

Guiding Your Child's Behavior

As parents and professionals, we know that challenging behaviors can happen. We are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of social-emotional development in young children. This development is the foundation for the child's future emotional, social and cognitive development. Research indicates that problems that occur in the young child's social or behavioral development are likely to be early indicators of more difficult and persistent challenging behavior as the child grows older.

SOURCE: Fox, 2005

What is meant by Challenging Behavior?



Any behavior that interferes with a child's learning, development, and success at play; is harmful to a child, other children, or adult; or puts a child at risk for later social problems or school failure (like being unable to make friends). In order to more easily identify challenging behavior when it occurs, it is important that a specific behavior be defined both by its *form* (What does the behavior look like?) and its *function* (What is the purpose of the behavior?). Families, peers and teachers may unwittingly change routines, alter demands, and defer conflict in an effort to avoid the challenging behavior.

Why Do Children Misbehave?

- * He is trying to get a real need met and lacks the language to tell us directly
- * She is asking for attention
- * He is too young to be able to reliably follow rules. Rules are unclear, inconsistent or too much to expect of a young child.
- * She is stressed or has strong emotions; frustrated, angry, overwhelmed. Change can be stressful, even when it is a positive change.
- * Young children do not understand time well and waiting five minutes can seem like forever, that is why it is hard to finish up a fun activity and why they cry when you leave them at child care.

Source: Penn State, 2004

What's Inside...

- ◆ 6 Goals of Behavior
- ◆ Prevention Strategies
- ◆ Biting
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Approaching Parents

All behavior is communication

Development and Behavior are Intertwined

Observing a child and looking at all areas of their development can provide clues about what is typically developing and what is not. When development in one or more areas is delayed, challenging behavior can be one indication of the problem. Children with poor social skills are often rejected by their peers. If they have few friends, they have little opportunity to learn and practice appropriate social skills. In frustration, they might become aggressive or isolate themselves. A major task will be to identify if the behavior is developmentally expected or of a level of intensity or persistence that exceeds normal development.

Part of being socially competent is being able to give messages that are clearly understood- - - the connection of communication and social skills.

The Lighter Side of Kids

One day, a little girl was watching her mother do the dishes at the kitchen sink. She noticed that her mother had several strands of white hair sticking out in contrast to her brunette head. She asked her mother, "Why are some of you hairs white, Mommy?" Her mother replied, "Well, every time you do something wrong, one of my hairs turns white." The little girl thought about this revelation for awhile and then said, "Mommy, how come ALL of grandma's hairs are white?"

The Six Goals of Behavior

1. Attention---“Remember me down here?”
2. Escape/Avoidance---“You want me to do what?”
3. Getting Something---“I want it now!”
4. Self-Regulation---“My body just won’t cooperate”
5. Power/Control---“I need to make choices too”
6. Play --- “I just want to have fun”



Two Basic Changes:

1. Change the environment
2. Change our interactions

Where do we have the most control?

Prevention Strategies

1. Physical Environment

Reduce conflict opportunities via room/center re-arrangements and traffic patterns. Childproof your home. Put your breakables, cleaning supplies, and sharp objects out of reach. Make a place for children to play, being able to find their toys easily.

2. Activities and Materials

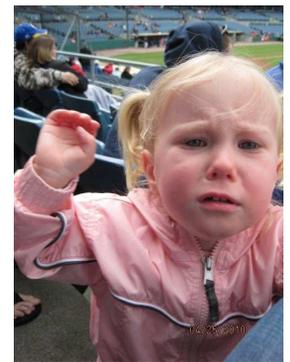
Ensure children are actively and appropriately engaged in activities with materials and people. Give your child time to play outside every day, weather permitting. Give your children a chance to explore sand, water, and play dough with their senses. Give children a chance to do things by themselves: using a small pitcher to pour their own drinks, a small stool at the sink lets them climb up to wash hands, provide choices during the day such as which of two t-shirts to wear, cereal or yogurt for breakfast, play dough or crayons to play at the table, etc.

3. Scheduling

Implement a consistent schedule and predictable routines to reduce occasions for misbehavior. Feed your children regular healthy meals, snacks and drinks. Pick a regular bedtime. Give your child time to rest during the day, even if they do not nap, have a time for quiet reading or playtime alone.

4. Promoting Appropriate Behaviors

Catch your child being good! Give specific, positive attention to the behavior that you want to see. Teach social and self-control skills to prevent problem behaviors. Use positive rules: “Use your words” Walk instead of run” to teach them what you want them to do, rather than just telling them what you do not want them to do. Give your children loving acceptance. Show them that you know that they can behave well, rather than expecting them to misbehave.



Coping with Difficult Behavior

- Establish clear ground rules, which tell the child what they can do rather than what not to do
- Use planned ignoring to deliberately pay no attention to a child when minor problem behavior occurs, such as whining, using rude words; then praise them when they behave appropriately
- Move within arm’s length and eye level with your child, be specific and tell them what you want them to do
- Pause briefly to allow your child time to do what you have asked
- Praise your child for cooperating
- Act quickly when problem behavior occurs, gain their attention, and tell them what you would like them to do: play gently without pushing
- Repeat your instruction only once and provide logical, timely consequences that fit the situation: withdraw the activity, help to clean up the mess made, etc.

We each come with our own beliefs about what behaviors are appropriate and inappropriate in young children. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between behaviors that put a child at risk and those that are merely “hot spots” for us.

Biting

Biting is very common in group setting with young children. However, when it happens it is always disturbing for the children, parents, and caregivers. Understanding the reasons for biting will assist in developing appropriate prevention strategies.

| Why Children May Bite: 3 Categories | Strategies for Prevention |
|--|--|
| <p>Developmental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teething • Cause & Effect • Imitation • Language Limitations • Attention  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Offer teething toys or frozen bagels to mouth ◆ Provide a wide variety of sensorimotor experiences: fingerpainting, play-dough, chewy/crunchy foods, water and sand play, bubbles, musical instruments to pound and blow ◆ Provide cause and effect toys ◆ Model gentle, caring behavior. ◆ Offer positive alternatives for negative behavior. ◆ Give choices throughout the day and reinforce positive social behavior. ◆ Give children lots of attention throughout the day. |
| <p>Expression of Feelings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frustration • Anger • Anxiety • Excitement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Watch for signs of rising frustration and potential conflict. ◆ Intercept a potentially harmful incident by responding to children's needs promptly. ◆ Help children identify feelings ◆ NEVER tell a child they are fine, when crying/seem upset |
| <p>Environmental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overstimulation • Boredom • Overcrowding • Developmentally Inappropriate Expectations • Scheduling Issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provide adequate number and variety of toys and activities. ◆ Have small places for toddlers to go to be alone ◆ Have duplicates of toys and do not expect toddlers to share ◆ Allow for consistent yet individual schedules ◆ Don't rush the schedule ◆ Go outside daily |

SOURCE: Dodge, 2006

What can you do in the moment that your child bites?

1. Quickly yet calmly remove your child from the one he has bitten. Calmly, clearly and firmly say, "Stop. No biting. Biting hurts." Show and explain the effect of the bite on the other child.
2. Focus most of your attention on the child who was bitten. Helping to soothe the child teaches empathy. Avoid trying to get your child to apologize.
3. Acknowledge your child's feelings. "You are frustrated. Let's find another way. You could ask, can I have that?"
4. When your child is calm, teach him/her other ways to express his/her needs or desires. It might be helpful to role play scenarios where your child can practice saying "Stop" or "Help."

What to do when biting continues?

- * Be patient
- * Shadow or stay within arm's distance of your child during playtime
- * Talk to others who care for your child about observations made and strategies used
- * Provide your child with education about teeth and what teeth are for
- * Read books about biting. Some suggestions are:
 - Teeth are Not for Biting* by Elizabeth Verdick
 - No Biting* by Karen Katz
 - No Biting, Louise* by Margie Palatini

WHAT NOT TO DO!

- Don't bite back!** Biting a child to show them what it feels like creates confusion and fear. It also teaches that biting is an acceptable problem-solving method.
- Don't use harsh punishment!** Yelling, scolding, and physical punishment increase anxiety and fear and might cause more biting.



SOURCES

- Supporting Infants and Toddlers with Challenging Behavior* by Lisa Fox, PhD. 2005 — www.challengingbehavior.org
- Why Do Children Misbehave* by Penn State Better Kid Care Program; October 2004— betterkidcare.psu.edu
- Coping with Difficult Behavior* by Positive Parenting Program of the University of Queensland; 2005
- Responding to Your Child's Bite—* www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel
- Creative Curriculum for Infants & Toddlers*—Dodge, Rudick & Berke; 2006

SOURCE: www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel

For Early Childhood Professionals

Sharing the Magic

- ◆ Expect to be part of the team
- ◆ Become the best observer you can be
- ◆ Make it your job to know typical development
- ◆ Identify parents as the essential partners in the process
- ◆ Improve your communication skills
- ◆ Share your information/ideas with all team members
- ◆ Remember that you are an early childhood professional



Understanding the Power You Have

- By building a positive relationship with families
- By understanding the connection between developmental sequence and reading a child's cues
- By making decisions about your style of interaction and the environment you create
- By taking advantage of teachable moments

Observe children with the same care and objectivity that you would want from someone observing you.

Approaching Parents

- * Think about what is working
- * Describe what the child does or is unable to do, not what the child is
- * Ask the family what they see
- * Listen to & acknowledge each person's concerns
- * Share what works/what doesn't
- * Inquire about their solutions and strategies
- * Empower the family rather than create dependence
- * Maintain confidentiality
- * Know community resources
- * Communicate frequently with families
- * Think about how you feel when people are discussing personal things about you and/ or your children.
- * Invite families to be involved
- * Families need ideas they can use in their daily lives
- * Families need to be heard, their ideas, views, FEARS and HOPES

Looking for more copies of this bulletin? You can find it on our ECDC website or contact us.

Workshops of Interest

ECDC can provide information and workshops on a variety of topics tailored to the interests and needs of parents and early childhood professionals. Resources are available on such topics as general child development, developmental issues for children with special needs, coping strategies, and specific disabilities.

Workshops include:

- Including All Kids
- Making Parent Partnerships
- Early Childhood Development: The Meaning of Red Flags
- Positive Guidance and Behavior Strategies
- Moving On: Children and Families Facing Transition
- What Are Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education?
- What is an Individualized Education Program (IEP)?
- Getting Ready for Kindergarten

Who We Are

The Early Childhood Direction Center (ECDC) is a regional technical assistance center for the NSY Office of Special Education under EMSC providing information, referral and support to families, professionals, and community agencies concerned with young children birth to five. We are located at Syracuse University's Center on Human Policy, Law and Disability Studies.

ECDC services are free and confidential.

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While we teach our children, they teach us.



30 Years
Caring for All Children