

Tip Sheets

Guiding Behavior Through Environment

The Environment

Careful consideration of the environment can help set the stage for success. Practitioners can avoid or reduce the number of challenging behaviors by adding, removing, or arranging objects in ways that support appropriate behavior.



For example, sometimes the goal of a child's challenging behavior is to obtain an object. In this case, make it easier for children to see and

access the materials they want by arranging the environment in ways that allow them to be as independent as possible.

Supporting Appropriate Behavior

- Place toys and materials on low shelves and hooks so children can help themselves and independently return materials to their places.
- Arrange materials so children can easily view selections and make decisions about what to play with. For example, display books on a bookshelf with the titles/covers facing forward so children don't have to dig through a box or become frustrated looking through the books on a shelf before finding the one they want.
- Use picture labels on containers for materials. Put the same picture on the shelf where the container is to be stored.
- Provide duplicates of favorite toys/materials.
- Place some materials on a table or the floor. This might draw children to the area and

encourage the type of play that is to take place. For example, place a few puzzles on a table rather than leaving them on a shelf.

- Limit the number of children who can play in a popular area so there is less competition over desired toys. For example, place four water shirts near the water table to indicate four children can use these materials at a time. Or arrange two chairs at the computer.
- Show where certain materials are to be used. For example, lay a hula hoop on the floor to indicate to the children where to stay with a punch ball.

Supporting Transitions

All children at some point will prefer not to leave a play area or activity. Practitioners can help children with transitions and avoid challenging behavior by:

- Examining the program schedule and implementing changes.
- Adapting the need for movement within a program/schedule.
- Teaching children skills for transitions.

Examples of Program Changes

- Reduce the number of transitions in a day.
- Give 5-minute warnings to prepare for ending an activity. (Some children may need multiple cues to ready themselves for a change.)
- Plan ahead and let children know when there will be changes to the regular schedule.
- Give extra time to children who may need it.
- Allow materials to go from one area to another, when possible.

- Reduce the chaos of some transitions by sending one child at a time. For example, if children are transitioning from group time to washing hands, give each child an opportunity to answer a question or do a short activity before going to the sink.
- ### Specific Strategies for Transitions
- Use a picture schedule to help children understand what is happening now and what is going to happen next. This can be a schedule for the day or even for specific activities, such as a field trip.
 - Specify each step of the schedule in an easy to understand format.
 - By teaching children to use a schedule, we give them predictability, security, confidence, and independence.
 - Use an activity book to describe the sequence of actions for a given event. The pages of the book might contain pictures for each step.
 - Keep a bag of open-ended waiting gadgets (such as squeeze balls or mini Slinkys) handy for especially difficult transitions. These can be passed out, used while waiting, and then collected until the next time they are needed.
 - Capture the interest of the group with an “attention getter.” While the children finish an activity and begin to settle into the next, pique their curiosity about what is to come. Introduce the new activity by wearing a costume, showing a prop, giving clues about the next activity, or asking questions that they can answer at the end of the game or story.
 - Give choices to children who have difficulty with the cleanup transition. Encourage participation by letting the child choose if they will clean the blocks or the puzzles.
 - Another choice might be if the child will pick up blocks while you place them on the shelf or the other way around.
 - Post a photo in each area of the room that provides an example of what should look like when it is clean.

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