
 **NATIONAL CENTER ON**  
Early Childhood Health and Wellness



## 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!*

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Neal Horen, PhD, Georgetown University  
[horenn@georgetown.edu](mailto:horenn@georgetown.edu)  
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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 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



clip 1.6

## 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

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## 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



## Understanding Challenging Behavior

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

- Defined by caregiver.
- Challenges caregivers sense of competence





## What is Challenging Behavior?



*istockphoto.com/Rebecca Ellis*

- 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)



Module 3
Handout 3.7: Do's and Don'ts

### Talking with Families about Problem Behavior: Do's and Don'ts

Do	Don't
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Begin the discussion by expressing concern about the child.</li> <li>2. Let the parent know that your goal is to help the child.</li> <li>3. Ask the parent if he or she has experienced similar situations and are concerned.</li> <li>4. Tell the parent that you want to work with the family to help the child develop appropriate behavior and social skills.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>8. Stress that if you can work together, you are more likely to be successful in helping the child learn new skills.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Begin the discussion by indicating that the child's behavior is not tolerable.</li> <li>2. Indicate that the child must be punished or "dealt with" by the parent.</li> <li>3. Ask the parent if something has happened at home to cause the behavior.</li> <li>4. Indicate that the parent should take action to resolve the problem at home.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>6. Leave it up to the parent to manage problems at home; develop a plan without inviting family participation.</li> <li>7. Let the parent believe that the child needs more discipline.</li> <li>8. Minimize the importance of helping the family understand and implement positive behavior support.</li> </ol>



The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning  
Vanderbilt University

www.nceh.wisc.edu

## 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](mailto:dln39@georgetown.edu)



## National Center on Health Contact Information

Toll-Free: [888-227-5125](tel:888-227-5125)

Email: [nchinfo@aap.org](mailto: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

<b>Do</b>	<b>Don't</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Share strengths of child with the family.</li> <li>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</li> <li>3. Ask the parent if he or she has experienced similar situations and are concerned.</li> <li>4. Tell the parent that you want to work with the family to help the child develop appropriate behavior and social skills.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>8. Stress that if you can work together, you are more likely to be successful in helping the child learn new skills.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Begin the discussion by indicating that the child's behavior is not tolerable.</li> <li>2. Indicate that the child must be punished or "dealt with" by the parent.</li> <li>3. Ask the parent if something has happened at home to cause the behavior.</li> <li>4. Indicate that the parent should take action to resolve the problem at home.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>6. Leave it up to the parent to manage problems at home; develop a plan without inviting family participation.</li> <li>7. Let the parent believe that the child needs more discipline.</li> <li>8. Minimize the importance of helping the family understand and implement positive behavior support.</li> </ol>

## 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

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#### 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, "shhhhhhhhhh, shhhhhhhh"), 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



**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 a 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";)