

# Issue Brief



## Administrator Strategies that Support High Fidelity Implementation of the Pyramid Model for Promoting Social-Emotional Competence & Addressing Challenging Behavior

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### INTRODUCTION

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Implementing the Pyramid Model with fidelity and achieving positive outcomes for children and their families requires that administrators understand their roles in the implementation process. Every administrative decision impacts program quality and sustainability. This Policy Brief underscores the importance of facilitative administrative practices that provide sustained commitment, timely training, competent coaching, the use of process and outcome data for decision-making, and the development of policies and procedures that are aligned with high fidelity implementation.

### WHAT IS INTERVENTION FIDELITY?

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Administrative vigilance and support of high fidelity implementation of the Pyramid Model is critical if children are to benefit. Intervention fidelity is defined as the degree to which interventions are accurately and consistently carried out as originally specified by the developers<sup>1</sup>. Implementing intervention procedures with fidelity is absolutely necessary in order to achieve the intended outcomes. The only way to know if a practice or intervention is being accurately applied with fidelity is to measure implementation. The measurement tool used for the Pyramid Model for preschool programs is the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT)<sup>2</sup>; and for birth-2 programs, the Teaching Pyramid Infant Toddler Observation Scale (TPITOS)<sup>3</sup>. The TPOT and TPITOS are used by an observer/coach to measure whether an early childhood professional is using the practices with fidelity.

Administrative support is key for achieving, as well as sustaining, the implementation of intervention methods with fidelity. Administrators can provide a number of supports to help personnel responsible for implementing intervention procedures overcome typical challenges along the way. These essential supports are described next.

### IT TAKES TIME

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Administrators and practitioners implementing intervention procedures need to focus on small steps and on incremental improvements in staff skills and related child outcomes. Realistic expectations for children's developmental outcomes are important to prevent personnel from getting frustrated and abandoning the intervention prior to reaching fidelity<sup>4</sup>. Building a strong program that supports children's social emotional development cannot be achieved overnight, and implementing and sustaining an intervention with fidelity requires resources, supports and time. Personnel and families need time to learn the new practices, time to practice them and receive feedback, and time to collect data. Administrators need time to develop procedures and written policies that support these effective and necessary strategies. Intervention fidelity is not a point in time. It is a journey! Based upon initial data, we believe that most programs require two years to reach satisfactory levels of fidelity using the Pyramid Model.



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## IT TAKES RESOURCES

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Perhaps the greatest challenge is a scarcity of program funding to ensure that proper supports for intervention implementation are in place. Program administrators can best ensure that the Pyramid Model practices are implemented with fidelity by developing supportive program policies and procedures including those that ensure funding, staff time for training and on-going coaching as and data collection on fidelity and outcomes. We estimate that administrators need to allocate dollars for at least four days of initial training plus two hours of coaching for each classroom or service unit on a weekly basis. In the face of no new fiscal resources, administrators have found ways of reallocating current budgets to ensure this level of support.

## IT TAKES TRAINING

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According to the Pyramid Model, an effective workforce is the foundation for social, emotional and behavioral outcomes for young children. Functional components of training include background knowledge about the intervention, demonstration of key skills by coaches and practice of key skills by trainees<sup>5</sup>. Training is not only necessary for teachers and staff. EC program administrators should have an understanding of the intervention, in this case the Pyramid Model, as well as a solid foundation early childhood education, early intervention, child development, and/or early childhood special education along with training in administration and supervision<sup>6</sup>.

## IT TAKES COACHING

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Personnel and families should have access to coaching during the training, implementation, and evaluation phases in order to achieve and then sustain high levels of fidelity<sup>7</sup>. Coaching should consist of:

- discussion of intervention theory and methods,
- demonstration of intervention procedures,
- supervised practice, and
- feedback on performance.

Coaches should provide on-site coaching and individualized guidance in order to help personnel and families learn to implement intervention procedures with fidelity<sup>8</sup>. Coaching on the Pyramid Model includes observation by the coach using the TPOT or TPITOS to measure the teacher's fidelity to the practice. Research indicates a significant increase in staff skill development and use of new skills if coaching is in place in addition to training<sup>9</sup>.

## IT TAKES DATA

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Administrators need to ensure data are collected and used to make decisions on the level of fidelity of implementation, the support needs of teachers, families and children, and on outcomes. Regular data collection will help programs decide whether: 1) the Pyramid Model practices are being implemented correctly and fully, 2) children, personnel and families are benefiting from the program, and 3) the intervention benefits are worth the costs. Data on both fidelity and outcomes are required in order to engage in continuous program improvement efforts and to interpret outcome data. If data indicate fidelity is low, then the first supports needed by teachers and practitioners are those that can help them improve their practices. If fidelity is high but outcomes are less than expected, then expert consultation may be needed related to individualizing interventions using the Pyramid Model.

## IT TAKES ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP

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Administrators set the tone and mission for the program by emphasizing what they consider to be important values<sup>10</sup>. Administrators should emphasize the importance of children's social-emotional development and approaches like the Pyramid Model that seek to promote social-emotional development versus focusing on problem behavior. Administrative leadership can set a tone of learning effective practices when faced with challenging behavior versus a tone of intolerance. Administrative leadership is needed to establish a value of ensuring that intervention strategies are practiced until they are implemented with fidelity. And, administrative leadership is needed to establish a program-wide vision of using data to make child and program decisions.

## IT TAKES WRITTEN POLICIES & PROCEDURES

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Of course, implementing practices to fidelity and sustaining high fidelity requires a lot more than tone and vision. It requires program policies and procedures to support personnel in their efforts to carry out that vision. This may be achieved by building the importance of fidelity into the program mission statement and other program policies as well as including the importance of fidelity into the personnel policies and procedures and parent handbooks.

Written policies are needed around topics such as the importance of social-emotional development and expectations about practicing and collecting data on a strategy until it is implemented with fidelity. In addition, administrators will need to develop procedures to ensure that program personnel can

access the specialized supports when needed (e.g., behavior support plan facilitation, family support) in an efficient and effective manner. Such policies and procedures should be conveyed to personnel from the start through recruitment and hiring policies and ongoing messages.

Budgets reflect the true vision of a program. Budgets need to be constructed to ensure that staff are well trained and receive the on-going support of a coach to ensure fidelity of implementation. Policies and budgets should support regular data collection and the use of data in making decisions about interventions, personnel development, and other program features.

Written personnel policies should establish a system of recognition for those personnel who adopt interventions and who collect and use data for decision-making. Recognition can range from an administrator's "thank you" in a program newsletter to bonuses or stipends for professional development opportunities.

Written policies and procedures that support the every-day use of interventions with fidelity need to address the importance of collaborative planning with staff and families in order to utilize their expertise and establish buy-in from all stakeholders<sup>11</sup>.

## IT TAKES FAMILIES

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Finally, to more fully support the program and intervention, administrators can encourage family participation in the program by communicating with families about Pyramid Model goals and procedures on a regular basis and providing information, training and coaching for the implementation by family members. Personnel can provide families with activities related to supporting social-emotional skill development that can be embedded within family routine activities. Newsletters and family meetings can provide a review of previous and upcoming classroom activities related to the intervention as well as include tips for ways parents can reinforce intervention-related skills at home. Similarly, a bulletin board dedicated solely to the intervention could be displayed in the classroom or center and used to highlight the intervention program goals, procedures, implementation timeline, and provide take-home sheets with tips for families use at home.

## SUMMARY

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Administrators can send an important message about fidelity of implementation to staff and families through their own actions and leadership. Implementation and sustainability with fidelity of the Pyramid Model takes a number of people and multiple resources, all requiring administrative support<sup>12</sup>. In the end, the benefits of such efforts for programs, children and families will speak for themselves.

## Endnotes

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## Resource

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