How to support ECE staff who work with children with challenging behaviors

Barbara Kaiser

www.challengingbehavior.com
How do you define your role as Director?

• What are your priorities?
• What are your responsibilities?
• What are your expectations of the staff?
• What are your goals for the children?
• What/who are your supports?
• What are your challenges?
One important challenge

May be…….
What does challenging behavior mean to you?
What do I mean by challenging behavior?

Makes it impossible to achieve our goals & interferes with learning opportunities

Not a diagnostic term
There may be no diagnosis
Need to survive period before diagnosis
Challenging behavior

- Interferes with children's learning, development, and success at play
- Is harmful to the child, other children, or adults
- Puts a child at high risk for later social problems or school failure

Timid and withdrawn behaviors also qualify as challenging
Challenging behavior is NOT a label

- How does labeling affect your attitude?
- Have you ever been labeled?
- How did the label affect your behavior?
CHALLENGING behavior is challenging for:

• The child
  – prevents him from achieving important outcomes.
  – probably doesn’t have much control over it.
  – wishes that he could change his behavior more than anyone.

• The other children
  – become frightened and confused
  – don’t know how to respond or defend themselves

• Teachers/Family
  – don’t know how to turn things around,
  – responses may even make things worse.
How does the presence of a child with challenging behavior influence:

• Your role?
• Your goals?
• Your supports?
• Your challenges?
Being There

- How much time do you spend with the children?
- Does the staff feel that you know what’s happening?
- Can they talk to you without feeling judged?
- Find a role in the classroom
  - The more you’re there the more naturally people will act
  - Observe unobtrusively
How do the educators feel about having a child with challenging behavior in their class?
“This child does not belong here!”
“I do not have the training to deal with him.”
“Nothing I do works!”
“I can never complete an activity”
“I have no time to give the other children the attention they deserve.”
“I worry about what the other children are learning!”
“I worry about the safety of the other children!”
“He never shows remorse.”
“I can’t predict what he will do next, his behavior comes out of nowhere.”
“He’s only 4, I think we are expecting too much of him.”
Between a rock and a hard place

How do the other children’s families feel?

“He shouldn’t be here’’”

“My child is afraid to come to school!”

“The teacher is spending so much time with Andrew that my child is getting no attention.”

“It isn’t fair that my child’s group doesn’t go to the library because the teacher cannot control Andrew’’”

“I will remove my child unless you ask Andrew to leave!”
Do you think that a child with challenging behavior should remain in the center?
Why should he stay?

• Moral obligation – can’t give up on a child
• If you know what to do it’s possible to make it work
• Tells the teachers that they are competent
• The other children are positive role models
• Will make teachers better teachers
• Gives the child a bad message:
  • he’s unteachable
  • you don’t want him
• Where should he go?
What happens when the teachers are faced with challenging behavior?
Amygdala Hijack

Senses perceive stimulus

Neocortex left prefrontal lobe

Considered, controlled response

Hijacked physiological uncontrolled response

Thalamus

Amygdala
The amygdale’s immediate physiological effects

- Increased blood pressure
- Stress hormones
- Startle reflex
- Freeze reflex
Out of control emotions

• Impair reasoning (even smart people sometimes act stupidly)

• Can result in not choosing the best response

• May increase the likelihood that you will escalate the child’s behavior
Managing an emotional hijack

Your brain needs 6 seconds to take back control

- Thinking about it makes you more upset
- Perform an analytical mental function

S = Stop
T = Think
A = Act
R = Review

Count to 10 in a foreign language
Take a deep breath and count to 6
Think of all the places you have lived
Visualize your favorite beach
Name several positive things about the child
How does having a child with challenging behavior in the group/class change a teacher’s attitude and/or behavior?
Do you know what behaviors each staff member finds challenging?
• Hitting
• Kicking
• Biting
• Throwing things
• Whining
• Constant crying
• Tantruming
• Defiance “NO!”
• Not participating
• Teasing

• Running off
• Swearing
• Hiding
• Destroying other children’s work
• Choking
• Grabbing
• Pushing
• Not caring
Everyone has different button pushers
- Past experiences with children
- Training experiences
- Level of support for dealing with challenging behaviors
- Culturally based beliefs

Why is it important for you to help your teachers identify their buttons?
Keep in mind

- All teachers do not have the same behavioral expectations;
- All activities do not require the same social and behavioral skills;
- Consistency in feedback about behavior is often inconsistent because expectations differ from teacher to teacher;
- The behavioral requirements in child care and/or school are quite different from those in the everyday world.
How can you promote a philosophy of staff ownership of the solution as well as the problem?

Do you know….

• What the teachers know about children with challenging behavior?
• What they feel they need to learn?
• How they perceive their role?
• What they feel you should be doing?
Communicate your expectations effectively

• Let the staff know in advance what is expected

• Be clear in your own mind
  – What you think they already know
  – What you want her or him to learn

• Be specific.
  – Do not assume that everyone will interpret your message the same way
  – It’s a good idea to use specific examples

• Listen
  – Rephrase the comments made by others to show you understand.
  – When you are talking, make sure others are listening and that they understand

• Communicate your priorities
  – Encourage the staff to ask questions
  – Check back from time to time to make sure your directions were understood

• Emphasize behaviors.
  – Accept that we all bring our different attitudes to the workplace
  – Respect and utilize the different perceptions of each staff member
When you meet resistance?

- Continuous **LEARNING** demands that people continuously **UNLEARN** past lessons, which leaves them vulnerable.

- Individuals do not expand their thinking or change their practice in linear or evenly paced stages.

- Variations in qualifications and experience must be considered in terms of people’s
  - understanding and accepting the challenge of new ideas
  - willingness to put in the time and commitment necessary to re-evaluate their practice
The administrator’s role

Enhance staff capacity to provide the best behavioral supports for all children

• Create an atmosphere of trust
• Understand the teacher’s reality
• Recognize the staff’s personal and professional knowledge
• Let your teachers know when they are on the right track
• Role model ways of dealing effectively with the child and his/her family
• Provide physical, emotional and informational support
• Create a team that works together
• Believe in the educators’ ability to succeed
FACING THE CHALLENGE

What is Challenging Behavior?
Developmentally Appropriate Behavior
Why Do Kids Misbehave?
Parents As Partners
Prevention Strategies
Behavioral Planning I
Behavioral Planning II
Intervention Strategies

Dates: October 10-12, 2012
Villanova, PA (Suburb of Philadelphia)

Debi Mahler
Professional Development Coordinator
dmahler@devereux.org
(610) 574-6141
• What would the teachers say if you asked why children behave inappropriately?

• Their interpretation affects their attitude and response
• Hungry, tired
• Wants attention
• Doesn’t know what else to do
• He’s angry
• Frustrated
• Confused
• No boundaries set at home
• Doesn’t have any social skills
• Doesn’t have the words
• Sensory issues
• Feels rejected or misunderstood
• To escape a task
He has difficulty:

• Seeking attention in appropriate ways
• Solving problems
  – Acts impulsively
  – Doesn’t consider likely consequences
• Expressing himself in words
• Managing emotional responses
  – anger
  – frustration
• Understanding social cues
• Entering into groups, making friends
• Following directions
  – Doesn’t always understand what is being said/instructions
  – Deviating from the routine
• Handling transitions
  – Shifting from 1 task or mind set to another
• Staying on task
  – Persisting when the task is difficult
  – Maintaining focus
What do the theorists say about aggressive and anti-social behavior?

- **Early-onset (life-course persistent aggressive behavior) theory:**
  - Aggressive and antisocial behavior is the result of the ongoing interaction between a child’s genes, experiences, and culture, starting from conception.

- **Frustration-aggression theory:**
  - When people are frustrated—when they can’t reach their goals—they become angry and hostile and act aggressively.

- **Social learning theory:**
  - Based on principles of conditioning and reinforcement:
    - People learn aggressive behavior from their environment.
    - Children observe and imitate the role models around them.
    - When they see a behavior reinforced, they’re likely to try it for themselves.
    - When they experience the reinforcement directly, they’re likely to repeat it.
So, Why **Do** They Misbehave?

**BECAUSE THE BEHAVIOR IS WORKING FOR THEM!**

1. To obtain an object or attention
2. To avoid/escape a situation or person(s)
3. To change level of stimulation
Since many children use challenging behavior at times, why do some children come to depend on these behaviors while others discover more effective strategies to help them meet their needs?
• BIOLOGICAL RISK FACTORS
  • Genes
  • Temperament
  • Complications of pregnancy and birth
  • Developmental delays
  • Gender

• ENVIRONMENTAL RISK FACTORS
  • Family factors and parenting style
  • Poverty and the social conditions surrounding it
  • Exposure to violence
  • Violent media
  • Cultural dissonance
  • School
The impact of multiple risk factors

“Give me one tennis ball, and I can toss it up and down with ease.

Give me two, and I can still manage easily.

Add a third, and it takes special skill to juggle them.

Make it four, and I will drop them all.”

James Garbarino Lost Boys (1999), pp.75-76
We can’t change a child’s life,

BUT......

WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!
Prevention is the best intervention

Effective teachers spend more time promoting appropriate behavior than responding to inappropriate behavior.
Create Rules and Policies

- Develop a list of three rules for your classroom

3 Basic Rules

- Stated in the positive
- Covers every possibility
- Can never be broken
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rule</th>
<th>Arrivals</th>
<th>Circle/Meeting</th>
<th>Choice/Centers</th>
<th>Snack</th>
<th>Outside</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect yourself</td>
<td>Walk to our cubbies. Take off your outdoor shoes. Put on indoor shoes.</td>
<td>Sit on mat Participate</td>
<td>Be aware of others. Walking feet.</td>
<td>Wash hands. Ask for help if we need it.</td>
<td>Follow directions. Ask for help if we need it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be safe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect others</td>
<td>Greet others.</td>
<td>Take turns Listen. Keep hands and feet to ourselves</td>
<td>Take turns. Share.</td>
<td>Use our manners. Talk quietly to each other.</td>
<td>Include others. Share. Take turns. Use our words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be Kind</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be careful with our things</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prevention

Creating opportunities for ALL children to succeed

• **Changing the social context**
  – Changing your approach with the children
  – Utilizing preventative pro-social skills curricula
• **Changing the physical environment**
• **Changing the program**
What word stands out on the previous slide?

CHANGE !!!
“If there is anything that we wish to change in others, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could better be changed in ourselves.”

Carl Jung
Reasons why educators resist change

- Decisions or requests are sprung on teachers without notice
- Not knowing enough about the change
- Feeling that changes are being done to, rather than done by, those affected
- Concerns that change will require teachers to question familiar (and comfortable) routines and habits
- Expectation that the initiative is temporary and it will stay incomplete
- Change implies that the former way of doing things was wrong
- Educators can question their ability to be effective after a change: Can I do it? How will I do it?
- Change in one area can disrupt other projects or activities, even ones outside of work
- Organizational change often increases workloads

Sometimes the Threat Is Real. Change often creates real winners and losers, and people worry about where they will end up when the project is complete
Helping staff navigate the change process

- Listen and understand their emotions (i.e. fear, anxiety, anger, loss, etc.)
- Consistently provide information that reinforces why change is important
- Encourage them to ask questions
- Help them to develop strategies for effectively dealing with the upcoming change(s)
- Help staff to completely understand the meaning of the change taking place
- Do not take staff responses personally
- Do not expect large leaps of acceptance immediately, it will take time for staff to adjust
- Give staff time to process the change as needed
- Present a positive stance surrounding the change - the potential benefits
What happens when you cannot prevent challenging behavior?
What role do you play?

When the teachers have a problem with behavior, what do they expect you to do?

What do you want THEM to do?
“We tend to teach the way we’ve been taught [and] discipline the way we’ve been disciplined”

Carl Rogers and Jerome Freiberg
## Typical Responses to Misbehavior

### Reactive Responses

**Consider:**
- The child separate from the context of the behavior

**Assume:**
- The child is not trying to behave appropriately
  - Misbehavior is deliberate
  - The student knows the right behavior and is being uncooperative
- They will behave appropriately next time
  - the child has learned his/her lesson

**Provide:**
- Aversive consequences

### Proactive Responses

**Identify:**
- The functional relationship (purpose) between behavior & environment
- The expected or acceptable behaviors

**Modify:**
- The environment (context of the behavior) to support expected behaviors

**Provide:**
- Differential reinforcement

**Teach:**
- Appropriate replacement behavior
Any challenging behavior that persists over time is working for the child.

Any intervention that does NOT produce a change in behavior is NOT working for the child or the teacher.
Punishment

- Damages the relationship
- Quick fix
  - Does not teach children alternatives
  - Does not provide long term solutions
- Creates a hostile environment
- Becomes a win/lose situation
• “If a child doesn’t know his letters, we teach.”
• “If a child doesn’t know his colors, we teach.”
• “If a child doesn’t know his numbers, we teach.”
• “If a child doesn’t know how to behave, we...........

“Why can’t we finish the last sentence as automatically as we do the others?”

Tom Herner (NASDE President, Counterpoint 1998, p.2)
• Do you have a Behavior Management Policy?
Summary

- Teachers need support to focus on prevention and teaching appropriate skills

- There are no quick fixes to challenging behavior.

- Working with children with challenging behavior requires a comprehensive approach that includes:
  - Building relationships
  - Focusing on adult behavior – evaluating our own behavior
  - Investing in evidence-based practices
  - Teaching & acknowledging behavioral expectations

A COMMITMENT!
Thank you

Challenging Behavior in Young Children: Understanding, Preventing, and Responding Effectively
Barbara Kaiser and Judy Sklar Rasminsky
www.challengingbehavior.com
Email: barbarak@challengingbehavior.com
What is Challenging Behavior?
Developmentally Appropriate Behavior
Why Do Kids Misbehave?
Parents As Partners
Prevention Strategies
Behavioral Planning I
Behavioral Planning II
Intervention Strategies

Dates: October 10-12, 2012
Villanova, PA (Suburb of Philadelphia)
Debi Mahler
Professional Development Coordinator
dmahler@devereux.org
(610) 574-6141