



Promoting Positive Behavior

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Fostering positive behavior - and responding to challenging behavior - are among the biggest challenges for early educators. But you can be successful if you start with one assumption: children do things (even very problematic things!) for a reason. They are trying to communicate something, trying to get their needs met. We begin to understand how to work with behavior issues when we look at the behavior from the child's point of view. Children don't automatically know how to behave appropriately. It's the adults' job to teach them the skills and behaviors that will help them meet their needs in positive ways. This understanding is essential to working effectively with children's behavior, but a positive attitude is not enough. Fortunately, the early care and education field has developed many specific, effective techniques both for fostering positive behavior and for responding to challenging behavior.



POSITIVE BEHAVIOR: ENVIRONMENT

- Activity areas clearly defined, with enough space.
- Appropriate materials available to the children.
- Groups small enough so children are not overwhelmed.
- Pleasant and calm environment free of clutter and over-stimulation.
- A comforting, quiet space where a child can go when feeling upset.
- Are there particular areas where problems tend to occur? How might you change these to reduce problems?

POSITIVE BEHAVIOR: PROGRAM

- Activities that are interesting, fun, and appropriately challenging.
- Realistic, age-appropriate expectations for children's behavior (e.g. Don't expect three-year olds to sit still and pay attention for half an hour).
- Plenty of time for children to direct their own activity.
- A predictable but flexible routine—it calms some children to have a picture schedule posted so they can see what comes next.
- Transitions carefully planned, with children warned before an activity ends.

POSITIVE BEHAVIOR: RELATIONSHIPS

- Warm, enjoyable interactions between children and adults.
- Positive, respectful relationships with families and co-workers.
- Children's cultures and languages reflected.

To learn more:

4Cs offers workshops on many topics, including children's behavior.
See our training calendar at
www.4calameda.org/

TRY TO UNDERSTAND THE BEHAVIOR

Since a child's challenging behavior is an attempt to communicate, your first step is to figure out what she is "saying."

- **Observe closely:** What specific behavior is the problem? When and where does it occur?
 - **Reflect:** What could be the child's reason for this behavior?
 - **Brainstorm possible solutions:** Is there a change you could make in the environment, or support you could give the child, that might resolve the problem?
 - **Discuss** your observations and ideas with other adults.
 - **Try something!** Then reflect on how it worked.
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TEACH SOCIAL SKILLS

You can help children respond appropriately by teaching them behaviors they can use in challenging situations.

- Read and discuss books that illustrate problems and solutions.
- Use dolls or puppets to demonstrate challenging situations and ask children to brainstorm solutions.
- Explain steps for problem-solving (stop, take a deep breath, think, etc.) and conflict resolution. Model and practice these steps.
- Monitor the children's activities. When you see a potential problem developing, remind children about these steps.
- Give positive feedback.

A GREAT RESOURCE:

"The Social/Emotional Teaching Pyramid," a program of the Center on the Social/Emotional Foundations of Early Learning, is a comprehensive system for understanding and implementing effective strategies for promoting social/emotional development and positive behavior. Materials and tools are available at:
<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/index.html>

WORK ON UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF

Understanding your own beliefs and emotions is essential to working effectively with children's behavior. Areas you might want to explore include:

- Your own temperament and learning style and how those are reflected in the way you work with children.
 - Your own beliefs about behavior, discipline, and expectations.
 - Similarities and differences between your language and cultural background and those of the children and families with whom you work.
 - What behaviors you find most challenging and why.
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TRY REDIRECTION

Point out an alternative, acceptable way for the child to do what she seems to want. If he's throwing a kickball indoors, substitute a beanbag. If she's grabbing a stuffed dog from another child, give her a stuffed cat and suggest that the cat and dog play together. If the dramatic play area is already full, suggest another activity and set a time when he will be able to participate in dramatic play.

USE APPROPRIATE CONSEQUENCES

"Consequence" should not be just a nice word for "punishment," but a reasonable solution.

- Removing a child from the activity makes sense if she is behaving in a way that harms other children, such as grabbing toys or throwing blocks. You can help her find a different activity that she enjoys.
- "Time out" makes sense when a child is angry or upset and needs to calm down. Instead of a chair in a corner, you could provide a quiet, comfortable space with books and stuffed animals. Be sure to follow up with conversation when the child is calm.