



NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Health and Wellness



Understanding and Effectively Responding to Young Children's Challenging Behaviors

36th Native American Child and Family Conference

Sunyoung Ahn, PhD. Georgetown University

March 15, 2017

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

- What is Challenging Behavior?
- Understanding Behavior
- Preventing Challenging Behavior
- Shifting Perspective
- Responding to Behavior
- Supporting Families

What Is Challenging Behavior?



[istockphoto.com/Rebecca Ellis](https://www.istockphoto.com/Rebecca_Ellis)

- 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



Understanding Behaviors Have Meaning: Behavior Expresses...

- “I want something.”
- “I want to escape from something.”



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?

Michael Video

3.2 Pyramid Model



NATIONAL CENTER ON

Early Childhood Health and Wellness

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?

Challenging Behavior as the Tip of the Iceberg



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

Shifting Perspective



Shifting Perspective





clip 2.3

Responding to the Behavior: What Can We Do?

- In the moment?
 - What did this 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

Video Preschool 2.14



NATIONAL CENTER ON

Early Childhood Health and Wellness

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

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

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:

Sunyoung Ahn, PhD.

sa1442@georgetown.edu



NATIONAL CENTER ON

Early Childhood Health and Wellness

National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness

Toll-Free: 888-227-5125

Email: health@ecetta.info

Website: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/center>