Adapting the Good Behavior Game at Pine Ridge Elementary

Pine Ridge Elementary is a rural elementary school serving approximately 320 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The school has experienced increasing concerns about disruptive behavior, difficulty with self-regulation, peer conflict, and classroom engagement.

A local community coalition, the Pine Ridge Prevention Partnership (PRPP), has been working to strengthen substance use prevention efforts in the community. Coalition members include the elementary school principal, classroom teachers, school counselor, school psychologist, parents, a public health representative, and a youth-services coordinator.

The coalition wants to address substance use risk factors before substance use begins. After reviewing several evidence-based prevention strategies, the coalition selects the Good Behavior Game (GBG) by PAXIS for implementation in grades 1–3.

GBG is a classroom-based behavior-management strategy in which teachers organize students into teams, establish and review classroom behavioral expectations, monitor behavioral infractions during game periods, and provide rewards when teams meet behavioral goals. The intervention is intended to strengthen children's self-regulation and prosocial behavior and reduce disruptive and aggressive behavior—factors associated with later substance use and other problem behaviors.

The coalition is excited about GBG but recognizes that the program was not developed specifically for Pine Ridge students and teachers.

Pine Ridge's Students and Teachers

- The school has several characteristics that the coalition believes need to be considered:
- Approximately 20% of students speak a language other than English at home.
- Several classrooms include students with ADHD, autism, learning disabilities, and other differences in attention, communication, or self-regulation.
- Many students respond particularly well to visual demonstrations, movement, and hands-on activities.
- Teachers report that they have limited time for additional lessons or extensive preparation.
- Several teachers are new to the profession and feel overwhelmed by classroom-management demands.
- Parents have expressed concern about approaches that could make children feel publicly labeled as "good" or "bad."
- The school has a strong emphasis on cultural responsiveness and wants students to see their families and communities reflected in classroom activities.

The coalition therefore begins discussing adaptations.

Three Proposed Adaptations

During a coalition meeting, three teachers propose changes to GBG.

The prevention coordinator asks the coalition to classify each proposed adaptation as a green-light, yellow-light, or red-light adaptation before deciding whether to implement it.

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Adaptation #1: "Let's Make the Examples More Relevant"

Teachers notice that some of the examples and illustrations in their GBG materials do not look like the students at Pine Ridge. They propose replacing some examples, pictures, and scenarios with ones that reflect students' actual experiences.

For example, instead of using a scenario involving students arguing about a playground game that few Pine Ridge students play, teachers might use: "Two students both want to be first in line. What could they do?"

They also want to include pictures representing the racial, cultural, linguistic, and family diversity of their school.

Adaptation #2: "We Don't Have Enough Time"

After reviewing the school schedule, the principal realizes that teachers are struggling to find time for GBG. One teacher proposes a solution: "What if we only play the game once a week instead of multiple times each week? We could still tell students about the rules and give teams rewards, but this would save teachers a lot of time."

Another teacher suggests an even larger reduction: "Maybe we could just do GBG for the first six weeks of school. Once students learn the rules, we could stop doing it."

The principal likes the idea because it would make implementation much easier.

However, the school psychologist objects: "That isn't just changing the way we explain the program. We're substantially reducing how often students participate and potentially eliminating part of the intervention."

According to the standard GBG description, the game initially occurs multiple times per week and increases in frequency and duration over time.

Adaptation #3: "Let's Change How the Game Works"

Some teachers are concerned that the traditional GBG format will be difficult for their first-grade students. They propose replacing some of the standard game activities with movement-based activities.

For example, instead of conducting the game during independent seatwork, teachers want to conduct the game during a classroom movement activity. They also want to add a short "team-building challenge" at the beginning of each game.

The teachers argue that these changes will make the intervention more engaging and developmentally appropriate.

The school counselor supports the idea but raises a concern: "These changes might work really well, but we're changing some of the activities and the way the game is delivered. We need to make sure we're not accidentally changing what makes GBG effective."