

CORE SKILL: REGULATE

Supporting Children's Behavior



What You Need to Know

Young children are still learning how to regulate their emotions and actions. They can make the most of their time in the classroom when they understand expectations, have a say in their daily lives, and are actively engaged in the task at hand. Teachers can support children behaviors by being aware of their needs and intentionally using strategies to *prevent* situations that may cause challenging behaviors in the classroom. They can also focus on and acknowledge the behaviors that support children to successfully engage in activities and interactions.

Things to Consider

Adults tend to notice and point out the behaviors they want children to stop or change and are less likely to acknowledge the times when children are meeting expectations. By doing this, adults may **accidentally reinforce negative behaviors** by paying more attention to them than to children's positive behavior.

The behaviors adults see as challenging are often a child's way of communicating something. The key to addressing these behaviors is to determine the need being communicated. For example, if a child hits another child in order to get a toy, they may need support to ask for a turn or wait, *or* there may not be enough materials available. Hitting is not the problem—it's a *symptom* of the problem. These situations can be stressful for teachers, but they also provide opportunities to communicate expectations, problem solve with children and model empathy in the moment.

Adults sometimes misattribute certain behaviors (e.g., hitting or throwing a toy) to a child "being mean" or "aggressive." These attributions are problematic because we know that our lens—such as our backgrounds, implicit (or explicit) biases, and prior experiences with a child—influences how we perceive behavior. Research shows that adults are more likely to identify behavior as aggressive and deserving of blame when the child displaying the behavior is Black or a boy. These inequities make it even more important for teachers to be aware of what behaviors they are noticing and how they react.

Development of Skills for Managing Behavior

Between 36 and 48 months, children <i>may</i> :	Between 48 and 60 months, children <i>may</i> :
Demonstrate the ability to manage own actions, words, and behavior with frequent adult support (e.g., reminders to use gentle touches).	Demonstrate the ability to manage own actions, words, and behavior with adult support.
Frequently engage in impulsive behavior, but inhibit them when directly supported by adults.	Demonstrate control over actions and words in response to a challenging situation.
Follow simple rules and routines with assistance from adults.	Demonstrate the ability to wait for a turn.
	Begin to understand the consequences of behavior.
	Usually follow classroom rules and routines with occasional reminders from adults.

Setting the Stage

Promote behaviors that support children's success in the classroom by:

- ◆ Providing developmentally appropriate, **hands-on** activities.
- ◆ Minimizing wait time and using timers or countdowns so children know what to expect.
- ◆ Alerting children when a transition is about to occur and provide a concrete event/activity to transition to. For example, "We'll play outside for one more minute. Then we'll go inside and eat a snack."
- ◆ Creating a consistent schedule and routines. Be sure to prepare children ahead of time if there is a change in the schedule. Consider using a visual schedule that children can refer to. Remind children of the routine during the day.
- ◆ Making expectations clear and consistent. State expectations before an activity/task. For example, "We are going to play with playdough! The playdough stays on the table while we play."



Intentional Teaching Practices that Support Children to Manage their Behavior

OBSERVE	OBSERVE <p>Carefully observe the context during times when children are most engaged versus times when challenging behaviors occur. Are your expectations reasonable (i.e., are children asked to wait too long or given a task that is too hard?)? Do children really know what is being expected of them? What is helping children to remember the rules and expectations in the moment?</p> <p>Focus on understanding the function or the purpose of a child’s behavior. It’s critical to assess why a child is engaging in a certain behavior in order to provide support and teach replacement behaviors that will promote the child’s positive interactions with others and full engagement in classroom activities.</p>
FOCUS	Acknowledge Positive Behaviors <p>Notice and acknowledge when children are in control of their movement and displaying behaviors that help them to successfully engage with activities and others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “You heard me start singing the clean-up song and you started picking up the crayons right away.”◆ “You’re waiting patiently for your turn at the sink.”◆ Give a thumbs up and make a “shh” motion (<i>finger to lips</i>) while walking in the hallway.
SCAFFOLD	Promote Autonomy <p>Give children a say in what they do by offering them choices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “Would you like to work in the art area or the sand table?”◆ “You seem really interested in the grasshopper. Should we stay here and observe a little or continue on to the playground?”◆ “It’s time to get ready to go home. Do you want to put your folder in your backpack or get your coat first?”
SCAFFOLD	Use Cues and Visuals <p>Cues and visuals help children know what to do without needing a lengthy verbal explanation. Use cues and visuals to prompt or remind children about expectations for different situations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “Quiet” or “sit” visual picture signs.◆ Music, clapping sequence, or lights to signal that it’s time to transition.◆ “Stop/Go” signs to practice behaviors or indicate areas that are closed.◆ Post pictures of what centers look like/where things go when they are “clean” so that children know what is being expected.◆ Frustration often results in undesired behaviors because children may not know how else to communicate their thoughts. Support dual language learners and children still developing their verbal skills by hanging core vocabulary boards for them to point to and use to communicate their thoughts and feelings. Some core vocabulary words include: <i>yes, no, my turn, help, stop, go, again, finished, me, you, etc.</i>

FOCUS	<p>Give Clear Directions</p> <p>Focus children's attention on the behaviors that will help them to be successful in the moment by giving simple and clear directions that let them know what they should be doing (not what they should stop doing).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ State expectations first: Give children the opportunity to do what's expected by stating rules first, "We are going to color a picture. The markers can be used on the paper." ◆ Specific: "Please put the blocks in the basket," rather than, "Clean up!" ◆ Stated positively: "Walk, please," rather than, "Don't run!" ◆ A statement (not a question): "It's time to go inside," rather than, "Are you ready to go?"
SCAFFOLD	<p>Engage Children in Alternative, Appropriate Behaviors</p> <p>Help children manage their emotions and behaviors by keeping them actively engaged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Modify an activity or material: A child is avoiding the puzzles, so you choose a harder/less difficult one that is more on her level. ◆ Engage children in an unrelated activity: A child is struggling with sharing space at the sand table during Choice Time, so you invite them to build with you. ◆ Offer an alternative choice or activity to engage/occupy children while they wait: Sing songs during transitions, provide bubbles and chalk while waiting for a turn on the bikes. Offer a task for when children complete things early (e.g., small toys on the carpet for those who finish lunch early).
SCAFFOLD	<p>Link Behaviors and Outcomes</p> <p>Help children make the connection between their actions, outcomes and other's reactions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ "You quickly got your jacket and now we have plenty of time to play outside. Thank you!" ◆ "You made room for your friend to join us and that made her smile!" ◆ A child is drawing on the table, so you say, "If you keep the crayons on paper, you can keep them. But if you continue to draw on the table, I will put them away." (Note that this is presented in a positive way and the consequence is logically linked to the child's behavior.)
KEEP IT GOING	<p>Consider what you learned from observing children 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 situations and respond effectively to support the children in your classroom.</p>

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