Understanding, Preventing and Effectively Responding to Young Children’s Challenging Behaviors

Region V
Leadership and Professional Development Conference

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Learning Objectives

Participants will:

• Have increased familiarity with tools and strategies to help parents and caregivers understand the meaning of their child’s behavior
• Gain strategies to help prevent challenging behavior
• Gain strategies to respond to challenging behavior
Agenda

• Social Emotional Development
• Understanding Challenging Behavior
• Engaging Parents as Full Partners – What do the HSPPS say?
• Preventing Challenging Behavior
• Addressing Challenging Behavior
• Expulsion and Suspension
• My role in all of this

CSEFEL Definition of Social Emotional Development/Early Childhood Mental Health

Developing capacity:
• to form close and secure adult and peer relationships
• to experience, regulate, and express emotions in socially
• explore the environment and learn
• all in the context of family, community, and culture.

Adapted from ZERO TO THREE, 2001
What Is Challenging Behavior?

- Intensity
- Frequency
- Duration

Continuum of Emotional Expression

Social Withdrawing  Acting Out
Acting Out Behaviors

- Fussing
- Inconsolable crying
- Frequent or intense tantrums
- Pushing
- Hitting
- Biting
- Frequent throwing of things or knocking things down or destroying property
- Persistent refusal to allow or participate in activities
- Harm to self or others

Social Withdrawing Behaviors

- Pulling away while being held
- Rarely cooing
- Rarely babbling or talking
- Looking sad
- Not showing preference for caregiver
- Not making eye contact
- Whining
- Being overly compliant or avoidant with the caregiver
- Diminished efforts to use communications skills that have previously been used
Understanding Challenging Behavior

- Any repeated pattern of behavior that interferes with learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers and adults
- Behaviors that are not responsive to the use of developmentally appropriate guidance procedures

Understanding Challenging Behavior

- Defined by caregiver
- Challenges caregivers sense of competence
Understanding Behaviors Have Meaning: Behavior Expresses...

• What the infant or toddler is experiencing

• What it is like to be in that child’s body

• What it is like to be in that child’s world

“"I want something."

“I want to escape from something.”
Infants Communicate in Many Ways

- **Gaze aversion (looking away)**
- **Yawning**
  - Dull look
- **Vocalization**
  - Giggling
  - Crying
  - Squealing
- **Expressions**
  - Pushing out of the lips
  - Wrinkling the brow
  - Lip grimace; lip compression
  - Smiling
  - Tongue show
  - Brow raising

Infants Communicate in Many Ways

**Movements**
- Pulling away
- Joining of hands
- Arching back, stiffening
- Clinging posture
- Lowering the head
- Hand to eye
- Hand to ear
- Hand to mouth
- Hand to stomach
- Reaching for caregiver
Pair and Share
Discuss Challenging Behavior

- Reflect on a child’s behavior (what is the behavior, in objective terms)

- What might the behavior be trying to communicate?
Challenging Behavior as the Tip of the Iceberg

Reasons for Behavior:

Unmet Needs
• Lack of safety
• Lack of ongoing responsive relationships with one or more adults
• Lack of emotionally responsive social environment
• Poor environmental match to temperament
• Lack of structure and consistency
Reasons for Behavior:

Unmet Needs

• Poor nutrition
• Medical issues/Health concerns/Pain
• Constitutional factors/biological chemistry
• Lacking stimulating environment; lacking opportunities for movement
Shifting Perspective
Understanding the Behavior

• What more do we want to know?
• What happened before he hit?
• What happened after he hit?
• What might Michael be trying to communicate with his behavior?

Responding to the Behavior: What Can We Do?

• In the moment?
  □ What did his teacher do well?
  □ How could she improve?
Responding to Distress

- Acknowledge distress
- Offer comfort
- Use words
- Be attuned (in sync) to child’s individual needs
- Help the baby/toddler achieve the understood intention
- Be developmentally appropriate

Hypotheses

- What is the behavior that you are concerned about? (how often and when does it occur)
- What events tend to “trigger” this behavior?
- What is your child gaining from this behavior?
- What is your child avoiding by using this behavior?
- What makes the behavior stop?
What Goes Into a Support Plan?

• Hypothesis
• Prevention strategies
• New skills
• New Responses to behaviors
• Timeframe and method for evaluating changes in the challenging behavior

Expulsion Rates (per 1,000)

- K-12
- PreK
- MA Child Care

State PreK Expulsion Rates

Suspension Rates

Disparity in Discipline Starts in Preschool

Less than 1 percent of the 1 million students in preschool in 2011-12 were suspended from school. But that translates into roughly 8,000 3- and 4-year-olds. More than 2,500 were suspended more than once.

- White
- Two or more races
- Hispanic/Latino
- Black or African-American
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- Asian
- American Indian or Alaska Native

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011-12
What do these practices look like?

• In-school suspensions
  Removal or exclusion of the child from the classroom.
• Out-of-school suspensions
  Temporary removal of the child from the program.
• Expulsions
  Permanent removal or dismissal from the program.
• Soft-expulsions
  Practices that leave the family with little choice but to withdraw their child.

Why does this matter?

• The beginning years of any child’s life are critical for building the early foundation of learning, health and wellness.
• Often the children most in need of intervention are the ones expelled from the system.
• Expulsion or suspension early in a child’s education predicts negative academic and life outcomes later in life.
Many Factors Predict Preschool Expulsion

Promising Approaches

The Pyramid Model: Promoting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children
Other Promising Approaches

• Mental Health Consultation
• Reflective Supervision
• Develop a workforce- incorporate IMH endorsement
• Staff Wellness practices

Preventing Challenging Behaviors

• Build communication skills:
  • Use language
  • Gestures
  • Read books
  • Sing songs
  • Chat
  • Tell stories

• Observe and notice clues:
  • Sounds
  • Language
  • Facial expression
  • Eye gaze
  • Actions
  • Think about the child’s environment
Preventing Challenging Behaviors

- Respond based on what you think the meaning of the behavior is
- If your first try didn’t work; try again
- Give toddlers appropriate choices
- Use pictures
- Teach child about non-verbal communication
- BE THERE for the child
Focusing on the Child

- Makes us more likely to be able to respond with empathy to her needs
- Helps us be more intentional about problem solving
- Will assist us in restoring the child’s sense of well being
- Will enable the child to spend his emotional energy on development
- Will help us keep our own emotions in check

“If a child doesn’t know how to read, we teach. If a child doesn’t know how to swim, we teach.”
“If a child doesn’t know how to multiply, we teach.”
“If a child doesn’t know how to drive, we teach.”
“If a child doesn’t know how to behave, we... teach? punish?”

“Why can’t we finish the last sentence as automatically as we do the others?”

Tom Herner (NASDE President)
Counterpoint 1998, p.2
Responding to the Behavior: What Can We Do?

- In the moment?
  - What did this teacher do well?
  - How could she improve?
Ways to Support Parents

It’s all About the Relationship

• You do not have to be a therapist to be therapeutic.
• Re-think the “expert role.” In order to teach someone, we must first learn from them. (Gerard Costa)
Talking with Families about Problem Behavior:
Dos and Don’ts
Module 3
Handout 3.7

### Dos and Don’ts

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dos</th>
<th>Don’ts</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Begin the discussion by expressing concern about the child.</td>
<td>1. Begin the discussion by indicating that the child’s behavior is a problem.</td>
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<td>2. Let the parent know that you care and are there to help.</td>
<td>2. Indicate that the child must be punished or “beaten with” by the parent.</td>
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<td>3. Ask the parent if they or someone in the family has experienced similar situations and are concerned.</td>
<td>3. Ask the parent if something has happened at home to make the situation worse.</td>
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<td>4. Tell the parent that they can work with the teacher to help the child develop appropriate behavior and social skills.</td>
<td>4. Indicate that the parent should take action to resolve the problem at home.</td>
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<td>5. Tell the parent about what is happening in the classroom only after the parent understands that you are concerned about the child, not blaming the family.</td>
<td>5. Ensure no classroom is subjected to being used as a challenging behavior. Discussions about challenging behavior should be framed so the child is a difficult child rather than having control.</td>
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<td>6. Offer to work with the parent to develop a behavior support plan that addresses the problem.</td>
<td>6. Offer to help the parent manage problems at home by developing a plan without calling in the child.</td>
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<td>7. Emphasize that the focus will be to help the child develop the skills needed to be successful in the classroom. The child needs instruction and support.</td>
<td>7. Let the parent believe that the child needs more discipline.</td>
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<td>8. Make sure you and work together, you are more likely to be successful in helping the child learn new skills.</td>
<td>8. Discuss the importance of identifying the behavior, understanding and implementing positive behavior support.</td>
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**A Conversation Between a Teacher and a Parent about Challenging Behavior**
Wrapping Up

• What stood out for you from what you heard or experienced today?
• What excites you or concerns you about what you learned?
• Any insights from the session?
• How might you use what you heard today?

To Continue the Discussion, Join MyPeers

• Email health@ecetta.info and say “I’d like to join MyPeers”
MyPeers Mental Health Consultation Community

Welcome to the Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Community.

This is an online peer learning community for Head Start leaders and related personnel (e.g., mental health, disabilities, and other managers, mental health consultants, TA providers, and policy makers) to share resources, network with each other, and provide support to improve or access mental health consultation services.

Quick Links:
- Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation/Resource
- Meet the Mentors Your Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Team
- Professional Development: Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Webinars
- What Works: A Study of Effective Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Programs

NATIONAL CENTER
Early Childhood National Centers
For More Information

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Email: health@ecetta.info

Website: https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/health
## Talking with Families about Problem Behavior: Do’s and Don’ts

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<td>1. Begin the discussion by expressing concern about the child.</td>
<td>1. Begin the discussion by indicating that the child’s behavior is not tolerable.</td>
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<td>2. Let the parent know that your goal is to help the child.</td>
<td>2. Indicate that the child must be punished or “dealt with” by the parent.</td>
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<td>3. Ask the parent if he or she has experienced similar situations and are concerned.</td>
<td>3. Ask the parent if something has happened at home to cause the behavior.</td>
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<td>4. Tell the parent that you want to work with the family to help the child develop appropriate behavior and social skills.</td>
<td>4. Indicate that the parent should take action to resolve the problem at home.</td>
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<td>5. Tell the parent about what is happening in the classroom but only after the parent understands that you are concerned about the child, not blaming the family.</td>
<td>5. Initiate the conversation by listing the child’s challenging behavior. Discussions about challenging behavior should be framed as “the child is having a difficult time” rather than losing control.</td>
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<td>6. Offer to work with the parent in the development of a behavior support plan that can be used at home and in the classroom.</td>
<td>6. Leave it up to the parent to manage problems at home; develop a plan without inviting family participation.</td>
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<td>7. Emphasize that your focus will be to help the child develop the skills needed to be successful in the classroom. The child needs instruction and support.</td>
<td>7. Let the parent believe that the child needs more discipline.</td>
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<td>8. Stress that if you can work together, you are more likely to be successful in helping the child learn new skills.</td>
<td>8. Minimize the importance of helping the family understand and implement positive behavior support.</td>
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