School-Age Child and Youth
Positive Behavior Support and Management

Purpose

Making ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behavior is critical to young people's success in school, work, and life. Many children and youth, however, contend with emotional, social, and behavioral barriers that prevent them from doing well both in and outside of school. NorthStar's programs for school-age children and youth 5-18 years old offer structure and support that help participants attain appropriate social, emotional, and behavioral developmental milestones. The purpose of this document is to describe the key elements of our positive behavior support and management plan.

"Child," "school-age child," and "youth" defined. While there is wide variation in how "children" and "youth" are defined, we demarcate "children" as students in grades 6 and below, generally age 12 or younger. "School-age children" is the subset of children in elementary school, usually 5-12 years old. Sixth graders could be in either elementary or middle school, depending on the school district. "Youth" is the age span between childhood and adult age (18 years old). As minors, children and youth generally cannot consent to services; a parent or guardian consents on the minor's behalf.

Approach

Our school-age child and youth behavior support and management plan draws from three evidence-based approaches associated with positive change in children and youth considered "at risk"[1] of negative school and life outcomes:

- **Positive youth development**
- **Trauma-informed care**
- **Harm reduction**

All are strength-based approaches that consider the whole person, meet children and youth "where they're at," and call for individualized responses to their needs, interests, preferences, and abilities. All three philosophies have been shown to increase youth engagement and retention, including among youth who are the hardest to reach and have the greatest needs. All can improve outcomes for youth in the areas of self-sufficiency, well-being, safety, and permanent connections.

Positive youth development
A growing number of studies have shown that school-age children and youth benefit from participating in developmentally focused programs that shift the orientation from preventing and "fixing" specific behavior deficits to acknowledging and enlisting the many strengths and assets that all children and youth have that can help them realize their full potential.[2] Offering resources to support healthy development, positive youth development programs help children and youth learn and develop across a range of psychological, behavioral, and social developmental areas that reflect what developmental scientists call the "Five Cs": competence, confidence, connection,

character, and caring/compassion. Developmental scientists have added a sixth "C": contribution (to self, family, community, and civil society).[3,4]

The "5 Cs" of Positive Youth Development + "Contribution"	
"C"	**Definition**
Competence	Positive view of personal actions in specific areas, including social, academic, cognitive, health, and vocational. Social competence refers to interpersonal skills (such as conflict resolution). Cognitive competence refers to cognitive abilities (e.g., decision-making). Academic competence refers to school performance as shown, in part, by school grades, attendance, and test scores. Health competence involves using nutrition, exercise, and rest to keep physically fit. Vocational competence entails the development of good work habits and exploration of career choices.
Confidence	An internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy.
Connection	Positive relationships with people and institutions, as evidenced in healthy two-way interactions between the individual and their peers, family, school, and community.
Character	Respect for social and cultural norms, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (morality), and integrity.
Caring/ Compassion	A sense of sympathy and empathy for others.
Contribution	Oriented to making contributions to self, family, community, and society.

While the paradigm shift from a deficit-based to a strength-based youth development approach moves us closer to defining promising program practices and settings that support positive child and youth outcomes, we cannot rest on the premise that all children and youth are "the same" and ignore the adverse impact of poverty and discrimination on the development of children and youth. A child/youth's self-identity, sense of belonging, competence, and hopefulness are adversely impacted by a lack of economic opportunity for their parents, family instability, inadequate schools, prevalence of drugs, violence, social isolation and, in the case of ethnic groups of color, racism (such as stereotypical media depictions).

Two problem areas have been identified. Children and youth of color tend to be underrepresented in most traditional youth development activities. Secondly, programs must directly can more directly respond to issues such as poverty and discrimination and try to offset their potentially negative influences on children/youth's healthy identify development.[5,6] Accordingly, NorthStar prioritizes a shared understanding of racism that influences our program development, implementation (including participant recruitment), and evaluation.

"Universal trauma precautions" approach
Our programs are grounded in and guided by understanding of trauma and the prevalence of traumatic experiences in children and youth who are referred to our programs. Practicing "universal trauma precautions," we presume that all children and youth and connected persons with whom we are working are coping in some way or another with the impact of trauma. A universal trauma precautions approach reduces the likelihood that we will inadvertently re-traumatize the individual and thereby interfere with their healing and recovery.[7]

Focused on improving individual over-all wellness, most of our programs may be characterized as *trauma-informed care*. Trauma-informed care is an approach that aims to engage people with

histories of trauma, recognize the presence of trauma symptoms, and acknowledge the role that trauma has played in their lives, and may indeed contribute to their trauma recovery. Only our mental health services—whether contracted or in-house—are specifically designed to treat symptoms or syndromes related to trauma and, therefore, are *trauma-specific treatment*.

Using trauma-informed consequences.[8] The children and youth in our programs need both opportunities to heal from past trauma and learn more effective, prosocial coping styles to become successful in school and in life. We use an individualized, consequence/trauma-informed approach in responding to inappropriate youth behavior and supporting positive behavior change. Known about and understood beforehand, consequences for breaking specific program rules are developed with participant input and don't threaten, punish, denigrate, or isolate the child or youth whose behavior needs to be corrected.

In contrast to trauma-informed consequences, punishment (often veiled as consequences) is generally ineffective and counterproductive. After-school detention, being sent to a time-out room, missing all or part of recess foster resentment, further erode the youth's sense of belonging in school, and even can re-traumatize children and youth. While learning that misbehavior has consequences, students are not learning how to behave better.

Elements of intervention	Trauma-informed consequences	Punishment
Latitude of individualized response	A trauma-informed perspective recognizes that some children/youth are more adversely impacted by past trauma and that there may be solid reasons to personalize consequences according to the needs and level of functioning of individual children and youth, while still holding them accountable for their actions.	Punishment tends to be meted out according to "3 strikes and you're out" and other "strike" policies—that is, as predetermined consequences to specific rule violations—that curtail staff ability to consider the situation or context of the behavior. Punishment is usually ineffective in deterring misbehavior.
Engagement and inclusion	Trauma-informed consequences are seen by children and youth as fair, reasonable, and nonthreatening to their sense of competence, self-determination, and relatedness. They attempt to keep children and youth engaged in school or services in spite of their problem behavior and preserve relationships between people.	Punishment contributes to disengagement and eventual dropout; children and youth whose bonds with their schools and programs are already weak may interpret punishment as a sign that they are unwanted or that they do not "belong." Exclusionary punishment denies already marginalized youth opportunities for positive socialization and fuels their distrust of adults.
Ownership and control	Trauma-informed consequences are logical consequences that are clearly connected to the behavior. Delivered in a calm, empathetic, and respectful manner, they help the child/ youth develop internal controls and learn from their mistakes in a supportive atmosphere.	Punishment is usually used to assert power and social control. Often delivered in inflammatory words and actions, it can leave the child/ youth feeling helpless, powerless, and shamed, encourage evasion and deception, and reinforce negative behavior.

Harm reduction approach
Harm reduction has proved effective in engaging and helping school-age children (including elementary school-aged children) and youth who are the hardest to reach and have the greatest need. We recognize that many of the children and youth entering our programs drink alcohol and/or abuse drugs.[9] Using nonjudgmental but direction-oriented strategies, our program staff show concern and consideration to overcome initial mistrust and resistance and establish rapport with the youth, point out the inconsistencies between what the child/youth says they want and where they currently are, and support self-efficacy in the child/ youth to take the necessary steps to move them toward the change they seek. A major problem with zero-tolerance approaches to substance abuse—commonly adopted by schools as well as most outside-of-school-time child/ youth programs—is that they frequently lead to excluding children and youth who have the greatest need of services.[10]

While harm reduction and abstinence-based programs may have the same ultimate goal—for example, refraining from all substance abuse—the approaches diverge in terms of what is construed as success. Outcome measures for abstinence-based programs define success by total abstinence, while harm reduction recognizes any step in the right direction.[11] Although the abstinence approach has construed substance abuse in either-or-terms of recovery or addiction, research indicates that recovery from substance abuse is a process in which people progress through a series of stages that include relapse.[12] Aligned with treatment outcome studies of non-abstinence programs, we define success in terms of a child/youth's progress in various life domains in spite of their not being entirely free from alcohol and/or drug use.

As trauma-informed perspective recognizes that change can be slow and incremental, so harm reduction is an incremental, non-coercive approach that recognizes the value of all persons regardless of what behaviors they exhibit, acknowledges "where they are at," and affirms any positive change that a child or youth makes. Harm reduction and trauma-informed approaches share an understanding that you must tailor your program to match the child/youth instead of trying to force them into a "one-size-fits-all" program.

Practices

Youth assessment
Drawing upon multiple sources, the NorthStar-developed school-age child and youth assessment tool covers strengths, assets, interests, risk factors, development needs, and barriers. A child/ youth's active involvement in identifying their own strengths, areas in which they need to improve, and the resources they need to overcome those barriers is in itself beginning steps in self-care, self-responsibility, and self-advocacy. The questions on the child/youth's in-school behavior, home life, and peer relations provide the case manager with an initial understanding of the potential risk of self-harm and harm to others and what seems to get in the way of their goal formulation and action steps to achieve them.

Often having to overcome a child/youth's deep-seated mistrust from adverse contact with systems, we recognize that making an initial positive connection with a child/youth is critical and that they are likely to underreport more sensitive issues, especially traumatic events and current trauma-related events. A trusting relationship between child/youth and staff helps in assessing needs and providing services effectively. Therefore, staff do not conduct an assessment until they have gained some trust and familiarity. Assessments are conducted within 30 days of intake—giving the child/youth and staff to gain some trust and familiarity.

In keeping with positive youth development principles, we have developed an assessment tool and process that encourage children/youth to express what they want and then act on what they ask for. Conveying early on that the organization is responsive, respectful, and safe increases the likelihood that the child/youth will cooperate and connect with support and services.

In our SCHOONER afterschool/summer program, staff conduct an initial assessment in which newly-enrolled participants identify their interests.

Creating positive developmental settings
We are committed to not only preventing and minimizing negative behaviors, but also promoting positive youth development and competencies that will help children and youth learn and thrive in our programs, in school, at home, and beyond. With low youth-staff ratios, our programs present opportunities to develop "21st century skills" such as personal responsibility, teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, and persistence—all of which contribute to positive behavior.

A supportive, safe program culture is one of the most important ways we promote positive youth behavior. Children and youth are listened to, make contributions, and are characterized as a resource instead of a problem. Our clear, consistent message is: Each individual matters.

In this program culture, everyone has the responsibility to behave in ways that are safe, caring, and respectful to others. While children/youth actively participate in building and supporting a program culture of mutual regard, staff are responsible for providing the leadership, supervision, and guidance necessary for maintaining an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for everyone in our program community. Staff appreciate that respect has to be given in order to be received.

As we deal with children/youth, we keep in mind that the ultimate goal of positive behavior support is to help children/youth develop self-control, self-respect, and self-motivation to manage their own behavior. To this end, we draw from a wide variety of techniques, including, but not limited to:

- Be constantly engaged.
- Set clear expectations; be persistent in the reinforcement of our expectations. .
- Show interest in and get to know each child/youth.
- Show concern for what happens in and out of school.
- Offer developmentally-appropriate choices.
- Use humor.
- Plan for transitions (before, in-between and after).
- Use trauma-informed consequences.
- Ignore minor non-aggressive, nondestructive behavior.
- Involve children and youth in planning.
- Focus on what "to do" rather than "what not to do."
- Redirect or distract.
- Surprise children/youth with an unexpected, uniquely creative response or action.

- Use incentives such as special field trips, food, or recreation to motivate and/or reward individuals or groups.[13]

Conflict resolution. Unfortunately, many school-age children and youth come into our programs not knowing how to safely and constructively resolve conflicts. Indeed, much of the misbehavior for which children and youth are referred to our intervention programs is at bottom unresolved conflict. Accordingly, learning conflict resolution skills is an integral part of our positive behavior support and management plan. With our focus on constructive conflict resolution, we are seeing significant reductions in school suspensions, court involvement, fights, family disputes, and out-of-home placements among program participants.

Program staff receive Crisis Prevention Institute-developed *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention* training, a proven model of conflict resolution education. Understanding what difficult behavior is and why it occurs, staff can help children/youth replace disruptive and destructive behaviors with more positive behaviors. Program participants learn to apply new coping skills to the real conflicts that mire down their lives and receive staff guidance about making positive behavior choices in the future. *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention* training stresses the importance of staff serving as positive role models in problem-solving. Learning effective conflict resolution concepts and skills enables children and youth to assume responsibility for their own conflicts and for resolving them constructively.

Following are conflict resolution skill areas we focus on:

Skills required for effective conflict resolution	What children and youth can learn
• Manage strong emotions.	• Use strategies to control strong feelings.
• Verbally express own thoughts and feelings.	• Identify and communicate thoughts and feelings.
• Identify the problem and express own needs.	• Talk about their own wants/needs/fears/concerns without demanding an immediate solution.
• Understand the other person's perspective.	• Listen to what the other person wants/needs. • Understand the other person's fears/concerns. • Understand without having to agree. • Respond sensitively and appropriately.
• Generate a number of solutions to the problem.	• Think of a variety of options; don't search for a single answer. • Try to include the needs and concerns of everyone involved.
• Come up with options that advance shared interests and reconcile differing interests.	• Be open-minded and flexible. • Look after own needs as well as the other person's needs—be assertive.

Mentoring

When incorporating evidence-based "best practices," child/youth-adult mentoring programs can improve academic achievement and strengthen self-concept, decrease school absence and substance abuse, improve parent and teacher relationships, and lower recidivism rates among

court-involved youth.[14,15] Genuine staff-youth relationships, moving staff from the role of "expert" to that of mentor, are the foundation of NorthStar's programming for school-age children and youth and how we promote positive behavior and development. Our staff have the opportunity to provide children/youth with emotional support and positive feedback and to help them problem-solve. Low staff-child/youth ratios, including opportunities for one-on-one interaction with staff, lead to warmer, more sensitive, more supportive interactions.

Preventing and responding to bullying and other forms of child/youth violence
We believe that children and youth are natural problem-solvers with the power, inclination, and positive energy to make positive, lasting change. Too often, however, children and youth are relegated to the restrictive roles of victims to be protected or perpetrators to be punished. Consequently, bullying prevention efforts often exclude the voices and perspectives of those who are impacted most. By actively involving children and youth in efforts to make our programs physically and emotionally safe, we can empower people of all ages to work together to design concrete, relevant ways to effectively prevent and intervene in bullying. Through collective action, we can all play a part in creating safe, inclusive programs, schools, and communities where all are respected, protected, and valued.

Instead of using an "anti-bullying" framework, we use positive approaches and descriptive language that coveys to children and youth the values and behaviors we expect to see from them. To this end, staff:

- Receive training on bullying and other forms of youth violence, their warning signs and effects; distinguish bullying from conflict resolution.

- Build strong, trusting relationships with individual children/youth.

- Plan and implement activities that bring together and promote relationship-building between children and youth across age and other differences.

- Set and continually reinforce clear, reasonable, and developmentally appropriate expectations for children and youth regarding unsafe or harmful behavior such as bullying.

- Maintain close supervision of program children and youth at all times (including a 1:5 ratio when going on overnight educational excursions).

- Respond immediately and appropriately to address any form of observed or reported behavior that is threatening, harassing, bullying, abusive, or dangerous.

- Investigate promptly when bullying or other violence is suspected or reported.

- Reinforce that anyone who feels threatened, upset, or endangered by someone else's behavior—or who witnesses this happening to someone else—has both the right and the responsibility to speak up and be protected from retaliation for reporting the bullying behavior..

- Work with youth who have been threatening or disrespectful to help them understand and change their behavior; focus on addressing situations in ways that seek solutions rather than cast blame and impose further marginalization.

In schools, the standard range of disciplinary actions taken against students who bully have generally proved to be ineffective in preventing future acts of bullying and improving school safety. As a community-based organization committed to promoting safety in schools, homes, and communities, we at NorthStar have stepped up to encourage schools to consider evidence-based, non-punitive alternatives to zero tolerance and to train their staff to prevent and stop bullying in

ways that can advance cooperation, engagement, and responsibility. Our message includes: Just as we urge children and youth to become lifelong learners, so we as adult professionals must continue to deepen our understanding of how bullying is manifested in a changing world and knowledge of promising prevention strategies as they emerge.

Using behavior problems as a "teachable moment" for social and emotional learning
The statement "Whenever a student misbehaves, personal and social growth should become a major priority in deciding how to react"[16] encapsulates our positive behavior support approach. When children and youth get suspended from school or a program for bullying or other forms of violence, they generally have little or no understanding of how their behavior needs to and can be changed. Moreover, their education is interrupted. Each instance of disciplinary exclusion constitutes, as we see it, a lost opportunity to teach children and youth respect and the parameters of appropriate behavior.

Further, directly dealing with bullying and other forms of violence can be an opportunity for growth for all involved. With clear structure and strong support, people can learn social-emotional skills that can prevent and stop most bullying and harassment and serve to build healthy, positive relationships.

On property theft and misuse. Our response to property theft and misuse is along the same lines—though of an entirely different order than harm to self or others. Learning to respect self and others, program participants also learn positive habits toward property, including respecting and taking care of one's own belongings. We use incidents of stealing and misusing others' property as teachable moments to interject ethics concerning stealing and misuse of others' belongings and their implications. While we remind children/youth about the cons of stealing and misusing others' property, we do so in a proactive, fair, non-threatening way, where we communicate our genuine interest in the well-being of all program participants. Instead of warning them of dire consequences that could happen, we encourage everyone to together to create a program environment in which everyone feels safe and free to express concerns.

No restrictive behavior management interventions
In keeping with our goal to create a program environment that is free of coercion, we do not use any restrictive behavior management interventions, including isolation or physical or other kinds of restraint. There is clear evidence of the harmful physical and emotional effects that restraint has on children and youth as well as on staff morale and retention. Particularly concerning is the impact of restraint on individuals with a trauma history and the potential for re-traumatization. Our no-restraint policy aligns with our practice of respecting participants' rights not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable and respecting that touch is initiated by the youth and not staff.

Only program staff who are trained on addressing problem behavior safely and effectively should engage in behavior management interventions. Training for program staff focuses on crisis prevention approaches, de-escalation strategies, and alternatives to restraint. Staff members are trained to anticipate, prevent, and respond to an emergent personal crisis through de-escalation strategies such as active listening, redirection, involvement in meaningful and engaging activities, and other calming measures. Indeed, staff can make it a "teachable moment"—e.g., talking children and youth through anger and conflicts to help them build capacity to manage strong emotions.

While the *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention* training staff receive includes physical interventions and personal safety techniques, the real focus is on learning proven strategies to safely de-escalate

anxious, hostile, or violent behavior at the earliest possible stage. As described by its developer, "The *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention* program focuses not on restraint training, but on ways to avoid the need to restrain."

What is and what isn't physical restraint? While physical restraint has been widely used across human service, juvenile justice, and education agency programs to control child and youth behavior, the practice has come under increasing scrutiny on many fronts (such as its overuse and negative impact on both youth and staff). Physically overcoming or restricting movement of a child or youth for whatever reason rightly raises uncomfortable professional, ethical, and legal issues. Massachusetts state agencies and "best practice" are part and parcel of a national (and even international) move away from physical and other restraint:

Placing "a greater emphasis on identifying and using behavior support alternatives to the use of restraint in schools," new Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) regulations define *physical restraint* as "direct physical contact that prevents or significantly restricts a student's freedom of movement. Physical restraint does not include: brief physical contact to promote student safety, providing physical guidance or prompting when teaching a skill, redirecting attention, providing comfort, or a physical escort." *Physical escort* is defined as "a temporary touching or holding, without the use of force, of the hand, wrist, arm, shoulder, or back for the purpose of inducing a student who is agitated to walk to a safe location."

- DESE explains elsewhere that "brief physical contact to promote safety refers to measures taken by school personnel consisting of physical contact with a student for a short period of time solely to prevent imminent harm to a student, for example, physically redirecting a student about to wander on to a busy road, grabbing a student who is about to fall, or breaking up a fight between students."[17] The DESE regulations on use of restraint are constructed so that "Nothing in 603 CMR 46.00 [Prevention of physical restraint and requirements if used] precludes any teacher, employee or agent of a public education program from using reasonable force to protect students, other persons or themselves from assault or imminent, serious, physical harm."[18]

- As defined by the state Department of Youth Services, *physical restraint* is a "non-mechanical behavior management technique involving the use of a physical hold as a means of restricting a youth's freedom of movement. Physical restraints include a youth being held in a standing, seated, or prone position." *Physical escort* is defined as "touching or holding of the hand, wrist, arm, shoulder or back for the purpose of inducing a non-compliant youth to walk to a safe location. A physical escort is not a physical restraint."[19]

- The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) licensing standards for early childhood education and school-age programs (serving children younger than 14 years old or 16 years if the child has special needs) call for "intervening quickly when children are physically aggressive with one another and helping them develop more positive strategies for resolving conflict."[20] While the EEC licensing standards are silent on "restraint," the department has released a technical assistance paper on child guidance that stipulates, "Practices that include physical restraints of children may not be used in any child care program licensed by the Department" and "regardless of any signed permission the program receives." Likely with young children in mind, EEC differentiates between "physical restraint" and "supportive holding of children." EEC licensing regulations allow for "supportive holding of children" when "the child's safety is at risk; the safety of other children or adults is at risk; the child must be moved in order to be safely supervised; the child demonstrates a sustained behavior that is highly disruptive and/or upsetting to other children necessitating moving the child."[21]

For the sake of comparison, we refer to CARF accreditation standards:

> Briefly holding a person served, without undue force, for the purpose of comforting him or her or to prevent self-injurious behavior or injury to self, or holding a person's hand or arm to safely guide him or her from one area to another is not a restraint. Separating individuals threatening to harm one another, without implementing restraints, is not considered restraint.[22]

Appropriate physical contact
At times, staff are responsible for giving practical assistance to a child or youth who is hurt, needs particular assistance, or warrants encouragement. Examples of appropriate physical contact are:

- Administering first aid;

- Supporting children and youth who have hurt themselves;

- Non-intrusive gestures to comfort a child or youth who is experiencing grief and loss or distress, such as a hand on the upper arm or upper back;

- Non-intrusive touch—such as congratulating a child or youth by shaking hands, high fives, handshakes, fist bumps, pats on the back or shoulder and side hugs. Staff should remember the importance of accompanying such touch with positive and encouraging words.

Staff must, before touching a child or youth, be aware of how physical touch can be perceived or received, and exercise discretion in determining whether physical contact would be an appropriate expression of greeting, care, concern, instruction or celebration. We need to respect and respond to words or signs that a child or youth is uncomfortable with touch. Staff also must keep in mind that a highly distressed child or youth may be incapable of expressing their wishes.

Interventions and alternatives to physical restraint
Instead of resorting to physical restraint, we use positive, supportive approaches to prevent self-injuring behavior or to de-escalate potentially violent or dangerous behavior occurring among groups of youth or with an individual youth:

- Remain calm.

- Actively listen.

- Use a low, non-authoritarian, respectful tone of voice.

- Use supportive, non-threatening body language; avoid dramatic gestures such as waving arms, pointing, blocking motions.

- Limit the number of adults providing direction to the child/youth.

- Base response on understanding of the child/youth's underlying motivation for their dangerous behavior to clarify what occurred; if feasible, involve participants in discussion of events.

- Validate each participant's perspective and feelings, making sure they feel respected.

- Offer the child/youth a choice.

- Suggest possible resolutions to the child/youth.

- If verbal de-escalation efforts do not curtail potentially violent or dangerous behavior, attempt to induce the child/youth to walk to a safer location by physical cue—that is,

physically guiding a child/youth without force, where they are free to and able to disengage should they choose to.

Throughout the process, keep others calm by dealing with the situation with a composed and protective demeanor.

Post-incident procedure after "brief physical contact" with a youth
While "brief physical contact" with a child or youth by a staff member to prevent imminent harm to the youth is not considered physical restraint, any such incident should be reported and reviewed:

- *Reporting requirements.* Staff who have "brief physical contact" with a child or youth to ensure their safety must verbally inform their program director as soon as possible and by no later than the close of the same business day and, by written "incident" report, no later than the next working day after the brief physical contact occurred, for review of the event. Documentation should include:
  - The name of involved child or youth
  - Location of incident
  - Name of witnesses (staff and/or children and youth)
  - Incident outline (including the child or young person's behavior, what was said, steps taken, description of brief physical contact, reasoning for actions taken)
  - Child or young person's response and the outcome
  - Details of any injury or damage to property

  The program director or, in their absence, another administrator should inform the parents promptly and fully of any incident involving brief physical contact with their child and afford them with the opportunity to discuss the matter at the time they are informed. The parents should receive a written report in English and their home language within 3 working days of the incident. The youth and their parent will be encouraged to comment orally and in writing on the incident and on information in the written report.

- *Administrative review.* The program director must complete a timely review of the circumstances leading up to the brief physical contact, including consideration of factors that may have contributed to the dangerous behavior and what de-escalation techniques and possible interventions might have been used, with the goal of reducing the need for such emergency action in the future. The executive director should receive a copy of the review. The executive director, in conjunction with the program director, will determine whether it is necessary or appropriate to modify the organization's behavior support policy or conduct additional staff training on positive behavioral interventions and supports that may preclude the need for emergency action.

Responding to immediate risk of serious harm
Use of wide-ranging preventative strategies makes dangerous behavior highly unlikely. It is impossible, however, to anticipate every behavior that might happen. The following procedure is designed to address an emergency situation in which there is immediate risk of serious harm— for example:

- There is immediate danger to the child/youth themself or others (e.g., possible presence of a weapon or other means they intend to use to harm themself or others).

- There is a suicide attempt in progress (e.g., the child/youth has taken a drug or medication overdose).

Staff will respond according to the following procedures:

1. Remain with the child/youth and provide support, safety, and continuous supervision until an emergency responder arrives—keeping personal safety in mind.

2. Call 911 or designate a person to call. Be mindful that in the presence of a weapon or danger to others, emergency medical personnel will need the scene to be secured by law enforcement personnel before they can intervene.

3. Immediately take steps to notify their supervisor and the facility director within the building of a potentially dangerous situation and to obtain additional assistance.

4. Even with no danger to others, if a suicide attempt is imminent or in progress, have staff quickly and calmly remove other children/youths from the vicinity.

5. Inform the child/youth's parent, social worker, and/or emergency contact by phone and document the time and content of the notification.

6. Complete a critical incident report.

Working with parents to improve youth behavior
Most of the children and youth in our programs have experienced turmoil at home. Some have endured multiple placements, without permanent connections with any family. In other cases, our family-based interventions have helped stabilize and strengthen families. Their children have benefited from improved family relationships and parenting skills. Where we can, we partner with families in making decisions, establishing goals, and taking action steps to achieve them.

- *Written information about our programs.* In addition to verbally describing our programs, we provide school-age children/youths and their parents with our *School and Child/Youth Support Programs Family Handbook*. We explain that our programs are intended to improve relationships between children/youth and their parents. The handbook provides information about behavioral supports that we use in our programs and informs children/youth and parents that they may request a free copy of the complete policy.

- *Parent consent.* The following parent consent forms are provided to parents in writing, reviewed in person, signed, and stored in their child's file:

  - First aid and emergency medical care

  - Authorization to request/use/release information

  - Media release

  We encounter few child/youth behavior problems that get in the way of their working together with our staff. Our charge is usually to address referred children/youths' misbehavior and anti-social acts in other settings—principally at home and in school. Accordingly, we offer parents with information and support that focus on strengthening parenting competencies (monitoring, positive behavior management, confidence) to improve the quality of the parent-child relationship. We also encourage parents' involvement in their child's school experiences to promote their academic, social and emotional skill development and reduce conduct problems.

- *Behavioral assessment information-gathering and application.* To improve child/youth behavior and parent-child interaction patterns, program staff may encourage parents to use a behavioral questionnaire or checklist to document observed behaviors of concern and the conditions that surround the behavior (its context). Antecedent-Behavior-

Consequence (ABC) Analysis is the most common functional assessment observation method we offer. This type of assessment involves writing down:

- **A**ntecedent –What happened just before the behavior occurred?

- **B**ehavior – What was the behavior, how long did it last, and how intense was it?

- **C**onsequence – What happened just after as a result?

The information gathered in an ABC analysis can provide useful information about what may trigger or reinforce the problem behavior— if the problem behavior correlates with time of day, a particular physical setting, the presence of a particular person, a certain activity, or some combination of these factors. The purpose is also to discover what appropriate behaviors that may not be reinforced; it is no less important to document those circumstances in which positive behaviors occur so that the parent, with staff support, can identify effective ways to reinforce it. The focus should always be on strengthening desired behavior.[23] Further, the information gathered on the ABC data form can inform crisis and safety planning.

- *After-hours crisis prevention/intervention.* We believe that children and youth are best served when they are at home with their families and in their communities. Our goal is to prevent the unnecessary out-of-home placement of children and youth with behavioral and emotional problems. To this end, we provide after-hours crisis prevention/intervention to keep a family conflict from escalating to unnecessary out-of-home placement of children and youth. Training gives program staff a practical framework for providing immediate problem-solving assistance to persons in crisis**.**

Eliminating suspension and expulsion practices
Why we don't have a zero-tolerance policy. School "zero-tolerance" policies for weapon and drug possession as well as disobedient, disruptive, bullying, and violent behaviors are invariably presented in "race-neutral" terms. Yet, there is compelling evidence that school zero-tolerance policies and attending suspension and expulsion from school are disproportionately applied to students of color and students with disabilities and are ineffective in deterring future problems.[24] Unfortunately, many community-based and even university-affiliated youth programs subscribe to the same approach, where failure to abide by the rules triggers lock-step temporary or permanent exclusion from the program. The youth who are most in need of and stand to benefit most from program participation are most likely to be subject to disciplinary exclusion.

In this context, NorthStar has moved toward preventing, strictly limiting, and ultimately eliminating suspension and expulsion practice in response to child/youth misconduct. We have been able to adopt a no-exclusion approach by using a broad constellation of strategies that schools have employed to reduce disciplinary exclusions while maintaining school safety:

- Create opportunities for children/youth and staff to form personal connections and build strong bonds.

- Provide staff training focused on positive behavior management and on the underlying causes of disruptive behavior.

- Widely promote high behavioral expectations.

- Implement a system of positive behavior support and strategic intervention that are age-appropriate and designed to progressively and effectively address and reduce the child/youth's misconduct.

- Focus on preventing or diffusing potential disruptive situations before they erupt, along with a clear protocol on calmly and appropriately responding to crises.

- Demonstrate in all interactions and activities with children/youth that we value their participation, contributions, and unique personal characteristics.[25]

Working across systems
In our collaboration with agencies, institutions, and systems that do not have trauma sensitivity, we see how the coercive interventions in schools, courts, and the child welfare system cause trauma and re-traumatization. In particular, we are faced with school zero-tolerance policies with predetermined punishments, including overreliance on out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. Children and youth most likely to be excluded from school for disciplinary reasons are also at greatest risk of educational failure. They simply cannot afford to miss school.

This said, our program directors and frontline staff have the daunting responsibility to advocate in schools, juvenile justice, and other settings for program participants and make the case for individually analyzing each child/youth's infraction through the lens of their history and circumstances and deciding on a non-punitive course of intervention directed at underlying factors, the root causes of the youth's misbehavior. Specifically, our staff have a duty to help eliminate unequal treatment of children and youth of color.

Beyond achieving minor wins on a case-by-case basis, we know that adoption of a trauma-informed perspective requires a paradigm change in how we all interpret and respond to disruptive, destructive, and other negative behavior. It entails schools and programs changing their practices from reacting to the symptoms of trauma to building children/youths' capacity to overcome the negative effects of trauma. On an organizational level, we must actively support a shift in how schools respond to misbehavior toward practices that address barriers to learning and engage all students in classroom learning.

Policy and procedural review and revision
The executive director and other senior management will annually review and update this youth behavior support and management policy to ensure its comprehensiveness and its continued alignment with recent research and best practices. This policy may be reviewed and modified in response to a specific critical incident.

► ***Concerning the need for additional resources.*** Our culturally competent, outcomes-oriented program framework and derivative program models have been recognized by state funding agencies such as the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Public Health for stabilizing and enhancing the well-being of our region's most challenged youth and families. Within the general lobbying rules for nonprofit organizations, we will continue to engage in public policy advocacy for increased funding for child and youth services, especially for children/youth experiencing poverty and discrimination.

Endnotes

[1] See Kristin Anderson Moore. (2006). Defining the term "at risk." Washington, DC: Child Trends. Publication # #2006-12. Retrieved from http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2006/01/DefiningAtRisk1.pdf "At-risk," the author notes, "is a concept that reflects a chance or a probability. It does not imply certainty. Risk factors raise the chance of poor outcomes, while protective factors raise the chance of good outcomes. It is valuable for programs to understand the levels of risk and protective factors in their program clients, as well as of their potential clients. Such understanding can help in developing programs and also in obtaining funding for them."

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[9] While there has been widespread concern about underage drinking, little attention has been devoted to alcohol use by elementary school students. One of the reasons cited is a reticence to recognize that children are using alcohol. See John E. Donovan, Sharon L. Leech, Robert A. Zucker, Carol J. Loveland-Cherry, Jennifer M. Jester, Hiram E. Fitzgerald, Leon I. Puttler, Maria M. Wong, and Wendy S. Looman. (2004).Really underage drinkers: Alcohol use among elementary students. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 28(2): 341-349. Retrieved from http://www.prevention.psu.edu/documents/Donovan_ACER_article.pdf

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