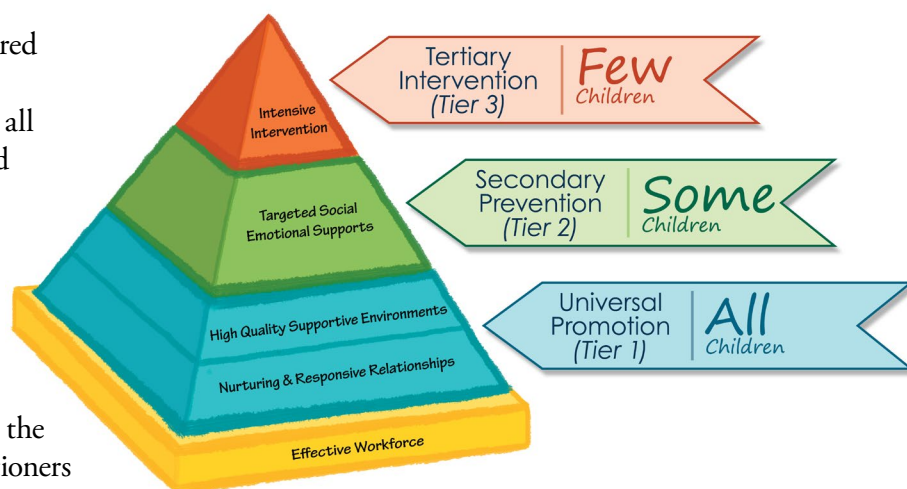


Tier 2 and the Pyramid Model

The Pyramid Model is a framework of evidence-based practices for promoting young children's social and emotional development. The Pyramid Model builds upon a tiered public health approach by identifying three levels of support: universal practices that all children need to develop social, emotional, and behavioral skills; targeted instruction for children who require additional support beyond universal practices; and individualized, intensive intervention for children with persistent challenging behaviors that have not responded to universal and targeted supports. As a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), the Pyramid Model guides early childhood practitioners and programs in systematically implementing these practices to prevent challenging behaviors in children and promote their social, emotional, and behavioral growth.

In the Pyramid Model, universal support, or Tier 1, is provided to all children through practices focused on establishing nurturing and responsive relationships and creating environments that promote connection, engagement, and social-emotional learning. At Tier 1, intentional social-emotional instruction is provided to all children as part of the high-quality early childhood program. Tier 2, the prevention level of the MTSS, includes targeted teaching and intervention strategies to address the social, emotional, and behavioral skill development needs of children who require additional support or focused intervention beyond universal practices. The provision of Tier 2 is reliant on a strong foundation of universal practices. When universal practices are not fully implemented, it can lead to the over-identification of children who appear to need Tier 2 support. In the Pyramid Model, Tier 3 intervention is provided to children who have significant social-emotional or behavioral challenges and require a

The Pyramid Model



comprehensive, assessment-based support plan. Success with Tier 3 intervention is also dependent on the provision of strong Tier 1 and 2 supports.

In an MTSS, the term "intervention" refers to specific, evidence-based strategies and instruction provided to children who need additional skill development to succeed in the classroom. The term "support" refers to comprehensive resources, strategies, and systems designed to promote the development and well-being of all children.

This document provides Pyramid Model leadership teams and practitioners with guidance on developing and implementing Tier 2 within the Pyramid Model. This guidance includes information on leading the development of Tier 2 interventions, processes for identifying children who would benefit from Tier 2 practices, evidence-based strategies and interventions to use at Tier 2, considerations for progress monitoring, and the importance of professional development and coaching to support the use of effective Tier 2 practices.

Teaming

Establishing a collaborative team or using an existing leadership or MTSS team to guide the development and implementation of Tier 2 services and strategies, and to identify children who need Tier 2 support, is strongly encouraged. If the team is large, a smaller subgroup may focus specifically on Tier 2.

Team Composition

The team guiding Tier 2 supports must include at least one member with expertise in early childhood behavior and effective behavior support planning to ensure that strategies and recommendations are developmentally appropriate and responsive to the needs of young children.

For schools or programs with established MTSS teams, the team should review its membership and ensure it includes a member with expertise in early childhood education. Early childhood programs (e.g., child care, Head Start, family child care home) that do not have an existing MTSS team can add additional members to the existing Pyramid Model leadership team (e.g., Infant-Early Mental Health consultant (IECMHC), behavior consultant, related services personnel) as needed to address Tier 2.

Tier 2 Team Activities

- ▶ Using screening information and other forms of data to identify children with social, emotional, or behavioral needs who may benefit from Tier 2 support.
- ▶ Establishing a transparent process for teachers to access assistance (e.g., IECMHC, coach, behavioral observation) for an individual child who may benefit from Tier 2 support. Teachers should be encouraged to seek assistance when they identify children who might need additional support for social-emotional or behavioral skill development. Providing intervention at Tier 2 should be considered before recommending a child for the Tier 3 process.
- ▶ Creating and maintaining a process to ensure that families are meaningfully involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of Tier 2 interventions.

- ▶ Maintaining awareness of the strategies and interventions offered in the program, as well as the additional support available when a child's specific needs arise. It will also be essential for the team to ensure that any interventions used are developmentally appropriate for young children.
- ▶ Collecting and analyzing data to inform ongoing decision-making, ensuring that Tier 2 processes and interventions remain effective and developmentally appropriate. The team uses data to understand and respond to teacher professional development needs (e.g., training, coaching), implementation fidelity of Tier 2 interventions, and child outcomes.

Screening and Identification

To ensure that children receive timely social, emotional, and behavioral support, programs should use clear and consistent procedures to identify children who may benefit from Tier 2 interventions. The screening and identification process aims to ensure children receive the support they need as early as possible. Programs and teachers are encouraged to utilize universal screening tools and supplement their use with additional data sources to make data-informed decisions and avoid relying solely on anecdotal reports of child needs.

Universal Screening

Universal screening is a proactive process that involves monitoring all children multiple times each year to determine whether they may benefit from Tier 2 support or if changes in practices or instruction are needed at Tier 1. Screeners should be:

- ▶ Quick and easy to use.
- ▶ Repeated consistently throughout the year.
- ▶ Focused on key developmental and social, emotional, and behavioral areas.

Using universal screeners helps identify children as soon as a need for additional support becomes clear, enabling the delivery of the most responsive and practical support to promote their continued engagement and growth.

Screening Tools

When choosing a screening tool, teams should ensure it is reliable, valid, brief, and cost-effective. Examples of widely used high-quality early childhood social and emotional screeners include:

- ▶ Ages & Stages Questionnaires® Social-Emotional (ASQ-SE-2; Squires, Bricker, & Twombly, 2015)
- ▶ Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Infant & Toddler Program (DECA; LeBuffe & Naglieri, 2012)
- ▶ The Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders, Second Edition (Walker et al., 2014)

When selecting a universal screening tool, teams should consider the following:

- ▶ Most screening tools categorize children into broad levels of support need or “risk” (e.g., low, moderate, high). Teams need to understand how these levels are determined so they can accurately interpret and use the results.
- ▶ Many tools emphasize identifying externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression) and may not adequately capture internalizing behaviors (e.g., withdrawal). Teams should consider whether the tool provides balanced information about children’s social and emotional needs.

Identification

In addition to screening, or if universal screening is not in place, teams should use multiple data sources to identify children for Tier 2. These might include:

- ▶ Behavior frequency and patterns, using tools such as:
 - Behavior Incident Report System (BIRS)
 - Early Childhood Schoolwide Information System (EC-SWIS)
 - Behavioral observation tools or progress monitoring forms
- ▶ Teacher observation notes, especially those related to:
 - Peer interactions during play
 - Use of emotional regulation strategies

- ▶ Family input, including observations and concerns shared by caregivers
- ▶ Curriculum-based assessments and documented learning outcomes

Combining multiple data sources will provide the most comprehensive understanding of the child’s social and emotional development.

To establish a transparent, shared identification process that is effective for all children, teams can:

- ▶ Create a visual flowchart or step-by-step guide to show how screening and identification will occur.
- ▶ Train all staff on the process so everyone understands their role.
- ▶ Ensure that families understand the data that are collected and how they are used to support children.
- ▶ Ensure the process is transparent, efficient, and responsive to children’s development.

Strategies and Interventions

Tier 2 support builds on the universal practices used with all children by increasing the frequency, intensity, and precision of teaching social, emotional, and behavioral skills for children who have additional intervention needs. It is important to include families as partners in the Tier 2 planning and implementation process. Families can be collaborators in identifying goals, sharing what works at home or in the community, and using shared strategies when appropriate across settings.

Tier 2 intervention approaches include:

- ▶ Increasing intentional and focused teaching with more frequent instruction, additional scaffolding, and targeted practice using the universal curriculum (e.g., Second Step; Committee for Children, 2011; Connect4Learning; Sarama et al., 2016; Preschool PATHS; Domitrovich et al., 2007).
- ▶ Focusing on helping children use specific skills (e.g., use of solution kit, calm down strategy) taught in the universal curriculum.

- ▶ Using meaningful reinforcers (e.g., positive descriptive feedback, celebratory gestures) to promote children's motivation while they learn and practice new skills.
- ▶ Considering skill development across the learning cycle phases, with plans to support skill acquisition (learning), maintenance (using the skill over time), and generalization (using the skill in different routines or settings).

Tier 2 might be delivered individually as embedded instruction, within small groups, or a hybrid approach combining multiple instruction modes. Practitioners and families should implement Tier 2 interventions within the context of routine activities (e.g., play, group instruction, meals). When a Tier 2 intervention is needed for a child's behavior that presents challenges within specific routines and the function of the behavior is known, teams can use [Teaching Tools for Young Children](#) to create a targeted Tier 2 intervention plan.

Examples of Manualized Interventions

Tier 2 manualized intervention approaches that might be considered (if they match the skill instruction or behavioral concerns for the child) are:

- ▶ BEST in CLASS (Conroy et al., 2018; Sutherland et al., 2018)
- ▶ First Step Next (Walker et al., 2015)
- ▶ Incredible Years Small Group Dinosaur Child Program (Webster-Stratton, 2005; 2016)
- ▶ Stay-Play-Talk (Ledford & Pustejovsky, 2023)
- ▶ Banking Time (Williford et al., 2015)

Progress Monitoring

Progress monitoring refers to the regular collection and review of data to determine whether a child is benefiting from Tier 2 support. It helps teams decide whether the intervention is effective or if adjustments are necessary.

Adults who work directly with the child, such as care providers, teachers, and staff in the child's environment or

classroom, should be responsible for progress monitoring. To make progress monitoring manageable, tools and forms should be simple, quick, and easy to use, minimizing the time they take away from teaching and interaction.

Daily data collection is recommended, with progress reviewed at least once a week. Frequent monitoring enables timely decisions and efficient adjustments to instruction or intervention as needed.

Type of Data

The type of data collected depends on the specific skill or behavior targeted by the Tier 2 intervention. Examples include:

- ▶ Frequency (e.g., how many times a child takes turns during play).
- ▶ Duration (e.g., how long a child participates in a routine).
- ▶ Opportunities (e.g., percentage of times the child regulates strong emotion when frustrated).
- ▶ Rating scales that provide a score summarizing intensity, duration, or frequency (e.g., simple 1–5 behavior rating with 1=never uses the skill and 5=uses skill consistently across all opportunities).
- ▶ Behavior Incident Reports (BIRs) if the focus is on reducing incidents.

Using Data to Make Decisions

Data should provide teams with helpful information they can easily use to make decisions about instruction and intervention. Forms supporting data collection and graphing can help teams identify patterns over time and make informed adjustments based on trends.

Data discussions should include families with planned check-ins about the child's progress, what is working, and what may need to change to provide the necessary supports. Teams can review progress data together to determine whether the child is responding to the intervention as expected.

Care providers and teachers provide updates to the team, and based on what the data show, the team may:

- ▶ Continue the intervention as is.
- ▶ Adjust or intensify the support; or
- ▶ Consider moving toward a Tier 3 support process.

Professional Development and Coaching

A core component of implementing the Pyramid Model is providing high-quality training and practice-based coaching. The following are some considerations for professional development and coaching specific to implementing Tier 2 in the classroom.

- ▶ Pyramid Model programs should plan for intentional and ongoing professional development on effective practices for teaching social-emotional skills (e.g., friendship skills, emotional literacy and regulation, problem-solving, and social interactions) to ensure that universal practices are implemented with fidelity.
- ▶ Coaching may be necessary to support practitioners to implement a manualized Tier 2 intervention with fidelity or to increase the frequency, intensity, and precision of social, emotional, and behavioral skills for identified small groups or individual children.
- ▶ Programs should provide high-quality training and practice-based coaching focusing on teaching practitioners to develop, implement, and evaluate Tier 2 intervention practices.

Additional Resources

Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children, Position Statement on Multitiered System of Support Framework in Early Childhood. <https://www.dec-sped.org/single-post/new-position-statement-multitiered-system-of-support-framework-in-early-childhood>

Blog post, How to Use MTSS in Preschool to Improve Learning Outcomes. <https://www.renaissance.com/2024/02/02/blog-how-to-use-mtss-in-preschool-to-improve-learning-outcomes/>

BEST in CLASS website. <https://education.ufl.edu/best-in-class/about/about-best-in-class/>

University of Virginia, The Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, ECE Resource Hub for Banking Time. <https://eceresourcehub.org/ece-resource-hub/strategy-library/banking-time/>

Banking Time fact sheet. <https://challengingbehavior.org/document/banking-time-strengthening-your-relationship-with-individual-children/>

Vanderbilt University, Evidence-Based Instructional Practices, Stay, Play, Talk Procedures. <https://ebip.vkcsites.org/stay-play-talk-procedures/>

National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations, Preschool Training Module on Individualized Teaching of Social-Emotional Skills. <https://challengingbehavior.org/document/preschool-module-4-individualized-teaching-of-social-emotional-skills/>

National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations, Preschool Training Module on Teaching Social-Emotional Skills. <https://challengingbehavior.org/document/preschool-module-3-teaching-social-emotional-skills/>

National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations, Infant-Toddler Training Module on Individualized Teaching. <https://challengingbehavior.org/document/infant-toddler-modul-7-individualized-teaching/>