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# Classroom Management & Assessment

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*Editor*

Foreword by Marcia L. Tate



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## First Step to Success for Preschool Children

Edward Feil, Andy Frey, and Annemieke Golly

*Edward Feil, Andy Frey, and Annemieke Golly explain how a collaborative home and school intervention program can be adapted to help young children already at risk of school failure.*

The number of children displaying challenging behaviors in preschools has increased in ways that severely stress the management skills of their teachers. This has emerged as a national problem that is found widely in preschools across the United States and United Kingdom.

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight an evidence-based practice—the preschool version of First Step to Success (FS)—for young children at risk of school failure due to early signs of challenging behavior. To date, this preschool version has been implemented and evaluated in several U.S. states, including Oregon, Kentucky, and Hawaii. Herein, we first describe the K–3 FS intervention, followed by the rationale for and description of the adaptation for preschool-age children in center-based programs.

### First Step to Success

FS is a collaborative home and school intervention to help at-risk students get off to a good start in school. It focuses on children who have difficulty adjusting to routine school demands. The teacher, the child's parents, and the FS coach work together to teach the child school success skills, such as following directions, doing one's work, and getting along with peers.

The three components of FS (screening, classroom, and home) require approximately three months to implement and are coordinated by a coach (i.e., behavior

consultant, counselor, or early intervention specialist). The FS program is implemented in regular K–3 classrooms and is applied as part of the regular classroom teacher's classroom routines. The FS intervention teaches the following school success skills to focus children in both school and home settings:

- Communication
- Cooperation
- Limit setting
- Problem solving
- Friendship making
- Confidence building

The role of the FS coach is to teach prosocial skills to the child. One-on-one role-play and a green and red feedback card are used. The role of the focus child is to learn and master the skills. The role of the teacher is to continue teaching the skills and to recognize and praise them. The role of the parents is to teach and strengthen the skills.

Research results show that the FS program improves social skills as well as school success skills and also reduces problem behavior. FS receives high consumer satisfaction ratings from participants.

### Rationale for Preschool Version

The FS intervention for younger children was modified for several reasons. Often, children come to preschool not consistently displaying knowledge of such school expectations as walking into the classroom quietly, sitting in a circle, asking for help appropriately, and so on. Many teachers believe that these behaviors do not need to be specifically taught, but they do! Lastly, teachers (from preschool through high school) too often use negative attention to mitigate students' inappropriate behavior and inadvertently exacerbate and make the challenging behavior more resistant to change.

### Preschool Adaptations

During FS preschool feasibility testing, we made a number of changes and adaptations to address the specific needs of preschool children. These changes were built into the final version of the preschool FS program to increase its efficacy with preschool populations. The following adaptations were made in the FS school component:

#### Classroom Management Training

All teachers received training on general classroom management strategies, organized around the five universal principles of positive behavior support (PBS) that are central to FS:

1. Establish clear expectations.
2. Teach the expectations.
3. Reinforce the expectations.
4. Minimize attention for minor inappropriate behaviors.
5. Deliver clear consequences for unacceptable behavior.

### Practice the Universal Principles With the Entire Class

We created small green and red cards to use with the entire class before the coach starts working with the focus student. The FS coach initially models the key universal principles for the teacher. The children receive the cards and act as “the teacher” during role-play scenarios—holding up the green card when their teachers or peers follow an expectation and red when they do not.

### Additional Support for the Focus Child

Many preschool children require additional practice to master skills. As a result, the coach role-plays with the focus child before each implementation session. In the preschool version, the coach problem-solves more during the intervention than is recommended with the regular program. For example, if the child was inappropriate and did not respond to the red card, the coach asked, “Do you know why the card is on red?” If the child didn't respond, the coach said, “You need to. . .” If the child didn't respond, the coach immediately role-plays the expected behavior or target skill one-to-one in a quiet place and encourages the focus child to keep the card on green. In the original program, the coach usually keeps the card on red and the natural consequence is that the child doesn't earn points until the card goes back on green. During the first few days of the teacher phase, the coach monitors and stays in close contact with the teacher and the coach supervisor.

To remind the adults in the classroom to notice the focus child doing the right thing, we created a green badge. When the teacher phase starts, the focus student gets a green “smiley face” badge. Each day, the focus child wears this badge, which helps the adults to notice the focus student and provide specific feedback for positive behavior. Finally, many preschool children require an individual reward as well as a group reward for meeting behavioral goals during the FS intervention. The group reward, earned for the whole class by the focus child, is needed to keep peers involved, motivated, and providing peer support for the focus student. These modifications often result in a longer coach phase (ten days) compared to the elementary version (five days).

### Additional Peer Support

In some cases, the focus student presents a green badge daily to another student who was especially kind and helpful. Eventually the entire class becomes part of the “green badge club”!

### Adaptations to the homeBase Component

Coaches are encouraged to conduct the homeBase meetings while the child is present. The coach models positive interactions with the child and demonstrates for parents how to do the homeBase activities. Parents seem to enjoy seeing another adult treat their child with respect and interact positively with them.

### Timing of the Home Component

In the K–3 FS version, the home component begins after day ten, but many parents want to begin earlier. In the preschool version, the home component starts after day three.

### Child Participation

In the preschool version, we recommend that the focus child be present during the home visit. If the child cannot be present, the coach is encouraged to role-play with the parent as if the parent were the child and the coach were the parent. This type of role-play teaches the parent in a respectful, non-embarrassing way how to positively interact and play with his or her child.

### Conclusion

The adapted version of the FS program provides preschool teachers with a proven intervention option that will produce the following benefits:

- Reduce behavior problems such as aggression, noncompliance, and other indicators of emerging antisocial behavior
- Substantially improve school readiness
- Improve the child's interactions and critically important relationships with the key social agents of parents and caregivers, teachers, and peers

### What We Know

- FS is a collaborative home and school intervention to help at-risk students get off to a good start in school.
- FS improves social skills as well as school success skills and also reduces problem behavior.
- The adapted version of the FS program focuses on preschool children who may have difficulty adjusting to routine school demands and teaches them the expectations for behavior such as walking into the classroom quietly, sitting in a circle, and asking for help appropriately.

### About the Authors

**Edward Feil** and **Annemieke Golly** are research scientists at Oregon Research Institute and codevelopers of the FS intervention. **Andy Frey** is a professor at the University of Louisville.

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