

# Universal Protocols

Universal Protocols, also known as UniPros or UPs, are a set of behavioral strategies designed to eliminate the occurrence and escalation of severe behavior. These strategies can be used in school settings to create a learning context that is therapeutic in nature, aligned with trauma-informed care, and free from severe behavior.

<p><b>What are the goals of Universal Protocols?</b></p>	<p>The goals of Universal Protocols are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> increase the extent to which students are happy, relaxed, and engaged;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> prevent escalation by removing events/interactions that commonly evoke problem behavior and by reinforcing precursor responses;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> teach students that staff are not adversarial but rather trustworthy allies; and</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> increase job satisfaction of staff by eliminating crisis situations and creating a window for learning.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What are the benefits of Universal Protocols?</b></p>	<p>The benefits of Universal Protocols include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The need for physical management or restrictive procedures such as isolation and restraint are minimized or eliminated.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Staff and students get out of “survival mode” and into “learning mode.”</li> </ul> <p>School teams regain time and energy to assess the behavior more thoroughly and design interventions to optimize progress and growth for the student.</p>
<p><b>What do Universal Protocols look like?</b></p>	<p>A student participating in Universal Protocols looks happy, relaxed, and engaged in activities of their choosing. Student comfort and choice is prioritized, and individual preference is honored whenever possible.</p> <p>Universal Protocols minimize demands and triggers and allow the student to access preferred items/activities/people/sensory experiences with minimal interruption. The following seven strategies are individualized to address the unique needs of the student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide continuous empathy and positive regard.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Enrich the environment.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Follow the client’s lead to the extent possible.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Invite the client to participate in scheduled activities.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Limit nonessential demands.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Make essential demands less aversive.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Work to prevent escalation to severe problem behaviors.</li> </ul>

<p><b>How often and for how long are Universal Protocols implemented?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ School teams may implement Universal Protocols initially during specific parts of the school day or across the entire school day.</li> <li>❑ Universal Protocols may be in place for a handful of days or weeks before beginning an intervention to build skills and resilience.</li> <li>❑ Teams should use data to decide when and for how long to implement Universal Protocols.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What happens after Universal Protocols?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Once the therapeutic context of Universal Protocols has been established, interventions that develop communication skills, cooperation skills, and long-term resilience can begin.</li> <li>❑ The team can pivot back to Universal Protocols as needed to maintain safety and therapeutic rapport with the student.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What are the risks of Universal Protocols?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Universal Protocols are meant to be a short-term intervention, laying a foundation for long-term skill-building interventions. Teams that fail to correctly implement or monitor Universal Protocols may hinder the student's opportunity to build meaningful skills and resilience. In this scenario, students may be safe at school but fail to build new skills or the resilience needed to engage in school routines.</li> <li>❑ This risk can be mitigated with proper implementation and monitoring of the program.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What is required from schools to implement Universal Protocols?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Schools may be asked to help enrich the student's environment by providing the student access to preferred items such as iPads, snacks, and dedicated relaxing spaces, and/or limiting transitions and task demands.</li> <li>❑ Schools may consider increasing staffing support while Universal Protocols are in place, as a key feature of the intervention is for the student to have consistent adult attention and connection available.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What is required from staff to implement Universal Protocols?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Teachers and paraprofessionals may be asked to limit or withhold demands while dramatically increasing the quality and quantity of the student's favorite things, whether that is attention and connection, preferred items and activities, specific sensory experiences, or a combination of these.</li> <li>❑ Staff may feel like they are giving the student a "free pass." It is essential for staff to understand that this is a temporary solution with a long-term plan to increase the student's engagement and participation in a more traditional school routine.</li> <li>❑ Teams implementing Universal Protocols should receive training and support from a specialist such as a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) or Behavior Specialist who is trained in Universal Protocols.</li> </ul>

**What documentation should be considered when implementing Universal Protocols?**

Some school districts have considered the following when implementing Universal Protocols:

- ❑ holding an IEP team meeting to propose Universal Protocols to the IEP team, and presenting data to support this proposal,
- ❑ completing the “Universal Protocols Individual” document in collaboration with a BCBA,
- ❑ conducting a Universal Protocols fidelity check form within the first week of implementation,
- ❑ completing an open-ended interview (such as the “Sharing History and Relevant Experiences” interview) and Practical Functional Assessment within three weeks of beginning Universal Protocols,
- ❑ completing a “Skill-Based Treatment Plan” within three weeks of beginning Universal Protocols,
- ❑ collecting numerical data continuously throughout the process, and
- ❑ using documents related to Universal Protocols, Practical Functional Assessment, and Skill-Based Treatment that are available on the [TRIAD Behavior Resources website](#).