

Tip Sheets

Strategies to Prevent Challenging Behavior



Positive support strategies can prevent challenging behaviors and support all children in your program.

Positive Teacher Talk

Teacher Talk means using the same phrases repeatedly with all your children, but in particular a child who is using a behavior in a challenging way. This helps children feel safe and encourages them to think before acting. It includes phrases like:

- I'm going to help you.
- I'm going to say no because...
- This looks like a problem. Let's solve the problem together.
- It's almost time for...
- We have enough...

Inviting Techniques

Inviting children to feel safe to express, regardless of how big or small the feelings are, conveys your willingness as a caring adult to listen to the child and how they feel. No feelings are 'outlawed' or excluded. All emotions and feelings are welcome.

Inviting is typically done in the context of activities, like art or circle time where you can read a book on emotions and expand from there. For instance, in

the art center, you can have pictures of children with lots of expressions and encourage a child to draw how she feels or what she sees on the faces.

Other areas which can be 'inviting' to expression:

- Dramatic play
- Drawing, painting and using playdough
- Books

When children learn to express more articulately, they will feel less like using aggression or other negative reactions to communicate.

Containing Techniques

Stable and secure environments help children feel safe. Containing means that child care environment is safe enough to contain all the children's feelings, big and small.

Some children, especially those who are experiencing trauma in their lives, need to feel that child care is a safe place. This also means having routines and consistency in practices and staffing.

Use of Praise

Praise and affirmation can help set a positive tone for all children in your program and can help build children's sense of their own value, worth and competence. Good praise:

- Includes students' names
- Is descriptive, communicates what is expected, and focuses on the behavior and not the child
- Is convincing
- Is varied
- Is non-disruptive

Cueing as a Behavior Tool

Cues are gestures and visual and verbal supports that tell children what we are expecting from them or what is coming next. They are especially effective with children who may struggle with transition or change.

Visual Cues

Visual cues are unobtrusive and easy to use, like posting classroom rules and the daily schedule or a noise level indicator. Children may have their own cues, such as mood indicators, to show teachers how they are feeling.

Verbal Cues

Verbal cues remind children of the task at hand, give instructions, and encourage appropriate behavior. They are powerful because even if they are used with one student, they influence the whole classroom's behavior.

Gestural Cues

Gestural cues involve a gesture or movement which is understood by a child as indicating a desired behavior. These will have been decided ahead of time so everyone knows the meaning.

Physical Cues

These physically direct the child, such as a hand on a child's shoulder if they need to quiet. Note that not all children react well to touching.

Routines as a Behavior Tool

Basic routines are important for all young children because they allow children to predict what is coming. Daily routine is particularly important for traumatized children because life may have been very unpredictable for them and they will need to learn how to trust those around them.

Children also need to know that the school routine is strong enough to withstand their emotional

outbursts. Even if a child is disruptive, routines should continue as scheduled.

Teach routines by using picture schedules that are reviewed with children every day and that are used throughout the day and during transitions.

Rules as a Behavior Tool

Let children help make some rules. Keeping it short and simple, this can be done over several days if needed.

- Ask the children for their ideas and write them all down.
- Communicate to the children that the purpose of the rules is to keep everyone safe. Ask which rules on the list are about being safe.
- Try to keep the list to three or four simple rules. Create a wall chart with pictures and words for each rule.
- Pictures can be photos of the children following the rules, drawings, or pictures from magazines. Be creative! Let the children help.
- Display the chart where everyone can see it. Review the rules each day. Point to the pictures and ask the children to identify the rule.

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