instructional activity. Set a goal for increasing the distribution of BSP across students.

Use written prompts to remind yourself of your goals (e.g., on post-its or in lesson plans).¹⁰

When identifying students who may benefit from BSP, think also of students who seem to seek your attention through inappropriate behavior. BSP may be a helpful strategy for them to access your attention while encouraging more appropriate behavior.

Graphic services supported in part by EKS NICHD Grant U54 HD083211 to the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development. vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu

For Further Reading

www.interventioncentral.org/behavioral-interventions/motivation/teacher-praise-efficient-tool-motivate-students

Endnotes

¹Sutherland, K. S., Wehby, J. H., & Copeland, S. R. (2000). Effect of varying rates of behavior-specific praise on the on-task

behavior of students with EBD. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 1, 2-9.

²Villeda, S. T., Shuster, B. C., Magill, L., & Carter, E. W. (2014). *Behavior-specific praise in the classroom*. Retrieved from vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/assets/files/resources/psibehaviorspecpraise.pdf

³Brophy, J. (1981). On praising effectively. *Elementary School Journal*, 81, 269-278.

⁴Brophy, J. (1981).

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Villeda et al., (2014).

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Myers, D.M., Simonsen, B., & Sugai, G. (2011). Increasing teachers' use of praise with a response-to-intervention approach. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 34, 35-39.

¹⁰Villeda et al., (2014).