

At times, young children will display challenging behavior. Often this behavior is a cry for help and children who exhibit such behavior are the ones who need us most. When challenging behavior occurs, the child care professional must seize the opportunity to provide guidance by teaching children more appropriate ways to behave. The following teaching strategies encourage positive behavior and healthy social and emotional development.

Teach Children to be a S.T.A.R.

Help children learn how to manage their emotions by taking a deep breath and relaxing. This exercise has a calming effect and gets oxygen to the brain, which in turn helps children make better choices. Encourage children to be a S.T.A.R. (Post a picture of a star in your child care space as a visual reminder to children.)

Smile Take a deep breath And Relax

Conflict Management

Teach children how to resolve conflicts using these steps:

1. **Cool down** – Provider and children calm down together.
2. **Identify the problem** – Children agree on what the problem is and put it into words.
3. **Brainstorm solution** – With the provider’s help, children come up with possible solutions.
4. **Go for it** – Children decide on a solution and try it.
5. **Follow up** – Provider encourages and monitors the solution.

Use Encouragement Instead of Praise

“You are working very hard on that picture” instead of “Good work.”
“You put all your toys in the bin!” instead of “Great job cleaning up.”

Examine Your Program

Physical Environment

- Where do most conflicts occur?
- Are there too many children in one area?
- Is there too much open space that encourages running?
- Are there too many toys stored in one big bin/toy box?
- Are there competitive games that encourage aggression?

Schedule

- When do conflicts occur?
- Can the number of transitions be reduced?
- Are circle times too long?
- Are large group activities interesting and do they actively engage the children?
- Are there adequate time periods scheduled for uninterrupted play?

Curriculum

- Are activities based on children’s interests, skills, and needs?
- Is the curriculum sensitive to and does it encourage respect and acceptance of different cultures and cultural beliefs?
- When necessary, are changes made to the curriculum?

References

Conscious Discipline by Dr. Becky Bailey, 2000

The Power of Guidance by Daniel Gartrell, 2004

A Guidance Approach for the Encouraging Classroom by Daniel Gartrell, 2003

Meeting the Challenge: Effective Strategies for Challenging Behaviors in Early Childhood Environment by B Kaiser & J. S. Rasminsky, 1999

Many young children do not possess the necessary social, emotional, or language skills they need in order to adequately express themselves in appropriate ways. These children often exhibit challenging behavior as a result. Consider the following suggestions in order to provide effective guidance which fosters these needed skills.

- Understand that challenging behavior can be a cry for help. Often the most challenging children are the ones who need us most. Avoid labeling children, be patient, and provide needed guidance.
- Use challenging behavior as an opportunity to teach appropriate behavior. Children make mistakes when they are learning colors and shapes. They also make mistakes when learning social and emotional skills. Talk with children about their behavior explaining why it is inappropriate rather than punishing them without using the opportunity to guide their behavior.
- Model appropriate behavior. Display self control in upsetting situations. If children see you lose control when you are upset, they will learn to act accordingly. Be a good example.
- Focus on appropriate behavior, not negative behavior. “Walk while we are inside” instead of “Don’t run inside.” “Just look at the pictures on the wall” instead of “Don’t touch the pictures on the wall.” Positive statements like these encourage positive behavior and make expectations clear.
- When a child hurts another child, focus on attending to and comforting the victim rather than punishing the perpetrator. This will shift the emphasis from the negative behavior to learning compassion and showing empathy.
- Help children teach other children how they would like to be treated. Encourage them to talk and express their feelings in appropriate ways. Give them the words to use if they do not have them.
- Use encouragement and effective praise instead of judgmental praise. When a child says, “Look at me climbing the slide!” respond with a description of the child’s action. “Look at you up there so high!” instead of a judgment “Good job, honey!”.
- Build relationships with children. Before children can learn social skills, they must feel safe and loved and be able to trust the adults in their lives.
- Form healthy relationships with families and celebrate differences. When families are valued, respected, and informed, they are better able to support their child.

References

Conscious Discipline by Dr. Becky Bailey, 2000

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