

Managing Behavior and Social Climate



Behavior is a means of communication. When young children exhibit challenging behaviors, they are trying to communicate something. They are trying to tell you about their interaction with another person or an object/activity they want or don't want. Your job is to figure out what they are trying to communicate and help them find a suitable solution. There are simple common-sense strategies that can be used to effectively guide the behavior of young children and promote a positive social climate.

Establish Expectations

Rules that are fair and consistently enforced, along with familiar routines, help children know what to expect and to understand their limits. Following the same routine each day and telling the children in advance when there will be a change may help reduce anxiety. Experiment with your daily routine until you find one that is easy to follow and meets the needs of your group. See *Preparing the Environment/Schedules* for suggestions.

- Consistency counts. Be clear in stating the expectations and consequences of children's behavior. Set guidelines and limits and stick to them.
- Observe children carefully as they are engaging in activities. Anticipate and act upon inappropriate behavior by redirecting a child to another activity or area before her behavior escalates. If there are too many children in one area at once and you anticipate problems arising, consider offering a new activity in a different part of the room to disperse the children and eliminate crowding. Introduce new activities or toys if it appears that children are becoming bored. Offering new toys and activities frequently may help alleviate inappropriate behaviors.
- Keep wait time to a minimum. Expecting young children to wait while having nothing to do can often lead to misbehavior. Consider singing songs, playing games, or giving the children something to do while they are waiting to reduce inappropriate behaviors such as pushing in line, running, and bothering friends. Try to keep transitions short and fun to alleviate wait time.
- When a child is misbehaving, try to ignore the inappropriate behavior if possible, and help focus his attention elsewhere. When the inappropriate behavior stops, be sure to give him positive attention right away, telling him what he is doing well.

Make Sure Activities are Age-Appropriate

Provide opportunities for children to engage in age-appropriate activities that are not too difficult. When children are asked to do tasks that are too lengthy or difficult, they often times get frustrated which may lead to inappropriate behaviors. Consider modifying activities for children who may get frustrated easily or have a short attention span.

Reinforce Positive Behavior

Use gentle reminders when explaining your expectations and redirecting children to more appropriate behavior. Teach conflict resolution techniques that guide children to identify problems and attempt to resolve them in a positive manner. Reinforce positive behavior often throughout the day. Praise children for their effort to improve behavior and make good choices.

Structure the Environment for Success

Room arrangement plays a large role in eliminating potential problems such as running, overcrowding, space issues, and the noise level in the room. If the room arrangement is not working for your group, consider experimenting with the layout until you find an arrangement that works well. See *Preparing the Environment/Schedules* for suggestions.

Allow Children to...

- Make acceptable choices. Give children the opportunity to make choices throughout the day to reduce frustration and build independence and self-esteem. Offering choices may help children feel empowered, leading to less frustration and inappropriate behaviors. Be sure to see the *Choice of Center Activities* ideas provided at the beginning of each monthly guide.
- Experience logical consequences. Remind children of limits and consequences in positive ways. When misbehavior occurs, deal with the behavior quickly in a firm, assertive manner. Be consistent with your reaction to misbehavior from day to day. Use time-out as a last resort to help the child regain control of her behavior.