

# SPORT AS A CONTEXT FOR TEACHING PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR TO ADOLESCENTS WITH DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR DISORDERS

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Adolescents with disruptive behavior disorders lack skills needed to demonstrate prosocial behavior. Sport is a therapeutic recreation (TR) context in which adolescents may learn prosocial behavior; however, sport alone does not assure that prosocial behavior will be learned. To promote learning of prosocial behavior, TR specialists leading sport activities may consider a prosocial behavior program to augment the sport activities. The purpose of this paper is to describe a TR program designed to increase prosocial behavior skills demonstrated by adolescents with disruptive behavior disorders within a sport context. To achieve this purpose, disruptive behavior disorders and prosocial behaviors are defined, and an examination of social learning theory is presented to illustrate how prosocial behavior skills are developed. Sport as a forum for teaching prosocial behavior is then introduced, followed by a discussion of TR, prosocial behavior and sport.

## Definitions

### Disruptive Behavior Disorders

Adolescents who receive mental health treatment for severe behavior problems are generally diagnosed with oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder. Adolescents diagnosed with oppositional defiant disorder behave in a manner that is defiant and hostile toward persons of authority (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). The American Psychiatric Association (APA) (1994) defines oppositional defiant disorder as a behavior disturbance that lasts at least six months during which at least four of the following eight antisocial behaviors are present: (a) loses temper, (b) argues with adults, (c) actively defies or refuses adult requests or rules, (d) deliberately does things to annoy others, (e) blames others for mistakes, (f) becomes easily annoyed by others, (g) demonstrates anger and resentment, and (h) appears spiteful or vindictive.

Conduct disorder is the most frequently diagnosed disorder among adolescents receiving mental health treatment (Fisher, 1997). Adolescents with conduct disorder often display their



feelings toward other people in a destructive manner (Center for Mental Health Services, 1997). These individuals demonstrate "a repetitive and persistent pattern of behavior in which the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate societal norms or rules are violated" (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, p. 85). According to the APA (1994), conduct disorder is present when an individual demonstrates antisocial behaviors that: (a) are aggressive toward people and animals, (b) involve property destruction, (c) result in theft or deceitfulness, and (d) violate rules.

### Prosocial Behavior

Prosocial behavior involves actions, such as complimenting others and offering encouragement, performed voluntarily with the intention of helping other people. Such behavior typically results in promoting the development of positive interpersonal relationships (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989; Estrada-Hollenbeck & Heatherton, 1998; Franzoi, 1996). Shields and Bredemeier (1995) argued that prosocial behavior is positive behavior performed when a person confronts a moral conflict. The moral conflict is operationalized as a behavior intended to help another person.

Prosocial behavior emerges during the second year of a person's life (Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990). Although prosocial behaviors, such as helping and sharing, are not evident, the demonstration of prosocial behavior is identified in children's responses to the emotional reactions of other people. Zahn-Waxler and Radke-Yarrow (1990) suggested that with children one to two years old, basic prosocial behaviors, such as pats or hugs, are demonstrated in reaction to their mothers' distress. As children mature, more sophisticated responses, such as asking why someone was crying, are found.

### **Social Learning Theory and Prosocial Behavior**

Social learning theory provides a basis from which to examine prosocial behavior skill development among adolescents with disruptive behavior disorders. According to Bandura (1977), social learning theory addresses the process by which a person's social behavior is learned and maintained. Most social behavior is learned by observing other people and the consequences they receive as a result of the observed behavior. Bandura (1977) referred to this process as observational learning.

Social learning theory illustrates that prosocial behaviors, such as helping and complimenting, are susceptible to the influence of observational learning (Toner, 1991). An example of a person engaging in observational learning might involve an adolescent playing football who repeatedly observes another participant who helps other participants get up when they have fallen. As a result of these observations the adolescent might similarly help other participants. According to Rushton (1982), an individual who observes another person demonstrating prosocial behavior is more inclined to demonstrate similar prosocial behavior,



particularly if the person observed is similar to him or her, a person of status, or if he or she is rewarded for the behavior.

### **Sport and Prosocial Behavior**

Sport provides a forum for developing prosocial behavior because participation has the potential to shape an individual's actions (Gough, 1997). Cooper (1982) argued that sport contributes to the development of prosocial behavior because team affiliations might discourage egoism and provide opportunities for demonstrating altruistic behavior. According to Kleiber and Roberts (1981), "... organized sports provide a forum for the teaching of responsibility, cooperation, subordination of self to the greater good, and the shaping of motivation and achievement behaviors" (p. 203). Furthermore, sport helps a person learn to work with other people aiming to achieve similar goals (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997), and cooperate with others by confronting issues of fairness surfacing as part of team participation (Kohlberg, 1981).

Sport participation may provide opportunities for adolescents with behavior disorders to learn prosocial behaviors; however, participation in sport in and of itself does not necessarily guarantee such learning will occur (McKenney & Dattilo, 2001). Instead, because sport might encourage a focus of attention on the self, the competition involved in sport may decrease a participant's sensitivity to the needs of other sport participants (Staub, 1978). Examples of how sport alone may inhibit the learning of prosocial behavior is found in studies conducted by Sherif, Harvey, Hood, and Sherif (1987) and Kleiber and Roberts (1981).

Sherif et al. (1987) conducted a study with two groups of eleven-year-old boys attending a summer camp in the 1950s. For the first week, groups were assigned to separate cabins where they interacted together in recreation activities so that they would develop attachments to one another. Second, participants in both groups began competing against one another in sports tournaments. After two weeks, the competition produced behaviors such as verbal insults, overturning beds, and taking property. Third, the researchers attempted to reduce the negative reactions by engaging participants in cooperative activities. After six days, negative behaviors decreased and cross-friendships were established.

Kleiber and Roberts (1981) examined social behaviors of 54 male and female fifth-grade participants before and after a two week "Kick-Soccer World Series." Using the Social Behavior Scale (Knight & Kagen, 1977), which provides participants with opportunities to obtain rewards for themselves and others, the authors did not find a reliable impact on giving patterns at the end of the two weeks. However, when the last trial was examined, male participants demonstrated a significant decrease in generosity. Consequently, for the male participants, this study suggests a relationship between sport participation and decreased altruism.

Based on the studies conducted by Sherif et al. (1987) and Kleiber and Roberts (1981), it can be argued that the presentation alone of a sport experience does not guarantee the learning of



prosocial behavior; rather, opportunities for developing prosocial behavior must be present to augment learning of sport skills. Consequently, if using sport as a part of a TR program, it is important for TR specialists to expose adolescents with disruptive behavior disorders to opportunities to learn prosocial behaviors (McKenney, 2001). One approach to helping adolescents with disruptive behavior disorders learn prosocial behaviors is to provide opportunities for observing and practicing demonstration of specific behaviors prior to engaging in sport activities (McKenney, 2001).

Three studies have demonstrated how, within a sport context, prosocial behavior interventions might increase participants' demonstration of prosocial behavior (Giebink & McKenzie, 1985; McKenzie & Dattilo, 2001; Sharpe, Brown, & Crider, 1995). Giebink and McKenzie (1985) examined the effects of a prosocial behavior program (N = 4) offered during 22 physical education class Softball games and found that using praise, modeling, and a point system were effective in increasing participants' ability to compliment teammates, play fair, and accept consequences. Sharpe, et al. (1995) examined the effects of a prosocial behavior program (N = 88) provided during elementary school physical education classes on leadership and conflict-resolution skills and found an increase in both target behaviors.

Although studies have revealed positive results associated with interventions designed to teach prosocial behavior to children and adolescents without disruptive behavior disorders (Giebink & McKenzie, 1985; Sharpe, et al., 1995), only one study has examined the effects of an intervention provided within a sport context on the prosocial behavior of adolescents with disruptive behavior disorders. McKenzie and Dattilo (2001) examined the effects of an intervention (N = 5) provided during basketball instruction on the behaviors of encouraging, helping, and conflict resolving demonstrated during basketball scrimmages. Using a single-subject, multiple baseline across behaviors design to assess the effects of the intervention, the authors found an increase in prosocial behavior immediately following implementation of the intervention for the behaviors of encouraging and helping. Higher mean values were maintained for encouraging and conflict resolving during intervention and when measured periodically after the study was completed. Although the number of prosocial behaviors decreased as the intervention progressed and after the intervention was completed, the authors found that the mean scores never decreased to the number demonstrated before the intervention was implemented.

### **Therapeutic Recreation, Prosocial Behavior and Sport**

Therapeutic Recreation involves "... the specialized application of recreation and experiential activities or interventions that assist in maintaining or improving the health status, functional capacities, and ultimately the quality of life of persons with special needs (Carter, Van Andel, & Robb, 1995, p. 10). The TR process involved is a problem-solving procedure that is



used by TR specialists to help participants improve their health status, functional capacities and quality of life by meeting identified needs (Austin & Crawford, 1996). The TR process can be used to assist in meeting the needs of adolescents with disruptive behavior disorders through observational learning activities designed to increase prosocial behaviors within a sport context. The TR process involves the following four elements: assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation. Assessment

Assessment is the process used to determine participants' needs, deficits, and strengths to place them in programs designed to change behavior determined to be in need of change (Stumbo & Peterson, 2000). To assess participants needs related to prosocial behavior, a prosocial behavior checklist, based on guidelines established by Goldstein & McGinnis (1997), could be developed and administered. Developing a prosocial behavior checklist involves choosing from examples of particular prosocial behaviors relevant to sport activities to be implemented as part of the TR program. Administering a prosocial behavior checklist would involve assessing the degree to which participants perform particular prosocial behaviors on a scale that ranges from "almost never" to "almost always," before the implementation of the program. Results of the prosocial behavior checklist could then be used to determine participants' treatment needs related to specific prosocial behaviors. For example, if a participant's prosocial behavior checklist results indicate that she or he almost never encourages other people, the TR specialist might plan to include "encouraging" in the planning phase of the program. Planning

During the planning phase of the TR process, the TR Specialist designs the program. At this time, goals and objectives are developed based on an assessment of participants' deficits and needs related to prosocial behaviors. The prosocial behavior program is comprised of prosocial behavior cards, role-play activities, and video-viewing activities.

During the planning phase the cards and activities are selected. Based on guidelines developed by Goldstein, Sprafkin, Gershaw and Klein (1980), prosocial behavior cards outline steps for demonstrating prosocial behaviors. For example, if "encouraging" is the prosocial behavior, steps would include: (a) deciding what behavior you want to encourage, (b) deciding how you want to demonstrate encouragement, and (c) provide the encouragement. Role-play activities are planned for each prosocial behavior presented on the prosocial behavior cards developed for each participant. For example, if "helping" is the planned prosocial behavior, two role-play activities might include: (a) one participant offers help to another participant who has fallen, and (b) one participant offers to help another participant learn a skill. To encourage reflective viewing, thus the enhancement of learning, use of videos is encouraged so that participants can view their own performances, or the performances of others (Lyons, 1988). To



implement a video-viewing portion of the program, the TR specialists could create videotapes comprised of behaviors demonstrated by participants in sport activities, or examples of athletes who provide appropriate role-model behavior. For example, the TR specialist could create a tape of prosocial behaviors demonstrated by college athletes who demonstrate behaviors targeted in the program.

### Implementation

For the prosocial behavior program, the implementation phase involves the use of activities based on guidelines developed by Goldstein et al. (1980). Each prosocial behavior is presented in a six-phase format: (1) presenting an overview of the prosocial behavior, (2) demonstrating the prosocial behavior, (3) discussing the demonstrated prosocial behavior, (4) organizing a role-play, (5) beginning the role-play, and (6) inviting feedback.

Presenting an overview of the prosocial behavior involves introducing and promoting discussion before demonstrating a prosocial behavior. Demonstrating the prosocial behavior involves having the TR specialist perform a prosocial behavior using the behavioral steps outlined on the prosocial behavior cards. Discussing the demonstrated prosocial behavior involves having the TR specialist invite discussion on the demonstrated behavior by asking questions. Organizing role-play activities involves assigning roles, rehearsing what participants say and do during the role-play activity, and providing final instructions. Beginning role-play activities involves having the TR specialist stand near a chalk board with the steps written on it and pointing to each step as it is enacted, and having the TR specialist provide needed instruction when role-play activities stray markedly from the behavioral steps. Finally, the TR specialist invites feedback following role-play activities by asking questions such as, "How did it feel to compliment your peer?" Sessions that include a video-viewing component involve presenting and discussing the observed behavior, and inviting feedback.

### Evaluation

Evaluation involves "... the systematic and logical process of gathering and analyzing selected information in order to make decisions about the quality, effectiveness, and/or outcomes of a program, function, or service" (Stumbo & Peterson, 2000, p. 288). Formative evaluation and summative evaluation provide two means for collecting data needed to evaluate effectiveness of the program. Formative evaluation involves collecting information on an ongoing basis throughout the prosocial behavior program (Stumbo & Peterson, 2000). Based on this evaluation, the TR specialist might consider making changes to the program while it is being implemented, thus increasing the probability of meeting participants needs. For example, if during sport activities the TR specialist observes participants helping peers after viewing videos of prosocial behaviors that they had performed, then the TR specialist might consider increasing the number of opportunities to observe videos.



At the conclusion of the prosocial behavior program, a summative evaluation could be completed so that the program can be compared with other programs or provide information to make changes before it is implemented again (Stumbo & Peterson, 2000). Completing a summative evaluation might include administering the same assessment tool as used in the assessment phase of the TR process. For example, if a prosocial behavior checklist was administered before the program, the TR specialist might re-administer the checklist after the program. Based on the information generated from the checklist, the TR specialist would be able to determine if participants demonstrated an increase in the demonstration of prosocial behaviors as a result of the program.

### **Conclusion**

Adolescents with disruptive behavior disorders lack skills needed to demonstrate prosocial behavior. Sport is a context in which prosocial behaviors can be learned. Nevertheless, there is no guarantee that the demonstration of prosocial behavior will increase with the introduction of sport alone. The purpose of this paper is to provide TR specialists with a program designed to teach prosocial behaviors through sport; however, it is merely a starting point from which to begin developing and implementing prosocial behavior activities within TR programs. Similar programs could be developed for a number of populations, and as part of other programs that require social interactions, such as cooperative games or social skills training.

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