

CORE SKILL: REGULATE

Managing Behaviors



What You Need to Know

Infants rely on behavior to express themselves and communicate with others. Especially when younger, infants cannot yet tell you with words what they need, think, or feel – when they are hungry, they cry; when they are mad, they swat or hit; and when they are excited, they bounce up and down. In addition, infants are in the *very* early stages of developing the skills needed to manage their behavior. An infant may crawl or walk too fast, for example, because they are not yet able to control their speed, or they may knock over a toy because they do not have the skills needed to carefully pick up and move objects. These behaviors are completely typical (and expected!) during infancy.

Because infants are not yet able to self-regulate, they rely on caregivers' support in managing their behaviors. As their teacher, you can play an important role by structuring infants' environment in ways that minimize and help avoid challenges (e.g., place off-limit objects out of reach, or provide lots of space to crawl) and gradually modeling acceptable ways to communicate needs (e.g., make "more" sign/gesture when hungry, or point at a toy that they want to play with).

Things to Consider

It is developmentally typical for infants to express their needs through behaviors such as crying, yelling, biting, and hitting. When these instances occur, it is important to understand *what* the infant needs or is trying to express in that moment. If an infant bites a peer, for example, it could be to communicate a number of things – maybe they want to play with the toy that their peer has, or maybe they feel too crowded and want their peer to back away, or maybe it is because their gums hurt and they need something to chew on. Biting is simply the *sign* that the infant needs support and assistance from an adult to help regulate their behavior. Knowing the function or purpose of the infant's biting helps you accurately focus on how to help them get their needs met!

Development of Behavior Management Skills

Between birth and 9 months, infants may:	Between 8 and 18 months, infants may:
Respond to attentive caregiving by quieting or calming down.	Look to familiar adults for assistance and guidance with actions and behavior.

Setting the Stage

Infants are better able to manage their behaviors when they are *actively* engaged in an activity, this means using:

- ◆ Age-appropriate, **hands-on** activities.
- ◆ Minimal wait time and transitions.
- ◆ A structured schedule and routines.
- ◆ Clear and consistent expectations.
- ◆ A classroom environment that allows infants to engage in preferred, self-regulating activities (i.e., an area that permits safe gross motor exploration, and a calm area with soft music or comforting stuffed animals).



Intentional Teaching Practices to Support Managing Behaviors

Monday OBSERVE	OBSERVE Carefully observe infants' behavior throughout the day. Think about the <i>purpose</i> of infants' behaviors. For example, when an infant swats at a peer, is this because they want their toy or because they want more space? Or, when an infant repeatedly pushes their bottle off of their highchair, are they trying to communicate that they are not thirsty, or do they enjoy watching the bottle fall? In addition, observe and think about what <i>triggers</i> and what <i>helps</i> each infant calm down. Maybe some infants have sensory needs and are extra sensitive to loud noises or are under-stimulated during book readings? If that's the case, then you know an environment with limited noise or reading while seated in a rocking chair will best set them up for success.
Tuesday FOCUS	Acknowledge Effort Acknowledge when infants are working to control their movements and behaviors. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Smile while clapping and say, "You slowed down and turned around to go the other way!"◆ "You are being so gentle with the stuffed animals!" while smiling and mimicking their behavior. Narrate when you are helping infants regulate their actions. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Hold an older infant's hand to slow them down and say, "We are going to walk nice and slooow."◆ "We are turning down the lights to help us calm down for nap."
Wednesday SCAFFOLD I	Promote Autonomy Infants will have greater success in managing their behaviors if you take their preferences into consideration and/or offer them choices . Be sure to pay attention to <i>how</i> each infant communicates their interests (e.g., looking, pointing, swatting, and vocalizing): <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Give infants the option of singing a song or reading a book before naptime.◆ For an infant who does not like having their diaper changed, approach diapering with extra excitement and warmth, and be ready to use a distraction while changing.◆ For an infant who tends to hit or bite during snack or mealtimes, make sure that an adult is always near that child when they are eating.◆ Redirect children to more appropriate activities when necessary. This acknowledges their preferences and helps them engage in more positive behaviors. For example, if an infant is throwing blocks, redirect them to a ball that they can throw. Or if an infant takes a book from another child, offer them a new book to look at.
Thursday SCAFFOLD II	Help Children See You As a Resource Help infants see you as a resource in managing their behaviors. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ When an infant swats at or hits a peer, make eye contact, place your hand gently on their arm, and calmly ask, "What do you need?" Avoid scolding. Model and demonstrate how to more appropriately reach their goals (e.g., "You want to play with his toy? (Child), can we have a turn with that truck?" while reaching hands out).◆ "You're hungry and want a snack? Here, let's go get one together," while holding the infant and offering different snack options.
Friday KEEP IT GOING	Consider what you learned from observing infants on Monday as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffolds. Find ways to build the activities in the Setting the Stage into your regular routines and to anticipate and respond effectively to help infants manage their behaviors.