

Children engage in challenging behavior for a variety of reasons, the most common being their need to communicate with us. They may need to escape or avoid a person, activity or situation or are in need of someone's attention. Once you learn the purpose of the behavior, you can select appropriate strategies to prevent it.

Get to know the child.

- Have you discussed your concerns with the parents? Has the child had a recent physical exam? Has the child been diagnosed with a developmental delay or a special need? Are parents sharing information and working with you to let you know what strategies may already be in place?
- Use this information to work with the parents to set appropriate goals for the child.
- Remember to follow up by continually checking on progress, and then adjusting goals as needed.

How does this influence your setting?

- When observing the child, have you noticed any patterns? For example, does he/she always call out at circle time? Knowing this information will help you take steps to prevent the problem.
- You may want to try small group or individualized learning situations.
- Is there an area that the child likes best? For example, should you expand the cozy or gross motor areas?

When Redirecting

- Intervene quickly before problems escalate.
- Try nonverbal techniques such as facial expressions, eye contact, a gentle touch or a gesture.
- Try a friendly reminder, possibly with some humor.
- Be sure to tell the child what you want them to do, not just what not to do. For example, say "walk" instead of "don't run."

References

Creating Teaching Tools for Young Children with Challenging Behavior. Early Intervention Positive Behavior Support, The Division of Applied Research and Educational Support, by R Lentini et al., 2005.

There's got to be a Better Way Discipline that Works, Becky Baileys, 2005.

The Power of Guidance: Teaching Social-Emotional Skills in Early Childhood Classrooms, Dan Gartrell, 2004.

Child Care Tips:

Special needs-Challenging Behavior in group settings

There is a variety of forms that challenging behavior may take. A child may yell, scream, spit or punch him/herself or others. Often these children are attempting to avoid or escape a situation that they do not want to participate in, or someone that they do not want to be in contact with. Other times they may be trying to gain access to something. It is not necessary to intervene on every undesirable behavior especially if it is a one time or infrequent occurrence. When you need intervention, consider the following. Remember that trying to determine the reason and motivation for the behaviors and beginning intervention early, will make a big difference.

Some typical specific causes of problem behaviors in a group setting are:

- Child cannot wait for long periods of time without something to do.
- Child cannot wait for long periods of time to get the early education teacher's attention.
- Child cannot predict when it will be their turn.
- Child cannot follow group instructions.

Some strategies to try:

- Use a concrete visual way to demonstrate turn taking such as passing a hat/ball/block around the circle, or showing a photo to indicate whose turn it is.
- Give the child something to hold while waiting for example the book you are about to read.
- Shorten the length of your group time.
- Consider if the activity is stimulating enough for all children.
- Alternate quiet times and active times.
- Keep routines, rules and schedules consistent.
- Arrange the physical environment to prevent challenging behaviors. For example, carpet squares for each child or placing the child in close proximity to you, arranging toys and supplies in a place where they are available to foster independence and decrease the likelihood of challenging behaviors and pay attention to lighting and temperature.
- Continually evaluate and modify what you have in place.
- Adopt a social skills curriculum such as Second Step.