Overview

A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) is a framework used to guide proactive and preventative strategies that support individuals throughout the life span from a strengths-based perspective. Though used primarily in educational settings, MTSS can be utilized for adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities through the implementation of positive behavior supports (PBS). The policy of the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) states that agencies need "to establish procedures and the highest practicable professional standards for the treatment of persons with intellectual and developmental disability, and to assure the dignity, health, safety, of its clients. System-wide PBS is a widely accepted and utilized framework for both systems change and individual treatment which supports individuals to grow and reach their maximum potential." 115 CMR 15.14(1)

The MTSS framework provides a systematic approach for agencies to problem solve, evaluate data, communicate and collaborate with team members, build infrastructure capacity and support individuals with disabilities, particularly those with challenging behaviors to achieve a high quality of life with meaningful social outcomes. A systematic approach helps agencies build capacity as they implement PBS practices into all settings and aspects of service delivery. Providers are required to develop a PBS Action Plan which provides a blueprint (systematic approach) for implementing PBS.

There are four essential components that comprise the MTSS framework: screening, progress monitoring, multi-level prevention systems, and data-based decision making. These components and how the MTSS framework is incorporated into the DDS policy on PBS is discussed below.

Screening

Screening is used to identify all individuals who may be at risk for engaging in behavior that significantly disrupts or prevents successful quality of life outcomes. Through using a systemic process, screening allows agencies to act proactively rather than reactively to support individuals who struggle to achieve personally meaningful and prosocial, behavior. Agencies are required through their PBS Action Plan to identify methods for screening (e.g., collecting data, conducting an FBA) that can be utilized for their individual setting and population.

Multi-level prevention

Multi-level prevention includes three tiers (Tiers 1, 2 and 3) which allows for a continuum of behavioral, social, and emotional supports depending upon the needs of the individual at a given point in time. Tier 1 includes universal interventions which are infused into an agencies' practices and policies. Evidence-based strategies such as daily choice making, explicitly teaching behavioral expectations, changing a physical environment to provide a quieter setting, providing consistent and predictable schedules, and delivering positive reinforcement (e.g., praise) are excellent examples of Tier-1 interventions.

Tier-2 strategies are designed to support individuals who do not respond effectively to Tier 1 interventions and are at-risk for the escalation of challenging behavior. The PBS Leadership Team is responsible for creating a process for referring individuals who may require Tier-2 interventions. The PBS Targeted Support Team clinicians are responsible for designing evidence-based interventions such as "check-in/check-out," self-management procedures, increased monitoring, relaxation training, individualized schedules and/or planned ignoring. Tier 3 utilizes individualized and intensive supports for individuals who engage in more severe challenging behavior that places them at risk for self-harm or the harm of others. The PBS Leadership Team is responsible for creating a process for referring individuals who may require Tier-3 interventions. The PBS Intensive Support Team clinicians are responsible for conducting an assessment and designing evidence-based Tier 3 interventions such as increased practices with self-regulation, opportunities for positive reinforcement, incidental teaching procedures, and systems for increasing functional communication, and may also include developing a Behavior Safety Plan.

Progress monitoring

Progress monitoring is used to assess the fidelity of implementation and effectiveness of specific procedures and supports, i.e., how well are they working for an individual. Assessment includes outcomes such as whether individuals are meaningfully involved in their communities as demonstrated for example by having a range of friends and activities in their daily living, work, leisure, etc.

Data based decision making

Collecting data is essential for decision making. Data collection and analysis are used to identify areas that are working well and those that need improvement. Teams (e.g., Implementation Team) should use data from progress monitoring to guide decisions about specific staff training needs and effective interventions. Providers should also use data to determine the extent to which assessments, interventions and supports are implemented with fidelity.

Summary

MTSS provides a framework for DDS to implement PBS. The four key components that comprise the MTSS framework were articulated above and are both dynamic and ongoing. This framework guides agencies as they work to improve quality of life outcomes through a structured systematic process that utilizes prevention and proactive strategies.

MTSS helpful websites:

https://www.branchingminds.com/mtss-guide
https://mtss4success.org/
https://www.pbisrewards.com/blog/what-is-mtss/
https://publications.ici.umn.edu/ties/mtss-policy-and-practice/mtss-policy-and-practice