CENTER FOR INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE

Tip Sheets

What is Challenging Behavior

Challenging Behavior

Challenging behavior can be defined as any behavior that:

- Results in self-injury
- Injures others
- Causes damage to the environment
- Interferes with the acquisition of new skills
- Socially isolates the learner

Challenging behavior is categorized as either **internalizing** or **externalizing** behaviors. Both types of behaviors can present challenges when the behaviors interfere with the child's learning or the learning of peers.

Internalizing Behaviors

Internalizing behaviors are negative behaviors that are focused inward by a child. Behaviors can include fearfulness, anxiety and social withdrawal.

A child may be quiet and seem "easy" to a provider when in fact, the child may be withdrawing and not participating. This can lead to missing out on social interactions, learning activities, and overall development.

While it may not be troubling to adults in the same way as aggression, internalizing behaviors can be a red flag for serious development concerns or trauma.

Externalizing Behaviors

Because these actions are more obvious and disruptive, we tend to see externalizing behaviors as more challenging. Externalizing behaviors are directed outward toward others, and therefore typically involve more than one child. Behaviors can include biting, hitting or other aggression.

Positive Behavior Supports

Whether the behavior is focused outward or inward, we can work to alleviate the behavior through positive behavior supports.

Positive behavior supports are strategies that help us to anticipate what may trigger challenging behavior and plan in advance to help prevent those challenges before they happen by changing or adapting the environment.

Most negative behaviors occur when the environmental demands exceed a child's capacity to cope or participate. The question isn't, "How do I get him to behave?" The question is, "In what area is he lacking knowledge or skills?"

When using positive behavior supports, we want to replace the challenging behaviors with behaviors or actions that do not interfere with a child's learning, their peers' learning, or disrupt the environment.

Making Behavior Ineffective and Inefficient

In order to replace challenging behaviors, you want to make the behavior ineffective and inefficient for the child.

Inefficient

Behaviors are inefficient when an alternative behavior is available or an alternative behavior has been taught.

For instance, when a child can point to a choice board to say he wants milk, he doesn't need to cry because he's been given juice.

Ineffective

Behaviors are ineffective when a challenging behavior doesn't work anymore. It does not get the child what he wants to obtain or what he wants to avoid. It is also ineffective when a child doesn't need to escape because he has access to more positive events.

For example, if a child's tantrum is ignored, it won't get him the preferred toy. Or if circle time is engaging him, he doesn't need to leave the group.