



SIMPLE STRATEGIES TO PREVENT MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING: EVIDENCE-BASED KERNELS

Wouldn't it be wonderful if there were inexpensive activities that could be easily used in a variety of settings to improve behavior health? Well, guess what?

Researchers have identified several fundamental elements—or kernels—that are the basis for a number of evidence-based strategies to promote emotional health and prevent behavioral health problems.^{1,2} These kernels can be incorporated into any number of settings, including schools, homes, workplaces, and communities.






For example:

- Giving **verbal praise**—or **signed praise** for persons who are deaf and communicate via sign language—to acknowledge and reinforce desirable behavior can improve cooperation and social competence and reduce disruptive behavior for individuals across the lifespan.
- The **mystery motivator/prize bowl** (in which individuals are given rewards via a basic lottery-style system for engaging in a desired behavior) can increase cooperation and productivity and enhance positive adult/child interactions.

What is a Kernel?

A kernel is the smallest unit of scientifically proven behavioral influence.

They:

-  Are indivisible (i.e., removing any part makes it inactive);
-  Produce quick, easily measured change;
-  Can be used alone or combined with other kernels;
-  Are an active ingredient of an evidence-based program; and
-  Can be spread by word-of-mouth, by modeling, and by non professionals.

Source: Dennis Embry, 2011

- Providing children with **meaningful roles** in school and at home can build self-efficacy, enhance family functioning, and decrease negative behaviors.
- Taking **Omega-3 supplements** (1 to 3 grams per day) is associated with a reduction in aggression, violence, and depression.
- Playing the “**beat the timer**” game with a child (who is asked to complete a simple chore like getting ready for bed before a set timer goes off) can enhance motivation and focus while decreasing negative behaviors.
- **Peer-to-peer tutoring**, in which groups of two or three participants take turns asking questions, giving praise/points, and providing thoughtful corrective feedback, can improve behavior, increase standardized achievement, and reduce attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and conduct problems.

Each of these kernels has experimental evidence supporting its effectiveness and can be used in tandem with various evidence-based programs as a means of strengthening their impact.

So far, researchers have identified **52** of these kernels. For more information, go to Promise Neighborhoods Research Consortium at <http://promiseneighborhoods.org/kernels/>.

References

- ¹ Embry, D., & Biglan, A. (2008). Evidence-based kernels: Fundamental units of behavioral influence. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 11(3), 75–113.
- ² Promise Neighborhoods Research Consortium. (2011). Evidence Based Behavioral Kernels. Retrieved from <http://promiseneighborhoods.org/kernels>

What is prevention? Interventions that occur prior to the onset of a disorder that are intended to prevent or reduce risk for the disorder.

What is promotion? In the context of mental health, **promotion** interventions aim to enhance individuals' ability to achieve developmentally appropriate tasks and a positive sense of self-esteem, mastery, well-being, and social inclusion, and strengthen their ability to cope with adversity.

Source: Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Among Young People: Progress and Possibilities.