

## Positive behavior program wins award

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3:41 p.m., May 31, 2005--"All people do what they do in order to get their needs met. When we speak of children's behavior problems, we have to understand that the child's behavior is a problem to us, but, to the child, the behavior is a solution to a problem. To properly support this child we have to understand what problem he or she is trying to solve through behavior, and then we can either eliminate the problem or help the child learn new behaviors and skills to deal with the problem."



*Michael Partie coordinates the Positive Behavior Support in the Community project at UD's Center for Disabilities Studies.*

The speaker is Michael Partie, who coordinates the Positive Behavior Support in the Community project at UD's Center for Disabilities Studies. Partie recently received a national honor for his work--the TASH 2005 Positive Approaches Award from the national organization, which supports equity, opportunity and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

The TASH award is given to "individuals who have significantly contributed to bettering the lives of people with disabilities." Partie was cited for his "leadership and advocacy in providing and promoting positive behavior supports for people with disabilities who have histories of challenging behavior" and for "having made a constructive difference in the field and in the lives of the people [he] supported."

Partie has provided behavior intervention and training across North America and the Pacific Rim through his own consulting business, Therapeutic Options Inc. Partie joined UD's Center for Disabilities Studies in 2003, when the Delaware Division of Child Mental Health Services asked the center to develop a Positive Behavior Intervention Certificate program. Partie worked closely with Gary Allison, assistant professor in the School of Education, to develop the initial program model.

"We offer a practical, flexible program on changing behaviors, focusing on children. For example, if a child has a history of hitting other children, we try to discover if there is a pattern, what causes the behavior and then try to change the circumstances around the behavior and the behavior itself," Partie said. "The child may want to play with other children and not know how to communicate that, want a toy or feel surrounded or threatened by other children and need space. Whatever the circumstances, we try to help the child alter the behavior and use more acceptable strategies.

"It is important to work with children while they are young because significant problems often don't just go away and will get worse," Partie said. "Severe behavior problems in young children are more common than most people realize. According to an article in the *Yale Medical News*, preK students are expelled more than three times as often as K-12 children. Among the 40 states that fund preschool programs, Delaware is ranked fourth highest in the nation in its



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expulsion rate of pre-K children. The data refers to state-sponsored settings. The expulsion rate in private settings is not well-documented, but, anecdotally, it appears far higher.

"This is a population of young children whose needs are not being met, who are being bounced from school to school that cannot accommodate them. Our goal in the program is to develop strategies to encourage children to alter their behavior in a positive fashion," Partie said.

The Positive Behavior Intervention program has been attended by therapists, school counselors, social workers, psychologists and others in the public and private sector.

"Our first two series were very intense, meeting once a week for several months for certification. We are now on our third series and have changed the format and opened the program to include those who want the training but don't necessarily wish to pursue certification. The workshops also are open to individuals from other service systems and to families," Partie said.

The certificate program has multiple components: A series of workshops detailing the basic principles and techniques of positive behavior intervention and support is followed by technical assistance sessions, during which participants focus on a particular individual, child or family and receive guidance in implementing the concepts. Participants also complete assigned reading, take a written examination and carry out a behavior-intervention project.

The program has gotten good feedback from participants. One wrote, "The BPI Certificate Program will not only benefit the children and families that we serve, but our program and state. The time spent has been well worth it."

Another commented, "The PBI Certificate program has provided me with practical, realistic and easy-to-implement ideas in my work with children and families." And, an educator wrote, "I think it would be useful for many staff to attend, but especially psychologists and special education teachers."

For more information on the Center for Disabilities Studies and the program, visit [[www.udel.edu/cds/](http://www.udel.edu/cds/)].

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