

Prereferral Interventions

School violence, poor academic performance, misbehavior in class -- with increasing numbers of students identified as troubled or in trouble, schools must design systems for intervening prior to referral for special assistance. Otherwise, the system will grind to a halt. A *prereferral intervention* process delineates steps and strategies to guide teachers. The following is one example:

- (1) **Formulate an initial description of the problem.**
- (2) **Get the youngster's view of what's wrong and, as feasible, explore the problem with the family.**

As every teacher knows, the causes of learning, behavior, and emotional problems are hard to analyze. What looks like a learning disability or an attentional problem may be emotionally-based. Misbehavior often arises in reaction to learning difficulties. What appears as a school problem may be the result of problems at home. The following are some things to consider in seeking more information about what may be causing a youngster's problem.

- (a) Through enhanced personal contacts, build a positive working relationship with the youngster and family.
 - (b) Focus first on assets (e.g. positive attributes, outside interests, hobbies, what the youngster likes at school and in class).
 - (c) Ask about what the youngster doesn't like at school.
 - (d) Explore the reasons for "dislikes" (e.g., Are assignments seen as too hard? as uninteresting? Is the youngster embarrassed because others will think s/he does not have the ability to do assignments? Is the youngster picked on? rejected? alienated?)
 - (e) Explore other possible causal factors.
 - (f) Explore what the youngster and those in the home think can be done to make things better (including extra support from a volunteer, a peer, friend, etc.).
 - (g) Discuss some new things the youngster and those in the home would be *willing* to try to make the situation better.
- (3) **Try new strategies in the classroom** -- based on the best information about what is causing the problem.

Prereferral Interventions Some Things to Try

- Make changes to (a) improve the match between a youngster's program and his/her interests and capabilities and (b) try to find ways for her/him to have a special, positive status in class, at the school, and in the community. Talk and work with other staff in developing ideas along these lines.
- Add resources for extra support (aide, volunteers, peer tutors) to help the youngster's efforts to learn and perform. Create time to interact and relate with the youngster as an individual.
- Discuss with the youngster (and those in the home) why the problems are occurring.
- Specifically focus on exploring matters with the youngster that will suggest ways to enhance positive motivation.
- Change aspects of the program (e.g., materials, environment) to provide a better match with his/her interests and skills.
- Provide enrichment options (in and out of class).
- Use resources such as volunteers, aides, and peers to enhance the youngster's social support network.
- Specifically focus on exploring ways those in the home can enhance their problem-solving efforts.
- If necessary include other staff (e.g., counselor, principal) in a special discussion with the youngster exploring reasons for the problem and ways to enhance positive involvement at school and in class.

- (4) **If the new strategies don't work, talk to others** at school to learn about approaches they find helpful (e.g., reach out for support/mentoring/coaching, participate with others in clusters and teams, observe how others teach in ways that effectively address differences in motivation and capability, request additional staff development on working with such youngsters).
- (5) **If necessary, use the school's referral processes** to ask for additional support services.
- (6) **Work with referral resources to coordinate your efforts with theirs** for classroom success.