



# COFFEE CHAT #4- DETERMINING THE MEANING OF YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR: FACILITATION GUIDE AND ACTIVITY DETAILS



## LET'S TALK ABOUT BEHAVIOUR

As a parent or caregiver, you may see your child behave in a way that doesn't make sense and ask yourself, "Why does she keep doing that?" It can be very frustrating, especially when it seems like it should be easy for your child to figure out on her own a more appropriate way to behave. In moments like this, it is important to remember that children continue to use a behavior because it works! Your child's behavior is a powerful communication tool that she uses to tell you what she needs or wants. Sometimes, when a child does not know the appropriate way (such as words, sign language or pointing to pictures) to express her needs or wants she may use challenging behavior (such as hitting, screaming or spitting) to communicate. Challenging behavior gives children the ability to send a message in a fast and powerful way. Children will use challenging behavior to communicate until they learn new, more appropriate ways to express their wants and needs. To change the behavior, it is important for you to first discover what is causing the behavior. If you know why your child is choosing a behavior, you can then teach her to communicate her wants and needs in a new way that everyone feels good about.



## UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF BEHAVIOUR

Most of the time, children use challenging behavior to either: 1) get something, such as attention, a toy or a nap, or, 2) get out of doing something, such as going to bed, eating a new food or getting buckled in the car seat.

The first step you must take to help your child learn a new behavior is to determine if she wants something or wants to avoid doing something.

*As a facilitator, spend some time going over the ABCs (Antecedent, Behaviour, Consequence) of behaviour using the Determining Behaviour Motivation Handout.*

*Go through some of the examples on the Behaviour Examples Handout/ Answer Key (discuss if the child was avoiding or escaping something, show parents how they can break down behaviour using ABC Chart)*

*Point out Observation Chart and ABC Chart as ways parents can begin recording their own child's behaviours.*

## SHARE HANDOUTS

Make copies of the handouts included in your Kit Box. These include several Backpack Series pages on determining and managing behaviour and pages they can use to document and determine the meaning of their own child's behaviours.



# UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF BEHAVIOUR

## DISCUSSION POINTS

Understanding the meaning of your child's behaviour can be one of the hardest aspects of parenting. Join us as we look at ways you can learn to interpret reasons why children do what they do and equip you with some strategies you can try at home.

### DATE AND PLACE

Join us at the daycare

## ACTIVITIES



### REVIEW COMMON BEHAVIOUR SCENARIOS

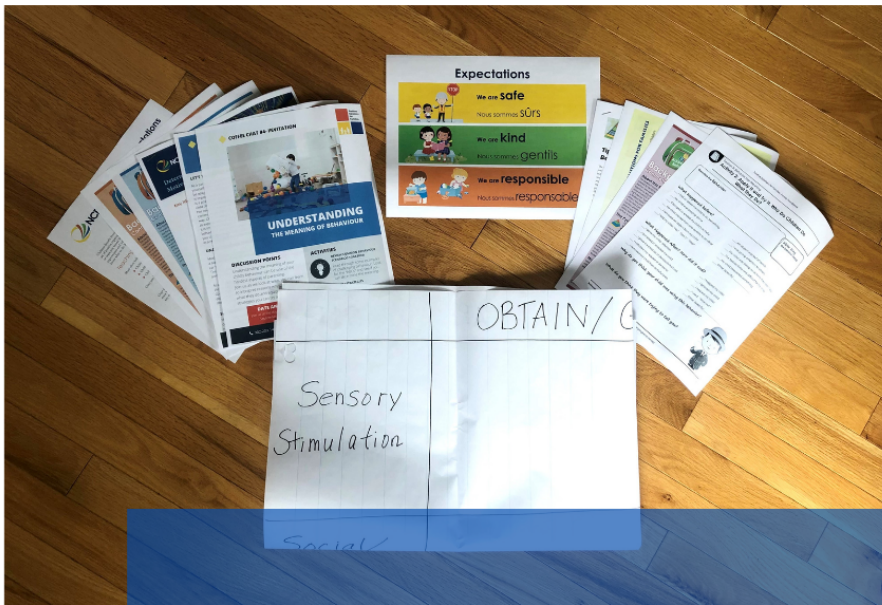
Read through some examples of challenging behaviour. Look for the 'ABCs' and see if you can determine the meaning.



### FORM STRATEGIES

Once the meaning of the behaviour has been determined, think about some ways to help prevent it.

# ◆ COFFEE CHAT #4- MATERIALS LIST



## COFFEE CHAT #4 MATERIALS LIST

### **MATERIALS NEEDED**

**Printed copies of invitation to distribute to guests**

#### **Determining the Meaning of Behaviour Activity**

- For this activity, you will need to review the handouts on how to help determine the meaning of a child's behaviour. There are several in your Kit Box and it will be important that you take some time to review them so you'll be better able to help parents be detectives for their own child's behaviour (Handouts 1-9).
- You can then use Handouts 10 & 11 along with the chart paper and marker (also included in your Kit Box) to go through behaviour examples together as a group to try and determine the functioning of each behaviour example.
- Your Kit Box also includes a one-pager that can help identify the purpose of a child's behaviour- Handout #12. You may want to print off some copies of this handout to go through some examples brought up by the group throughout the session.

**Printed copies of all handouts**



**Expectations**

**We are safe**  
Nous sommes sûrs

**We are kind**  
Nous sommes gentils

**We are responsible**  
Nous sommes responsables



**Back to School**


**Activity 2: Apply / appliquez / Try it / Essayez**

**What Happened Before?**

**What Happened After? How did it end?**

**Why do you think your child was using this behavior?**

**What do you think they were trying to tell you?**



**COFFEE CHAT #4 - INVITATION**

**UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF BEHAVIOUR**

**DISCUSSION POINTS**

**ACTIVITIES**

**REVIEW YOUR TOGETHER**

**DATE AND TIME**

**NCI**

OBTAINING

Sensory Stimulation

Social



# Determining Behaviour Motivation

## Key Ideas to Remember:

- ▶ Behavior is a form of communication
- ▶ Behavior has meaning - signifying wants, needs, likes, and dislikes
- ▶ Behavior is motivated

Behavior can mean many things and is one way a child communicates their wants and needs; their likes and dislikes. Collecting data about what's happening when the behavior occurs can help you understand the meaning of the behavior. A key part of this is identifying the motivation behind the behavior. You are taking your best *guess* about what the child is trying to communicate. You are trying to answer the question, 'Why did the behavior occur?' in order to put the right strategies in place to support that child.

## Identifying the “Why?”

Motivation can be determined by looking at what happens during or immediately after the behavior incident. You might ask yourself these questions:

- ▶ What did an adult do during and after the behavior?
- ▶ What did peers do during and after the behavior?
- ▶ Is there an object (ex: a toy) involved? What happens with the object?  
Does the child keep it or is it removed?
- ▶ Did the child get to play with something?
- ▶ Did the child complete the instructions or task?
- ▶ Did the child get out of the task?

The motivation can be divided into two general categories: the child gains something or avoids/escapes something. When a child avoids something, they prevent it from happening. For example, the child will not go to circle or will not clean up. The child has avoided circle or cleaning up – at least temporarily.

Escape means that the child is already doing something, and the challenging behavior allows them to get to stop doing it. For example, the child is already in circle but leaves it or the child begins to clean up but then begins to play with some of the toys.

<b>Obtains</b>	<b>Avoids (Escapes)</b>
Adult Attention/comfort or peer attention	Adults or peer
Desired Item or Activity	Task
Sensory	Sensory

### Remember:

- ▶ What happens during and after the behavior occurs indicates the possible motivation for the behavior
- ▶ You are making your best guess – you don't have to know for sure to complete the motivation section of the checklist.

Below are examples of behaviors you may see in an early childhood classroom. As you read through the examples, you will notice that some of the behaviors are positive behaviors that we look for children to demonstrate. However, there is still a 'possible motivation' that goes along with that behavior. All behavior has a motivation.

<b>Behavior</b>	<b>What happens during/after the behavior</b>	<b>Possible Motivation(s)</b>
1. Child asks for a toy from peer	Peer gives child toy	Obtains desired item
2. Child hits peer and takes toy	Child plays with toy	Obtains desired item and activity
3. Child asks for help	You talk to child and provide help	Obtains adult attention/comfort
4. Child jumps around in circle	Peers laugh You redirect child to sit	Obtains peer attention Obtains adult attention Obtains sensory (jumping)
5. Child continues to play after given a direction to cleanup.	Child continues playing while others are cleaning. You do nothing	Obtains desired activity (playing) Avoids task (cleanup)
6. Child continues to play after given a direction to cleanup	Child sits in chair where you have moved him without any toys.	Avoids/Escapes task (cleanup)
7. Child refuses to go to small group.	You sit with child, remind them of the rules, and continue instruction to go to small group.	Avoids task (small group) Obtains adult attention
8. Child grabs peer's snack	Child eats snack. Peer yells.	Obtains desired item (food) Obtains peer attention
9. Child cries at sand table.	Other children leave.	Avoid peers Obtains desired activity (playing with all toys at sand table)
10. Child cries at sand table	You comfort child.	Obtains adult attention

Sometimes more than one thing happens during or immediately after the behavior, as seen in Examples 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9. How do you choose a motivation then? You make your best guess about the primary possible motivation.



## Make your best guess!

### How do you do that?

Let's first discuss Example 4. In Example 4, consider the context of the situation.

For example:

- ▶ What else was the child doing that might indicate the motivation?
  - Were they watching the peers laugh? Were they laughing or smiling with them? Did they talk to the peers?
  - Was the child more interested in you or another teacher? Were they looking at the adult(s)? Did they turn to the adult when redirected to sit? Talk to the adult?
- ▶ Did the child seem to be more focused on jumping rather than other people?

You are identifying a *possible* motivation. You aren't expected to be perfect. So, think about it and make your best guess. This "guess" will improve over time as you see more instances of this behavior. For example, the child may jump around even when the children aren't laughing. The child may look or smile at you or another adult in the classroom while jumping around, indicating the motivation is adult attention. Alternatively, the child may talk to the other children, smile, and laugh at them, indicating the motivation is peer attention. As the behavior occurs more often, your observations should begin to be more precise. What happens after the behavior occurs becomes clearer. But, if it doesn't, that's okay. This is not data collected for an individualized intervention. This is still your best guess.

Example 5 describes a situation that may often occur in an early childhood classroom. The child is both obtaining and avoiding something, but you want to try to identify the stronger possible motivation. You might ask:

- ▶ Is the child engrossed in play or playing a little and watching others clean up? Being engrossed with the object and playing might indicate the motivation is gaining an activity.
- ▶ What happens if you take the object away and redirect the child to cleanup? Escalation of challenging behavior by trying to get the desired object may indicate the motivation is more likely to be gaining an object or activity.
- ▶ Does the child stop playing as soon as cleanup is complete? Reengaging in classroom activities after cleanup may indicate that the motivation is avoiding cleaning up.

### In Summary:

1. Look at and think about what happens during and immediately after the behavior. You will find the motivation there.
2. If there is more than one thing that happens, think about the one that seems to be the strongest or has most of the child's attention.
3. Make your best guess.



## Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children

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The Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children, also known as TACSEI, is a five-year grant made possible by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. TACSEI takes the research that shows which practices improve the social-emotional outcomes for young children with, or at risk for, delays or disabilities and creates FREE products and resources to help decision-makers, caregivers, and service providers apply these best practices in the work they do every day.



[www.challengingbehavior.org](http://www.challengingbehavior.org)



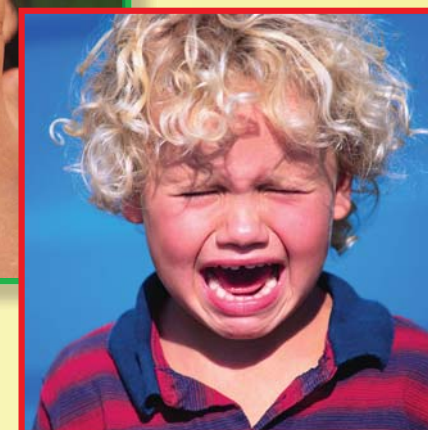
September 2006

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## POSITIVE SOLUTIONS FOR FAMILIES

### Eight Practical Tips for Parents of Young Children with Challenging Behavior

*by Matt Timm and Jill Giacomini*



Has life with your young child become filled with conflict and confusion? Does it seem as if even the simplest activity can turn quickly into disaster when your child's behavior is out of control? Are you beginning to feel as if things are getting worse instead of better? You're not alone. Many, if not most, parents find themselves struggling with the challenging behavior of their young child at some point in time. The good news is that there are evidence-based, effective strategies based on what the child is communicating that you can use to create positive solutions for your family.

Adapted with permission from "Strategies That Help" Copyright © 2000 Regional Intervention Program







### How to Use This List

Review each of the tips below and think about situations you have experienced that are similar to the provided examples. You will need to decide which strategies are likely to work best for your family. You might want to try one or two of the strategies at first and then add others as you become more comfortable with the process. Remember, the idea is to develop specific approaches for your own family that can be used in everyday life.

### Tip #1: Keep Your Expectations Realistic

It is important for you to know and understand your child's abilities and limitations. When you expect too much or too little from your child it can lead to problems and frustrations for you both.

~You are in a restaurant with a group of friends. The waiter took your order over 30 minutes ago and your food still hasn't arrived. 2 1/2 year-old Simone is getting impatient—she is throwing her crayons and saying that she wants down. Instead of getting angry and frustrated with her for acting up, try taking her for a short walk to give her and others a needed break.~

### Tip #2: Plan Ahead

Try to anticipate what your child may do or need in various situations. Make sure that you plan ahead to help your child have a successful experience. Hope for the best, but plan for the worst. Always have a back-up plan!

~Your family is in the car headed to your mother's house for dinner. It is usually a short drive,

but rush-hour traffic is snarled, it's 6:30 pm, and you're already 45 minutes late. Your 3 year-old is screaming for food in the backseat. Luckily, you remembered to bring some snacks and a sippy cup of water to hold him over until you can make it home~

### Tip #3: Clearly State Your Expectations in Advance

Some undesirable behavior occurs because your child can't act differently, other times it occurs because your child simply doesn't want to act differently. Either way it helps for you to remember that your child cannot read your mind. Be sure to give your child one clear instruction so that he knows what it is that you want him to do.

~You are visiting at your sister's house and your daughter has been playing with her favorite cousin. Over the course of the afternoon, toys have been tossed aside and scattered throughout the room. When you say, "Come on Alicia, it's time to get ready to go!" she ignores you completely and continues to play. A better approach might be to say, "All right, time to get going. Alicia, let's start by putting the blocks in their box. I see it over there in the corner!"~

### Tip #4: Offer Limited, Reasonable Choices

Most children are not born with the built-in ability to make decisions and then accept the consequences. In order for your child to learn to take personal responsibility they will need plenty of support and practice.

~You have just picked up your son at childcare and he doesn't want to get into his car seat. You sense a battle of the wills coming on. One way to avoid a struggle might be to say, "Zachary, we can't start the car until you get buckled in your seat. Do you want to climb up in there yourself, or do you want Daddy to put you in?"~

### Tip #5: Use "When...Then" Statements

A "when...then" statement is a simple instruction that tells your child what he or she must do in order to earn a desired consequence (what he/she wants to do). This is also known as a contingency statement.

When you use a contingency statement, be sure you:

- ✓ Give it a positive focus
- ✓ State it only once
- ✓ Set a reasonable time limit
- ✓ Follow through
- ✓ Are prepared for your child's response—it may be "NO"

~It's a sunny day and your barefoot child has decided she would like to go out in the backyard and play. She starts outside and you stop her and say, "No...put on your shoes." She starts to throw a tantrum. Here's an alternative approach you might want to use next time. "When you put on your shoes, then you may go outside". You are not just saying "No". You are letting her know what needs to happen in order for her to reach her desired destination.~

### Tip #6: Catch Your Child Being Good

Did you ever stop to think about how much time you spend telling your child what he should not do? Instead, try giving specific, positive attention to the behavior that you want to see. This will teach your child what you want him to do and increase the likelihood that this behavior will occur again and again.

~You are enjoying a remarkably calm family meal. Instead of waiting for your 4 year-old to begin fidgeting, trying to leave, or stuff green beans down his shirt, you look at him and exclaim, "Manuel, it makes Daddy so happy to see you eating your dinner like a big boy!"~

### Tip #7: Stay Calm

When your child's behavior is unacceptable, you can choose to either respond to it or ignore it. If you decide that a reaction is required, remember that the least response necessary is



usually best. Acting calm with a minimum of attention will reduce the risk of strengthening the very behavior you wish to discourage. When you remain calm, it also gives you time to think about how you want to respond. Remember, you are modeling desired behavior for your child—the more out-of-control your child becomes, the more self-control you need to show. When you remain calm your child learns appropriate ways to respond to difficult situations.

~You are cleaning your house in preparation for your in-laws' annual visit. You go in the kitchen for just a moment and return to your family room to find that your 2 year-old son has colored on a white wall with red and blue crayons. Your immediate reaction is to respond negatively. However, you think twice, take a deep breath and say, "Christopher, paper is for coloring, Mommy's walls are not," and buckle him in his high chair where he can continue to create his art on paper. ~

### Tip #8: Use Neutral Time

Neutral time cannot be found in the middle of a difficult situation filled with strong feelings. Instead, neutral time is when everyone is calm enough to think and talk and listen. It's important to remember that neutral time can occur either before or after a child's unacceptable behavior occurs. You can talk about what happened earlier and talk about positive ways to handle problems in the future. The challenge is to identify neutral time and make use of these opportunities.

~You are sitting on the sofa reading books with your daughter when you look up at the clock and realize it is 7:30—bedtime is approaching fast. Getting Emma to brush her teeth each night has become more and more of a struggle. As you hold her on your lap you say, "Almost bedtime kiddo. Hey, tonight Mommy is going to brush her teeth at the same time you do—it'll be fun for us to do it together!"~



# Tips for Responding to Challenging Behavior in Young Children

January, 2017

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The most effective strategies for addressing challenging behavior are primarily focused on prevention of challenging behavior and promotion of appropriate social behaviors. These strategies include environmental manipulations, providing positive attention and feedback to children, and teaching social skills and emotional competencies. Even when these practices are in place, some young children will engage in challenging behavior. There are several strategies you can use when responding to challenging behavior but these should always be combined with more intentional promotion and prevention practices. The use of these response strategies is intended to reduce the likelihood of challenging behavior, but will not be effective without careful and intentional attention to teaching social skills and emotional competencies.

1. When children are engaging in challenging behavior, keep interactions with them to a minimum during these episodes. You should ensure the child's safety while providing minimal attention to the challenging behavior. This recommendation is based upon the fact that the two most likely reasons for challenging behavior are: (1) attempts to get attention or (2) attempts to avoid or escape a non-preferred activity. Sometimes if we attend to children during this time, we are reinforcing their inappropriate behavior.
2. When children are engaging in challenging behavior, interrupt, and redirect the child to the appropriate alternative behavior using minimal attention, discussion, and emotion. Your redirect should focus on stating what the child should or might do. For example, if the child has taken another's toy, prompt a more appropriate social skill (e.g., "You can trade with Eric."). For example, throwing blocks might be redirected to: "Let's build, you put one here!" Notice that this recommendation involves minimal interaction and usually just one prompt.
3. Reinforce the nearest child who is engaging in the appropriate, alternative behavior (e.g., "I see Manuel using walking feet" or "LaShawn you are sharing the blocks so nicely with your friends!"). Then, when the child with challenging behavior engages in the desired behavior, immediately use descriptive feedback to acknowledge his/her use of the desired behavior.
4. When the incident of challenging behavior ends and the child engages in appropriate behavior, provide positive attention to the child. This might include joining in the child's play, having a conversation with the child about the child's interests or activity, providing the child with a response opportunity, or providing the child with physical affection. It is important for the child to be able to rejoin the classroom community and to experience positive attention from the adult in the classroom when behaving appropriately.



5. If another child is hurt, attend to the “victim.” You can say, for example, “Tim, it looks like you got hurt, come sit here with me.” Notice that this recommendation involves ignoring, for the moment, the challenging behavior.
6. Put 95% of your time and attention into the teaching of replacement behaviors and do this when the child is not engaging in the challenging behavior. If and when children are upset and engaging in challenging behavior, it is likely that your teaching efforts will be minimally effective. Intentionally plan opportunities to teach the replacement skill throughout the day before the challenging behavior is likely to occur and focus most of your efforts on this instruction.
7. Remember that what keeps challenging behavior occurring are the things that happen after the behavior occurs (e.g., a redirection, saying, “stop,” being escorted to the cozy corner during large group). If challenging behavior seem to be reoccurring, consider what has been happening immediately following the challenging behavior and adapt it.
8. Find individualized reinforcers and use them liberally at first. Challenging behavior works for the child 100% of the time *unless* we teach the more appropriate skill and reinforce it at a higher frequency than the challenging behavior is being reinforced.
9. Figure out what makes the good times so good. If you analyze carefully, most children who engage in challenging behavior actually spend very little time engaged. Think about what environmental and contextual characteristics are engaging to the child and add more of these to the times of the day and routines when challenging behavior is most likely to occur.
10. Make a plan, write it down, and teach *all* adults what to do! It is important that all adults are responding consistently to children’s appropriate and challenging behavior.
11. Know that severe and persistent challenging behavior can require the use of individualized positive behavior support (e.g., Dunlap, Strain, Lee, Joseph, Vatland, & Fox, 2017; Dunlap, Wilson, Strain, & Lee, 2013). That is, once challenging behavior is severe and persistent, it oftentimes necessitates the use of a process in which goals are set, data collection occurs, the function of the behavior is determined, and a comprehensive behavior support plan is developed based on the function of the challenging behaviors, implemented consistently, and monitored to ensure success.

## References

- Dunlap, G., Strain, P.S., Lee, J.K., Joseph, J. D., Vatland, C., & Fox, L. (2017). *Prevent, teach, reinforce for families: A model of individualized positive behavior support for home and community*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Dunlap, G., Wilson, K., Strain, P., & Lee, J. K. (2013). *Prevent, teach, reinforce for young children: The early childhood model of individualized positive behavior support*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.



# 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](http://ChallengingBehavior.org).

## More Information

More information and resources on this and other topics are available on our website, [ChallengingBehavior.org](http://ChallengingBehavior.org).



[ChallengingBehavior.org](http://ChallengingBehavior.org)

# How to Use Positive Language to Improve Your Child's Behavior

Brooke Brogle, Alyson Jiron y Jill Giacomini

"Stop it." "No." "Don't do that!" As a parent, you might find yourself using these words and phrases more often when your child begins to make his own choices. Now, stop for a moment and consider how the conversation might feel if you couldn't use these words? What if, rather than telling your child what he can't do, you instead chose words to tell him what he can do? While this shift in language might seem small, it actually provides a powerful positive change to the tone of the conversation. When you focus on using positive language with your child, you will likely find that he has fewer tantrums, whines less and overall experiences fewer challenging behaviors.

How can such a small change make such a big difference? While it is obvious to adults, young children are not able to make the logical connection that when they are told not to do something, what they actually should do is the opposite. For example, the directions, "Don't climb on the counter" can be very confusing to a child. However, "Please keep your feet on the floor" tells the child exactly what the expectation is and how he can change what he is doing. Using positive language also empowers a child to make an appropriate choice on his own, which can boost his self-esteem. When you are specific in your directions by telling your child exactly what he can do and when, it is easier for him to comply and he is more likely to cooperate with the request.



## Try This at Home

- **Replace "don't" with "do".** Tell your child what she can do! If you saw her cutting the leaves of a plant, rather than saying "Don't cut that!" you could say, "Scissors are for cutting paper or play dough. Which one do you want to cut?" It is more likely that your child will make an appropriate choice when you help her to understand exactly what appropriate options are available.
- **Offer a choice.** When you provide your child with a choice of things that he can do, wear or go, he is more likely to select one of the options you have offered because it makes him feel like he is in control. This strategy also works for you as a parent because you approve of either choice.
- **Tell your child "when."** When your child asks to do something, rather than saying no, acknowledge her wish and tell her when she might be able to do it. This answer feels more like a "yes" to a child. For example, if your child asks to go to the park, but you are on the computer finishing up a work project, you could say, "The park sounds like a great idea! I need to finish this letter for work right now. Would you like to go after your nap today or tomorrow morning after breakfast?"
- **Use "first-then" language.** Another way to tell a child when he can do something in a positive way is to use a "first-then" statement. For example, if he wants to watch TV but you would like for him to pick up his toys, you could say "First, pick up your toys and then

you may watch a TV show."

- **Give your child time to think.** Sometimes, you may feel frustrated when your child does not respond quickly to requests and feel tempted to use demands and raise your voice. When that happens, remember that your child is learning language and how to use it. She needs time to think about what you said and how she is going to respond. It can take her several seconds, or even minutes, longer than you to process the information. If you remain calm and patiently repeat the statement again, you will see fewer challenging behaviors and enjoy more quality time with your child.
- **Help your child to remember.** Children are easily distracted. Sometimes your child may need you to help him remember what you asked him to do in order to do it. "I remember" statements are very useful in these situations. For example, imagine you have asked your child to put on his shoes so that he can go outside, and he comes over to you without his shoes on and is trying to go outside. You can say, "I remember you need to put your shoes on before you can go outside." Stating the information as a simple fact, rather than a command, gives him the information he needs to make the right choice on his own without blaming him or making him feel like he has failed.



## Practice at School

Teachers use positive language at school to help children become more confident and independent. When teachers tell children what they can do, children begin to manage themselves, classroom routines and interactions with peers by themselves. For example, a child who is throwing sand on the playground can be shown that, instead, she can use a shovel to put the sand in a bucket. The teacher might say, "If you want to play with the sand, you can fill this bucket. Would you like a blue bucket or this red one?" In this way, the teacher honors the child's interest, but directs it to a more appropriate play choice.



## The Bottom Line

Positive relationships with parents, teachers and other caregivers provide the foundation for a successful and happy child, are the building blocks for your child's self-esteem and ability to empathize and predict future positive behavior choices. The manner in which you talk to your child has a significant impact on his behavior. Making positive changes to your communication style can be hard work, but with a little practice, you will see a big difference in your relationship with your child. Your child will feel more encouraged, positive and independent and, as a result, you will enjoy better overall cooperation.



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# How to Plan Activities to Reduce Challenging Behavior

Brooke Brogle, Alyson Jiron & Jill Giacomini

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

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### 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](http://ChallengingBehavior.org).

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### 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.



[ChallengingBehavior.org](http://ChallengingBehavior.org)



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# Behavior Expectations Strategies and Poster (English-French)

Children benefit from organized classroom environments in which the guidelines are clearly and simply stated. A set of positive expectations can help guide all interactions in the classroom. Expectations are general characteristics or ways you would like children and adults to behave. Rules help define exactly what expectations mean. Behavior expectations and rules are important because children are less likely to engage in challenging behavior when they know what to do, how to do it, and what is expected.

## Teaching Behavior Expectations

More often behavioral errors occur because:

- ▶ Children do not have the appropriate skills.
- ▶ Children do not know when to use the skills.
- ▶ Children have not been taught specific classroom procedures and routines.

Once you have developed classroom expectations, it is not enough to just post the words on the walls...

*You Must Teach Them!*

Once expectations and rules are posted with visuals that are meaningful for all children in the classroom, they must be concretely taught and systematically reinforced. Teach expectations and rules the way you would teach any other concept:

1. Define them with words children will understand.
2. Provide examples and non-examples.
3. Check for understanding.
4. Model, practice, and rehearse (create songs, rhymes, use visual supports, have puppets recite).
5. Use gestures, pictures, or graphics to frequently remind children of classroom rules and expectations.
6. Provide clear expectations for children's behavior during each classroom activity.
7. Acknowledge efforts frequently.
8. Share information regarding expectations and rules with families. Provide ideas about how to apply the concepts at home and in the community.

# Expectations



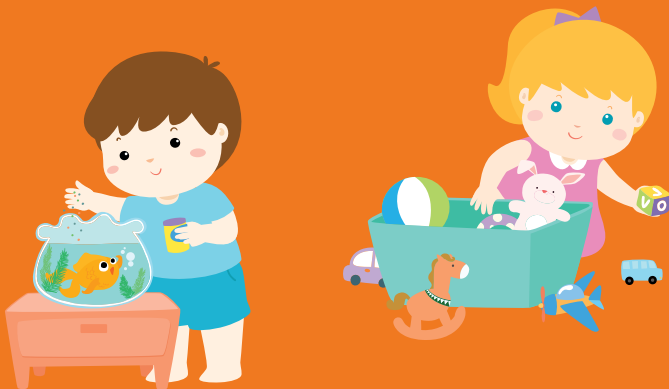
We are **safe**

Nous sommes **sûrs**



We are **kind**

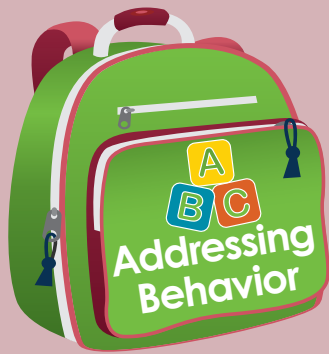
Nous sommes **gentils**



We are **responsible**

Nous sommes **responsables**





# How to Understand the Meaning of Your Child's Challenging Behavior

Brooke Brogle, Alyson Jiron & Jill Giacomini

As a parent or caregiver, you may see your child behave in a way that doesn't make sense and ask yourself, "Why does she keep doing that?" It can be very frustrating, especially when it seems like it should be easy for your child to figure out on her own a more appropriate way to behave. In moments like this, it is important to remember that children continue to use a behavior because it works! Your child's behavior is a powerful communication tool that she uses to tell you what she needs or wants. Sometimes, when a child does not know the appropriate way (such as words, sign language or pointing to pictures) to express her needs or wants she may use challenging behavior (such as hitting, screaming or spitting) to communicate. Challenging behavior gives children the ability to send a message in a fast and powerful way. Children will use challenging behavior to communicate until they learn new, more appropriate ways to express their wants and needs. To change the behavior, it is important for you to first discover what is causing the behavior. If you know why your child is choosing a behavior, you can then teach her to communicate her wants and needs in a new way that everyone feels good about.

» **Role play:** Use puppets, trains, dolls or other toys to act out the new skill with your child. For example, you can make the doll say, "I really want to play outside. I want to open the door and run, but Mommy says I need to wait for her. I won't scream. I will say 'Hurry up Mommy. I am ready to play.'"



» **Read books:** Children often tell you how they are feeling when they are trying to guess how others are feeling. Ask your child questions about a character in a book as a way to start to talk about your child's own behavior. For example, "That little girl doesn't want to go to bed. I wonder why?"

» **Talk about the situation ahead of time:** Sometimes, children simply want to know about what is planned ahead of time or to be included in the planning. Parent schedules are busy and you often need to get things done quickly. However, quick transitions can feel overwhelming to young children. If you take a few minutes to include your child in the plan, you will likely see a dramatic decrease in challenging behavior. For example, you could say, "We are going to get in the car and go to the store when you finish this puzzle. Would you like to pick a special toy to bring with you to the grocery store?"

Children use challenging behavior to either:

- 1) get something, such as attention, a toy or a nap, or,
- 2) get out of doing something, such as going to bed, eating a new food or getting buckled in the car seat.

The first step you must take to help your child learn a new behavior is to determine if she wants something or wants to avoid doing something.

## Practice at School

Teachers are detectives too! When a child uses challenging behavior at school, teachers watch to see what caused the behavior and then teach the child a new way to communicate. For example, Ethan is playing with cars alone when Jacob tries to grab a car from him. Ethan hits Jacob and grabs his toy back. Jacob cries. Ethan was frustrated that a friend was taking a toy from him before he was done and used hitting as a way to tell Jacob that he wanted his toy back. The teacher might say to Ethan, "You looked frustrated when Jacob took your toy. Next time, you can use your words and tell him 'It's busy. I'm still using this toy.'" Teachers can also use puppets to reinforce the skill of saying "it's busy" during circle time or during other activities throughout the day.

## The Bottom Line

It can be fun and rewarding to figure out what your child is thinking and why! The more familiar you are with how your child reacts to everyday situations, the easier it is for you to teach him appropriate ways to deal with challenges like frustration, stress and fatigue. Children who learn how to manage these situations feel more confident and are less likely to use challenging behavior to communicate their needs.

## Try This at Home

- **Observe.** Pay careful attention to what is happening when your child displays challenging behavior. Keep a chart to see repeated patterns in behavior. What happens before the behavior starts? What happens after?
- **Track.** Keep track of when the behavior occurs. Do you always see the behaviors just before nap time? Perhaps your child is tired and you can change your routine to include errands in the morning and quiet, at-home activities before nap time.
- **List.** Brainstorm ideas about what your child is trying to get, or avoid doing, by using challenging behavior. The more you watch your child, the more you will be able to narrow your list down to a few possible reasons why the behavior is occurring.
- **Teach.** Once you have an understanding of why your child chooses to use a challenging behavior, you can teach him a new way to behave in that situation. Pick a time outside of the situation when you can:

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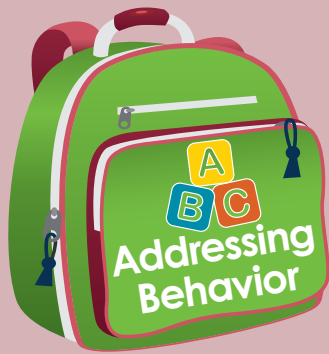
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# How to Give Clear Directions

Brooke Brogle, Alyson Jiron & Jill Giacomini

"Why do I have to repeat myself time and again?" "Why won't she listen to me?" Listening and following directions are important skills young children must learn. There are many reasons why children do not follow directions.

- **The child does not hear the direction.** Parents often give directions from a distance or in passing. "Lauren, get your shoes on." Did your child actually hear what you said? Just as adults often don't hear what their partner has said to them because they are focused on reading, email or talking on the phone, children too often don't hear what a parent has said because they are focused on a task such as building a tower or drawing a picture.
- **The parent gives too many directions at one time.** When you give your child too many directions at one time, it reduces the chance that she will follow the directions and increases the chance that she will be confused. "Lauren, please go upstairs, brush your teeth and pick up your blocks while I finish the dishes." This multi-step direction is too long and complicated for your child to easily understand. Instead, try giving one direction at a time.
- **The child doesn't understand the direction or the direction is too vague.** Directions such as "Settle down," "stop," or "be nice" might be too vague and difficult for your child to understand. If she is throwing toys out of the bathtub and you simply say, "Lauren," you have not actually told her what you want her to do. If you say, "stop it," it may temporarily stop the behavior, but she still may not know what you want her to do. If what you mean is, "Lauren, toys stay in the tub," then you need to explicitly tell her so.
- **The direction does not tell the child what to do.** Parents often tell children what not to do, rather than what they should do. It is important to state directions positively in order to teach your child the expectation. Instead of saying, "Stop running!", state the direction positively by saying, "Use walking feet."
- **The direction sounds like a suggestion or question.** Daily conversation is filled with questions, suggestions and directions. When you say, "Will you put your shoes away?" you are not giving your child a direction—you are asking her a question. When you give your child a direction that needs to be followed, it is essential that you tell your child what to do rather than ask. For example, "Lauren, put your shoes by the door."

## Try This at Home

- It is important to follow through when you give your child a direction. A technique you can use to make sure you do follow through when your child has difficulty complying, or following directions is Do-WAWP.
  - » Do—State the "do" direction.
  - » W—Wait for compliance (silently count to 5).
  - » A—Ask the child to restate the direction.
  - » W—Wait for compliance (silently count to 5).
  - » P—Provide encouragement or help (helping will ensure success).

- **Make sure that you have your child's attention.** Eye contact is a great indicator! When you state the "do" direction you are teaching your child the desired behavior. For instance, "Lauren, go brush your teeth." When you count to five, you are giving her the opportunity to hear and process the direction. Parents often repeat the same direction over and over in that five second period. When you repeat the same direction to your child time and again, it teaches her that she does not have to follow the direction the first time. Instead, state the direction once and then have your child restate the direction back to you. This way you can confirm that she heard you and understood what you were saying. Finally, offering help may simply mean that you take her hand and lead her to the bathroom. Don't forget to encourage your child by saying something like, "Wow, Lauren, what great listening ears! Thank you for brushing your teeth."



## Practice at School

In addition to verbal instructions, teachers use many methods to give directions and help children understand expectations. These methods may include using symbols or pictures, sign language or gestures, songs, puppets, instruments, sand timers, or other tools. The more opportunities children are given to see or hear the instructions, the more likely they are to complete the task. For example, when teachers need to tell the class that it is time to go inside from the playground, in addition to words they may use a sound (e.g., ring a bell) to alert the children about this event. Children know that the sound means that it is time to line up at the door, even if they do not hear the verbal instructions. When teachers pair words with other signals, they help children to confidently and successfully participate in activities.

## The Bottom Line

Listening and following directions are skills that children learn through their daily interactions. When children do not follow directions, for any reason, it can be extremely frustrating for parents. You can increase the chances that your child will listen and successfully follow your directions when you make sure that your direction is clearly stated and you follow through.

An important consideration for parents when teaching their child to follow directions is to "pick your battles". You want to avoid insisting that your child follow directions that are not important or can escalate to a major struggle when the direction is not critical. Pick a few, very important directions that you will follow-through with your child.



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# Observation Card

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Observer: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

General Context: \_\_\_\_\_

Social Context: \_\_\_\_\_

Challenging Behavior: \_\_\_\_\_

Social Reaction: \_\_\_\_\_

Possible Function: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Observer: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

General Context: \_\_\_\_\_

Social Context: \_\_\_\_\_

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Social Reaction: \_\_\_\_\_

Possible Function: \_\_\_\_\_





**Instructions: Read the scenarios numbered below. For each scenario, consider the antecedents and consequences to determine the function of the behavior. Place the number of the scenario in the appropriate box in the table below.**

	<b>Obtain/Get</b>	<b>Escape/Avoid</b>
<b>Sensory Stimulation</b>		
<b>Social/Attention from adult or peer</b>		
<b>Tangible/ Activity</b>		

1. Most days Ally pushes her craft supplies onto the floor when she is asked to sit at the craft table with her peers and complete a project. This behavior typically results in the teacher saying, "Since you are behaving like that, you can just complete your work later, by yourself."
2. Whenever, Ms. Jackson walks away from Jonathan to attend to another student, Jonathan says to her, "You don't want me to learn, you don't care about me! I know you think I'm dumb!" Ms. Jackson responds by consoling Jonathan saying "That's not true, you're a very smart young man." She works with him for the rest of the period. This happens more than once a week.
3. When a group of children enter the classroom and begin discussing their morning (rather loudly), Sarah starts saying the ABCs over and over, so loudly that she can be heard in the hallway. The teacher and peers ignore this behavior because Sarah typically quiets down once the group is quiet and working.
4. When Jessie wants a toy from her sister she screams "Give it to me now!" repeatedly until her sister gives her the toy or her mom comes in the room and tells her sister "Just give her the toy, you can play with it later." and the sister gives her the toy. This is a typical, everyday occurrence.
5. Mom tells her two young children that they will be going on a big hike today, Tanner, the youngest, tells mom that she has cramps and her stomach hurts. Mom tells her to go rest in her bed for a while to see if she feels better. Mom has noticed that Tanner often feels unwell on days that she suggests a big, outdoor activity.
6. When Mr. Watts hands Harry a worksheet to complete independently and walks away, Harry begins squirming in his seat and hitting his own head with the palm of his hand repeatedly. Mr. Watts quickly walks back to Harry's desk and asks Harry if he wants help with the task. Harry says no and continues hitting his head. Mr. Watts send Harry to the office where he spends some time jumping on the trampoline. This is a common occurrence with Harry.

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	<b>Obtain/Get</b>	<b>Escape/Avoid</b>
<b>Sensory Stimulation</b>	<b>6-</b> Harry has learned that if he hits his head, he will end up in the office jumping on the trampoline they have there. It seems that he is seeking sensory input but this one is tricky because he could also be avoiding the worksheet. It would take further observation over time.	<b>3-</b> Sarah could be saying the ABCs loudly to herself to block out the sound of the other children. The behaviour stops once the other children are quiet.
<b>Social/Attention from adult or peer</b>	<b>2-</b> Jonathan appears to crave attention and positive comments from his educator	<b>1-</b> It seems Ally may prefer to do her work independently
<b>Tangible/ Activity</b>	<b>4-</b> Jessie has learned that if she screams, she gets the toy	<b>5-</b> Tanner complains of a sore stomach to avoid the activity

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**2.** Whenever, Ms. Jackson walks away from Jonathan to attend to another student, Jonathan says to her, “You don’t want me to learn, you don’t care about me! I know you think I’m dumb!” Ms. Jackson responds by consoling Jonathan saying “That’s not true, you’re a very smart young man.” She works with him for the rest of the period. This happens more than once a week.

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**5.** Mom tells her two young children that they will be going on a big hike today, Tanner, the youngest, tells mom that she has cramps and her stomach hurts. Mom tells her to go rest in her bed for a while to see if she feels better. Mom has noticed that Tanner often feels unwell on days that she suggests a big, outdoor activity.

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Session 3: Behavior Has Meaning

## Activity 2: Apply It and Try It. Why Do Children Do What They Do?

Describe the *behavior*:

How long  
the behavior lasted:

### What happened before?

- I told or asked my child to do something
- My child was playing alone
- Changed or ended my child's activity
- My child moved from one activity to another
- I removed an object from my child
- I told my child "No," "Don't," "Stop"
- An object was out of reach
- I was giving attention to others
- My child was doing an activity they didn't like
- The task/activity was difficult for my child
- My child requested something
- Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

### What Happened After? How did it end?

- I gave my child attention
- I punished or scolded my child
- I gave my child an object/activity/food
- I withdrew my request or demand
- I removed my child from activity/area
- I hugged my child
- I ignored my child
- I helped my child
- I used "time-out"
- Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

### Why do you think your child was using this behavior?

### What do you think they were trying to tell you?

