



BEHAVIORAL & MENTAL HEALTH
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The Pyramid Model

Four Takeaways for Young Children's Social
and Emotional Development



The Pyramid Model

The Pyramid Model framework was developed and promoted by several nationally funded centers: The Center for the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL), the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children and the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations. Based on a tiered public health model, the Pyramid Model looks to guide educators, families, and other early childhood professionals, specifically for those involved with children up to five years old. The framework promotes positive social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes for ALL students in the education system and gives plans to help children with or at risk for delays and disabilities in their early development. Through reading this report, you will harness a clear grasp on the Pyramid Model and its ability to help children in your schools.



1. SUPPORT IS PROVIDED TO ALL CHILDREN

The Pyramid Model's rationale is that adults need to be intentional in their support of social and emotional development for all children. All children learn and grow within the context of relationships and a facilitated classroom environment, but some students will require additional supports and interventions to gain important social and emotional skills. In the Pyramid Model, all students receive the same high quality support and adults only use the upper tier's resources when children need them to.

The first level of the model refers to universal supports, also known as quality environments and responsive relationships. All children develop

through well implemented structures in their lives. At the universal level, this includes the environments in early care, education, and the home. The relationships in these areas comprise of the interactions with children, families, and anyone else playing an active role in their life. It will take time to establish relationships as caretakers get to know their children's preferences. However, most children will form these healthy relationships without intervention. Every student, regardless of their involvement in the upper tiers of the model, needs these universal supports.

The next level of the Pyramid Model relates to prevention of challenging behavior. In this tier, teachers and caretakers provide support to children at risk of behavioral problems through targeted social-emotional strategies. Included



The Pyramid Model's Tiers

Tier 3: Intensive Intervention - Focuses on individualized interventions for a child's persistent challenges

Tier 2: Targeted Social Emotional Supports - Uses prevention methods to deter emotional problems from developing

Tier 1: High Quality Supportive Environments and Nurturing & Responsive Relationships - Contains universal supports to develop every child's behavioral practices

Base: Effective Workforce - Provides systems, policies, and workers to make the Pyramid Model function



The Pyramid Model is designed to ensure a child's healthy social and emotional development. The higher tiers of the pyramid work to prevent future problems, while continuous giving support from the tier 1 level.

is explicitly instructing positive social behaviors, along with self-regulation strategies, emotional comprehension, problem-solving, and developing peer relationships. Adults use intentional teaching to help children build skills to solve tasks, control anger, recognize and express emotions, and more.

If needed, the tertiary level focuses on intervention, comprised of practices with individualized and intensive interventions embedded throughout the child's day. For the very small number of children with persistent challenges, this tier creates individualized strategies that are family-centered, assessment-based, and skill-building. For this level, it is essential that the caretaker, parents, and/or guardians prevent challenges, teach new skills and reinforce expected behavior in all environments.

2. ORGANIZATION AND FOUNDATION MATTER

When evidence-based practices are implemented with fidelity, intended outcomes are achieved. The Pyramid Model framework provides tools and resources aimed at addressing implementation at the systems and policy levels. Dedicated teachers, staff, and parents who are supported to use the proven practices and policies to make up the base known as the "Effective Workforce." Achieving fidelity with this framework, starting from the base, forms a comprehensive school mental health system. Supporting engagement, routine, conversations, communication, policies, evaluations, encouragement, and safe environments creates the necessary context for healthy early social and emotional development.

Training and technical assistance for the contributors is necessary to build the capacity of implementation. This support helps adults to team together to use of data-proven practices as they harness the different levels of the Pyramid Model. This group of training and study-driven thinking is also a part of the "Effective Workforce" in the

Pyramid diagram. When leadership and stakeholder groups are aware of events in school and district-wide, family and community are collaborating, and outside factors such as culture, area, and climate are taken into account, the Pyramid Model has its strongest foundation. The school and district must promote this evidence-based model in its systems and policies to be successfully implemented.

3. PROVEN RESULTS FOR CONSISTENT DEVELOPMENT

The Pyramid Model is based on proven practices for improving behavior in the early years of schooling. A 2014 study in Tennessee and Florida of 484 public students and 40 teachers set out to refine the Pyramid Model intervention system. The groups of students included “target children” who were identified as having problematic behavior, and “non-target children” who did not have special consideration. The Teaching Pyramid provided randomly-selected educators with training in the model of universal strategies, secondary strategies, and targeted interventions to strengthen young children’s social and emotional development and reducing disruptive behavior.

Results of the study indicated following teachers’ instruction in the intervention group, the non-targeted children were rated significantly higher on social skills than non-target children whose teachers were in the control group. Target children within classrooms with the experimental condition had statistically significant problem behavior reductions as rated by teachers in comparison to target children in the control group. With the Pyramid Model in place, improvements were present for both the target and non-target children in the classroom.

Also, in 2016, UW-Whitewater in Wisconsin

“Beginning the dialogue whereby families and professionals learn from and with one another is a first step in the implementation of a multitiered approach to supporting young children’s social-emotional competence and decreasing the incidence of challenging behavior.”

- Quote from *Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning: A Conceptual Model for Intervention*

completed a study based on evaluating the Pyramid Model in Wisconsin. Among 22 classroom teachers and 109 students in 4K, they organized into Pyramid Model implementation classrooms compared to the control. Children’s social, behavioral, and early literacy outcomes were assessed in Fall and again in Spring. The results of the study showed a significant decrease in problem behaviors in the experimental group versus the control group. The Pyramid Model group also indicated a greater increase in social skills. These results were especially significant for young children with problematic behavior in the Fall. With preschool children who display more challenging behaviors being at greater risk for suspension or expulsion, achieving appropriate behaviors is essential to keep children in the education system.

There are many other components to the data behind the Pyramid Model, but these studies show the effectiveness of implementing the model into the early childhood classroom. All children in the classroom have the potential to grow in their social and emotional development. It is the practices in their classrooms that inspire this development.



4. SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION AFTER TRAINING AND COACHING

Additionally, a Florida and Tennessee Study in 2011 examined the use of the Pyramid Model for teachers, revealing the model is better implemented after receiving training and practice-based coaching. While the teachers in the comparison group were informed of the Pyramid Model before the study, those in the experimental group had 16 weeks of coaching sessions and materials.

The study's results revealed that teachers in the intervention group progressed steadily in implementing more practices promoted by the Pyramid Model when compared to teachers in the control group. By the end of the school year, there were statistically significant and noteworthy differences in practice implementation between intervention and control teachers. Teachers who had 16 weeks of prior training and coaching were using more than 70% of the Pyramid Model practices by the end of the school year, compared to the control group with just over 40%.

With students in the experimental group achieving more positive behaviors, this study gives evidence for the importance of classroom-based coaching and practicing the Pyramid Model before

implementation. This, combined with strong fidelity, can effectively show behavior benefits in a year's time. The Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) and/or Teaching Pyramid for Infants/Toddlers Observation Scale (TPITOS) can show levels of fidelity with the number of implemented practices. Successful implementation of the model includes essentials such as a visual schedule, rules and expectations, and a number of other items.


CONCLUSION

The Pyramid Model's structure and proven results find it as one of the most effective ways to ensure healthy emotional well-being and development of social competence in young children. When a supportive environment and nurturing relationships are not enough, emotional supports and intensive intervention supplement healthy development. The structure itself and the protocol with it gives instructors the tools to implement the Pyramid Model, given the proper coaching.

The Pyramid Model base, the effective workforce, is essential. Without strong, shared leadership and practice-based classroom coaching, the framework will not achieve its intended results. Teachers, educators, and families all work together for maximum effectiveness in their children's development. Coaching further strengthens the use of practices promoted by the Pyramid Model to ensure the best behavioral and emotional outcomes for all students.



START USING THE PYRAMID MODEL:



Wisconsin's statewide implementation of the Pyramid Model framework is coordinated by the Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health (WI-AIMH). In collaborative partnership with WI-AIMH, CESA 2 can support your school or district to implement the Pyramid Model framework. CESA 2 professionals can help, through workshops and consulting, to start a path towards positive social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes for ALL students.

Get started by scheduling a consulting session at cesa2.org.

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