Helping Parents & Caregivers Understand, Prevent and Respond to Infant/Toddler & Young Children’s Challenging Behaviors

26th NIHSDA Management Training Conference
Neal Horen, PhD, Georgetown University
June 7, 2016

School readiness begins with health!
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 in Infants and Toddlers
• Engaging Parents as Full Partners – What do the HSPPS say?
• Preventing Challenging Behavior
• Addressing Challenging Behavior
A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

CSEFEL Definition of Social Emotional Development

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
CSEFEL Pyramid Model

When it Works Well
Video Reflection Discussion

• How did she use her relationship with the parent to help the child?
• How might the parent have felt as a result of this situation?
• How do you in your program engage parents to bring in their culture and caregiving practices into your work with their children?
• How might this interaction prevent challenging behavior?

Understanding Behavior Has 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
Understanding Behavior Has Meaning: Behavior Expresses...

- 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

- **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
Understanding Challenging Behavior

What we are referring to when we say “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

What we are referring to when we say “challenging behavior”?

• Defined by caregiver.
• Challenges caregivers sense of competence
What is Challenging Behavior?

• Intensity
• Frequency
• Duration
Video Discussion

• What might this behavior be communicating?

• How do you think this parent feels?

• What might help the parent feel better?

Continuum of Emotional Expression

Social Withdrawing..................................Acting Out

*Two different and extreme forms of emotional expression*
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, babbling or talking
- Looking sad
- Not showing preference for caregiver
- Not making eye contact
- Whining
- Being overly complaint or avoidant with caregiver
- Diminished efforts to use communications skills that have previously been used
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 emotions in check

Preventing Challenging Behaviors

- Build communication skills
  - Use language; gestures; read books, sing songs, chat and tell stories
- Observe and notice clues
  - Sounds; language; facial expressions; eye gaze; actions
- Think about 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
Debrief

• What did this teacher do to promote children’s positive behavior/prevent the development further challenging behavior?

• What could she do to further develop these children’s social emotional skills?

“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)
Challenging Behavior as 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

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?
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?

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
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

Ways to Support Parents
Its 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: Do’s and Don’ts
Module 3
Handout 3.7
Summary 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?

For More Information, Please Contact:

Deitra L. Nealy-Shane
dln39@georgetown.edu
National Center on Health Contact Information

Toll-Free: 888-227-5125

Email: nchinfo@aap.org

Website: http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/center
## Talking with Families about Problem Behavior: Do’s and Don’ts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do</th>
<th>Don’t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Share strengths of child with the family.</td>
<td>1. Begin the discussion by indicating that the child’s behavior is not tolerable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Let the family know you are feeling concerned and want to do all you can to help their child feel safe, happy, and successful in your setting</td>
<td>2. Indicate that the child must be punished or “dealt with” by the parent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategies for Responding to Infant and Toddlers’ Challenging Behavior and Supporting Infant and Toddlers’ Social Emotional Development

Social Emotional Development Goal

Help Child to:
- Experience, regulate and express emotions
- Form close and secure interpersonal relationships
- Explore the environment and learn

All Strategies for Responding to Infant and Toddler Challenging Behavior Should Meet the Following Criteria:
- Acknowledge distress
- Offer comfort
- Use words
- Be attuned to (or in sync with) the child’s individualized needs
- Help the child achieve the understood intention
- Be developmentally appropriate

Example Strategies:

**Systematic strategies**
- Observe to understand the meaning of the behavior
- Track and document frequency, duration, and intensity
- Chart time of day behavior occurs
- Use self reflection to appropriately respond to behavior
- Share reflections/access thoughts and opinions of others
- Attempt to understand and empathize with the child’s experience
- Monitor progress of social emotional skill development and concerning behavior reduction

**Strategies to soothe**
- Shush (e.g. saying, “shhhhhhhhh, shhhhhhh”), white noise (e.g. running a vacuum cleaner, white noise machine, or hair dryer)
- Rock
- Hold, carry, use slings or carriers to keep child close to one’s body
- Hold baby on side or stomach
- Outside time, fresh air
- Sing
- Encourage sucking (pacifier, fingers)
- Swaddle
- Encourage transitional objects of comfort (e.g. blankets, dolls, stuffed toy, etc.)
- Stay calm
- Stay physically close
Module 3  Handout 3.8 Strategies for Challenging Behaviors

Modify Environment and Interactions
• Reduce and/or minimize number of caregivers
• Make adjustments based on child’s temperament (e.g. offer more time for a slow-to-warm up child; offer more physical activity for an active child)
• Make appropriate environmental changes (e.g. reduce stimulation, increase stimulation
• Shadow child (e.g. for a limited time provide as much one-on-one attention and monitoring as possible)
• Provide extra time and attention including touch

Provide increased predictability and consistency
• Stick to consistent routines (e.g. diaper the same way in the same place using the same language; read books before nap)
• Use consistent simple words (e.g. “Food?; You want food?”; “Look with your eyes”)  
• Develop a plan of action/responses and stick to plan
• Set limited clear consistent limits (e.g. “No biting”; “gentle touch”)

Model, coach, teach appropriate behavior (e.g. “This is a gentle touch”; “Feel the gentle touch”) 
• Teach sign language or gesture for common words
• Validate child’s feelings and/or experience (use exaggerated facial expression, tone of voice and gestures to mirror the child’s emotion) 
• Phrase demands in the affirmative (“Bottom on the chair”; “Feet on the floor”) 
• Notice when child is engaging in desired behavior (“You gave Sam a turn with that toy”) 
• Recognize positive behavior (“That’s nice touching”; “You’re so calm now.” “You pointed to the toy”) 
• Label child’s and others’ emotional experience (“You look sad.”; “Tyrus looks so angry”) 
• Use books to illustrate emotions and social skills (e.g. Hands are Not for Hitting; Teeth Are Not for Biting; etc.)

Use distraction (“Let’s play with this toy instead”) 
• Offer substitute behavior (“you can bite this apple” “you can bite this teething ring”;)

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning  Vanderbilt University vanderbilt.edu/csefel