



How to Plan Activities to Reduce Challenging Behavior

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Unfortunately, there is no “Guidebook for Parents” that tells you exactly how to raise children who behave perfectly at all times. Each child and family is unique, which means that there is no one solution or strategy that is going to work for everyone, every time. However, while it isn’t magic, simple planning ahead can work wonders to help improve your child’s behavior. You can plan activities to teach your child important skills such as sharing, taking turns or handling disappointment. You can also plan ahead to prepare your child for new events in her life such as changes in her schedule, a road trip, a new baby or a visit from grandparents.

For example, Abby is three years old and is usually happy at preschool where she loves to draw and play with the doll house. However, at home when Abby plays one-on-one with another child, she often ends up throwing toys, screaming “Mine!” or crying. What can Abby’s mom do? Instead of always “managing” these outbursts, she can intentionally plan activities to teach Abby the skills of sharing and taking turns. She can also plan activities that give Abby an opportunity to practice these new skills.

we share our toys. I know how special doggy is to you. We could put doggy in a safe place and you do not have to share her.”



- **Hope for the best but plan for the worst!** If you know that your child might have problems when playing with other children, stay nearby so that you can intervene if needed. You might also provide two sets of an identical toy (e.g., two bubbles or two balls) and then offer a change in location to play to diffuse difficult situations.

Backpack Connection Series

About this Series

The Backpack Connection Series was created by TACSEI to provide a way for teachers and parents/caregivers to work together to help young children develop social emotional skills and reduce challenging behavior. Teachers may choose to send a handout home in each child’s backpack when a new strategy or skill is introduced to the class. Each Backpack Connection handout provides information that helps parents stay informed about what their child is learning at school and specific ideas on how to use the strategy or skill at home.

The Pyramid Model

The Pyramid Model is a framework that provides programs with guidance on how to promote social emotional competence in all children and design effective interventions that support young children who might have persistent challenging behavior. It also provides practices to ensure that children with social emotional delays receive intentional teaching. Programs that implement the Pyramid Model are eager to work together with families to meet every child’s individualized learning and support needs. To learn more about the Pyramid Model, please visit ChallengingBehavior.org.

More Information

More information and resources on this and other topics are available on our website, ChallengingBehavior.org.

Try This at Home

- **Tell your child exactly what to do.** Telling your child to “share” or “be nice” does not actually tell her what she should be doing. For example, if Abby throws her toys, her mom can say, “Abby, toys stay on the floor or on your lap.” If Abby hits her friend, her mom can say, “Hands down. Hands are for playing, eating, and hugging. Use your words. You can say, ‘I am angry. Help please.’”
- **Use a Visual Schedule.** A visual schedule will help her to understand what is expected. To learn more about visual schedules, read the *How to Use Visual Schedules to Help Your Child Understand Expectations* handout in the Backpack Connection Series.
- **Practice, practice, practice.** Intentionally create situations where she can practice the desired behavior. For example, Abby’s mom can help Abby learn to take turns while playing with her sister or an older friend. She can ask Abby’s sister to “help teach Abby to take turns” while playing with one doll. Abby’s mom provides the toy and reminds the girls to take turns when playing. The girls can practice the skill of sharing during their time together.
- **Catch your child being good!** When your child is using the desired behavior, you can encourage her by responding with enthusiasm. For example, “Wow, I saw you share the sand toys at the park with those two girls. What a great friend you are!”
- **Prepare your child before an event.** For example, Abby’s mom can say, “Abby, your friend Ella is coming over to play today. When friends come over,

Practice at School

School offers many opportunities for children to practice social skills and learn emotional vocabulary. Teachers can set up art or quiet activities where children have the opportunity to practice sharing, learning to wait and taking turns. As children interact with each other, teachers provide positive language. For example, “Abby, I see that you are pointing to the red marker. You can tap Jacob on the shoulder and say, ‘Can I have a turn?’” After the interaction, the teacher provides the children with encouragement. For example, “Way to go! Class, Abby and Jacob are working together. They are sharing and taking turns!” Teachers can also use daily schedule changes to teach the skill of handling disappointment. For example, “Oh no, Miss Marcie is not here today. We won’t be able to go to music. I am really disappointed. What should we do?” At this point, the children can learn to problem-solve and come up with a positive solution.

The Bottom Line

Much of the frustration that parents experience can be avoided by planning ahead and teaching children a desired behavior before a difficult situation occurs. When you are unprepared for your child’s challenging behavior, such as whining or temper tantrums, you might respond with anger or in other ways that make the situation worse. Remember that you are in control of the daily schedule and routine. If your child is having problems with activities such as play with others, drop-off at school, or bedtime, you can plan activities that will give her the opportunity to learn the social skills she needs. Planning ahead can reduce challenging behavior such as meltdowns, whining and temper tantrums and increase desired behavior such as flexibility, using words and patience. Planning activities that teach skills such as sharing and taking turns will provide her with the tools she needs to increase self-esteem and be successful in school and life.



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This publication was produced by the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention (TACSEI) for Young Children funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), U.S. Department of Education (H326807002) and updated by the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations also funded by OSEP (H3268170003). The views expressed do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the Department of Education. July 2013/January, 2018.



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