

What is Challenging Behavior?

When using this segment of the Facing the Challenge DVD for training purposes, the following activities may help enhance the learning experience for participants.



Optional pre-post questions

Handout 1:1/Pre-test What is Challenging Behavior?

Handout 1:5/Post-test What is Challenging Behavior?

What is Challenging Behavior?

Program Content and Activity Cue

Let's look at a scene in an early childhood environment in which the teachers, like all of us, face difficult behaviors and, at times, respond in ways that don't help the child learn more positive behaviors:

Incident Evaluation Sequence

We'll take another look at this sequence at the end of the program to examine what might be done in future situations like this to help the child learn more positive behaviors. Meanwhile, let's begin answering the question: What is Challenging Behavior?

Almost all children who have trouble controlling their behavior can learn new, more effective ways of taking part in school activities and playing with their friends. A child often shows dramatic improvements in his behavior when he learns how to use his words or how to control his impulses. But, in order to have a chance to learn and use these new skills, a child has to be involved with adults who are committed to helping him.

A recent study conducted by Yale University indicated that over 5,000 children were expelled from pre-school in one year. This expulsion rate is more than 3 times that of children in kindergarten through the 12th grade. The study also described as many as one in every ten children as having a serious behavioral problem.

Helping these children can be hard work. Programs that expell young children often feel they can't help those few children using difficult behaviors while still meeting the needs of other children in the classroom. But the fact is, as a qualified teacher, you can help these children. You may not realize that you already have many of the skills needed to help children using challenging behaviors.

Interview - Tom Lottman, Children Inc.

"Teachers often times faced with challenging behaviors - their first reaction is I'm not prepared to deal with this, I don't have the training to deal with this. When in reality, if she simply reflected on the skills that she does have - I think that's the really key point, is that ability to really stop and do some self-reflection and take a look at what am I really good at? And maybe that I'm good at anticipating what the triggers are for that behavior. Well that's really going to give me some good warning. You know I might not know what to really do about that but I can learn then to become intentional about some kind of intervention at that point. So, I think really reflecting and developing an awareness of what skills you do have is the first step to realizing that you might be able to develop the confidence and competence to deal with the challenging behaviors."

Activity 1: Our Own Strengths 3:37

Dealing with challenging behaviors is a normal part of some preschool teacher's jobs. Most children will, at times, use difficult behaviors as they try out different ways of interacting with the world around them or as they adapt to difficult situations like a family move, parental separations, a new sibling, recent changes within the classroom or other major events in their lives. Usually children adapt quickly and stop using behaviors that aren't the most effective at helping them get what they want or need.

But sometimes a child doesn't stop using challenging behaviors. Without help, this child's behavior will likely limit his ability to learn and grow. Determining the difference between behavior that is difficult but likely to improve and behavior that is challenging and likely to require intervention comes with experience.

The description of challenging behavior used by some child development experts and cited in the book: *Challenging Behavior in Young Children* by Barbara Kaiser and Judy Sklar Rasminsky, has three components. Challenging behavior is defined as any behavior that:

- interferes with children's learning, development and successful play.
- is harmful to the child, other children or adults.
- puts a child at high risk for later social problems or school failure.

Activity 2: Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviors 5:13

Aggressive behavior, like hitting, hair pulling and biting, can be challenging in all three ways. That's why a child who hurts his friends in order to get what he wants and doesn't respond as expected to your efforts to teach classroom rules can turn your life upside down. These are the children that get your attention. But kids that don't disrupt the class may also need help.

A child who is withdrawn or extremely shy is also at risk. She may not be likely to interfere with classroom learning or harm other children, but, because she is not engaging in classroom activities and developing the skills she'll need to succeed, she could be at high risk for later social problems or school failure. Children whose main challenge is that they don't participate in classroom activities are often overlooked and can easily get left behind.

Behavior problems can stem from many causes. Before deciding to target a particular child for his challenging behaviors, you should first look at your own teaching practices and learning environment to make sure you're encouraging positive interactions and experiences for all of the children. Each child is different and every group is unique. What has worked in the past may not be working now. Likewise, an activity that a group of children enjoys on a Wednesday may result in chaos on a Monday. Many problem behaviors can improve quickly with simple changes in the classroom's physical layout, rules or transition strategies.

If a child's behavior doesn't improve after you've evaluated and modified the program, you may need to work with the child's parents and others to develop a targeted set of strategies called a Behavioral Intervention Plan. The input of early childhood educators to this plan is critical. Your observations of the child's behavior and careful documentation of the potential causes and results of incidents will provide the raw material from which a plan can be developed.

Interview - Chris Kelley, Training Specialist

I think, next to a parent, the teacher is really the link that builds the bridge between - this is something that is in our heads still or on paper as a plan and what becomes the practical daily reality. What we do is what really makes the difference. The old adage that when we talk about something and think about it and write about it is one thing but when we actually do it and work the plan and go back to the development process. We know that it doesn't have to be perfect the first time - that it is a work in progress and process. That teachers are really a critical part, second only to the parents role in this."

Teachers are an important influence and guide to a child's happiness and well-being.

If the child uses challenging behaviors, your relationship with the child may help you recognize why the behavior is occurring. When a child has difficulty learning new behaviors, one of your best tools in reaching out to the child will be the trust that lies at the heart of a positive relationship.

Interview - Mary Lou Hyson, Senior Advisor for Research and Professional Practice, NAEYC

"Positive relationships between adults and children, teachers and children, play an incredibly important role in

supporting children's development and learning in all areas. And, in this case, if teachers take the time up front, to get to know a child, to really understand, express interest in, build a positive, friendly, caring relationship with that child, that's really like money in the bank. With that relationship, then, when things get tough, when you the teacher need to implement a plan that is focused on some difficult, some challenging behaviors that that child is showing, you're doing that implementation on top of this earlier positive relationship. It's going to make it easier for you and the child to move forward with that plan."

There isn't a formula that you can use to build relationships with young children. With some children, communication seems natural and easy. With others, you may need to be patient and willing to try different approaches until you find one that works.

Just as children are different from one another, so are adults. Behavior that upsets one teacher may be acceptable to another. Some behaviors that a teacher won't allow in the classroom may be encouraged at home. For a child, this difference in adult expectations can be confusing. For you and the child, the confusion about what's acceptable in school, can be a source of frustration. The child may continually push your buttons with behaviors that you don't understand.

One way to harness the frustration and emotional energy that you may feel when a child disrupts your class is to acknowledge the child as soon as she uses a more positive behavior. The characteristics of a child that lead to the display of challenging behavior can also be characteristics that, when channeled appropriately, will ultimately make the child successful. For example, a child with challenging behaviors may possess initiative, perseverance, an ability to lead or even strong problem solving skills.

When a child is displaying challenging behaviors, take some time to list the child's positive traits. With some effort, a teacher should be able to find likeable qualities in every child.

Interview - Nefertiti K. Bruce, M.Ed, Early Childhood Specialist and Trainer "One of the things I encourage teachers to do is not to think about it while you're in that moment. But think about it when you have more quiet time. So maybe before the children start their day, stop for a moment, picture that child, and replay his or her day. And it's at that part that you might start to think, I've been really missing some things. Because when you're dealing with children that have challenging behaviors the best way to start is to think about what they do well. So one of the things I suggest, start in the morning, replay that child's day, picture that child in your mind and do it at that point or maybe in your quiet moments after they've gone home. It's going to be really tough to do it while you're interacting with those behaviors. So try to do it in your quiet moments when the day starts or when the day ends."

Activity 3: Bonding With Each Child 12:17

Finding a child's strengths will be helpful. But it's also a good idea to reflect on your own feelings and motivations to help figure out why you respond strongly to a child's behavior. You might ask yourself:

- Why did I decide to teach young children?
- What behaviors did my parents consider acceptable and unacceptable when I was a child?
- Did I have teachers that I admired?
- How did those teachers react to challenging behaviors in the classroom?

You may be surprised at what you learn about yourself when you look closely at beliefs you take for granted. Also, understanding why you feel the way you do may help you control your responses when children use behaviors that normally upset you.

Interview - Luis Hernandez, Early Childhood Education Specialist, Western Kentucky University

“Actually, in our profession, we really have to start always within ourselves. What are my values? What are my beliefs? in order to carry my professional work. And that cuts across whether it’s curriculum, whether it’s assessment but certainly about our relationship with individual children and families. So I have to double check a lot of those issues. Part of that belief system certainly is going to be about how do I really feel about particular children. In our field we always think that all children are equal and I’m going to love them all. But in reality there are certain personality quirks that can get to us and really challenge us - my individual relationship with a child. What is it that bothers me about this particular child or even the families. So it becomes one that is challenging. What is it about me that creates a conflict, creates a barrier for a better relationship with a child. So the internal work that we do as professionals is deep. It’s not a just a superficial level of like or not like but it really is something that is deeper - within my own culture, my beliefs, my values.”

Now let’s take another look at the challenging behavior you viewed at the beginning of the program:

Sequence: 15 seconds

What do you think the teacher might have done differently?

Here are some responses that might have worked:

- 1) ignore the behavior as long as the other children are not affected.
 - 2) let the child do another quiet activity while the other children nap.
 - and 3) give the child clear but limited choices as a way to empower the child to problem solve.
-

The teachers working with this child realized that they often told him what he shouldn’t be doing but left out what his choices actually were. Once they adjusted their strategy, they saw dramatic improvement.

What is Challenging Behavior?



Pre-Test - Handout 1:1

- 1.) Most children stop using challenging behaviors when:
 - a.) the behavior stops working for them
 - b.) they are disciplined
 - c.) they get to kindergarten
 - d.) they develop strong language skills
- 2.) Challenging Behavior is defined as behavior that:
 - a.) interferes with a child's learning, development or successful play
 - b.) is harmful to the child or other children
 - c.) puts a child at risk for later social problems
 - d.) all of the above
- 3.) Before targeting a child's challenging behaviors, teachers should first examine:
 - a.) their own teaching practices
 - b.) the classroom layout, expectations and experiences
 - c.) their own values and beliefs about challenging behaviors
 - d.) all of the above
- 4.) Teachers should first list a child's _____ as a way to set a positive approach to helping a child learn to use more positive behaviors.
 - a.) hobbies
 - b.) favorite toys
 - c.) positive characteristics or strengths
 - d.) assessment scores
- 5.) As teachers prepare to work with a child with challenging behaviors, they will find that their _____ with that child is at the heart of the process.
 - a.) trusting relationship
 - b.) friendship
 - c.) academic focus
 - d.) all of the above

Name: _____ Center/Classroom: _____ Date: _____

What is Challenging Behavior?

Suggested Activities - Activity 1

Our Own Strengths

<i>Activity:</i>	<i>Our Own Strengths</i>
<i>Running Time into Show:</i>	<i>3:37</i>
<i>Total Activity Time:</i>	<i>10:00</i>
<i>Training/Prep Materials:</i>	<i>None</i>
<i>Handouts:</i>	<i>1.2</i>

Description

Part 1: 5 Minutes

Allow each participant time to reflect upon their own strengths as an early childhood provider.

Part 2: 2 Minutes

Have each participant "pair share" their strengths with a partner.

Part 3: 3 Minutes

Debrief as a group to emphasize that we already possess many qualities as early childhood professionals that will aid us in helping children with challenging behaviors.

Resume DVD.



What is Challenging Behavior?

Our Own Strengths

Handout 1:2



Think about a typical day in your classroom. What are the children doing? What are you doing? Reflect on your own strengths. List below your positive qualities as an early childhood educator that may help you in working with children with challenging behaviors.

What is Challenging Behavior?

Suggested Activities - Activity 2

Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviors

<i>Activity:</i>	<i>Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviors</i>
<i>Running Time into Show:</i>	<i>5:13</i>
<i>Total Activity Time:</i>	<i>10:00</i>
<i>Training/Prep Materials:</i>	<i>Flipchart and marker</i>
<i>Handouts:</i>	<i>None</i>

Description

Part 1: 3 minutes

Ask participants to brainstorm what behaviors they find most challenging in preschool aged children. Chart replies as they are called out.

Part 2: 5 minutes

Go back through the list asking how many of the behaviors would be considered "externalizing" and how many would be "internalizing". Most times, the externalizing behaviors far outweigh the internalizing, because we notice them more and often need to "put out those fires".

Part 3: 2 minutes

Refer back to the screen showing the three components of challenging behavior. Ask participants to share as a group why we need to be equally concerned about both externalizing and internalizing behaviors.

Resume DVD.



What is Challenging Behavior?

Suggested Activities - Activity 3

Bonding with Each Child

<i>Activity:</i>	<i>Bonding with Each Child</i>
<i>Running Time into Show:</i>	<i>12:17</i>
<i>Total Activity Time:</i>	<i>10:00</i>
<i>Training/Prep Materials:</i>	<i>None</i>
<i>Handouts:</i>	<i>1:3</i>

Description

Part 1: 5 minutes

Divide participants into small groups. Ask each group to assign a recorder, and, using Handout 1:3/Bonding With Each Child, have each small group list ways that they work to establish relationships with each child in the classroom.

Part 2: 5 minutes

Debrief as a group, asking one group to read their list, and then other groups to add on with things from their list not yet mentioned.

Resume DVD and play until end.



What is Challenging Behavior?

Bonding With Each Child

Handout 1:3



What ways do you work to establish relationships with each child in the classroom? List ways you work to establish relationships with each child at arrival, during routines, outdoors, and during group meeting times.

What is Challenging Behavior? - Handout 1:4

Reflection Questions

Reflection Questions

Considering the definition of challenging behavior, what are the behaviors that you find most challenging?

Before zeroing in on a child as having a challenging behavior, what are some of the things you should first consider or reflect upon?

How does actively looking for strengths in every child better help you work with a child with challenging behavior?

What is Challenging Behavior?

Post-Test - Handout 1:5



- 1.) Most children stop using challenging behaviors when:
 - a.) the behavior stops working for them
 - b.) they are disciplined
 - c.) they get to kindergarten
 - d.) they develop strong language skills
- 2.) Challenging Behavior is defined as behavior that:
 - a.) interferes with a child's learning, development or successful play
 - b.) is harmful to the child or other children
 - c.) puts a child at risk for later social problems
 - d.) all of the above
- 3.) Before targeting a child's challenging behaviors, teachers should first examine:
 - a.) their own teaching practices
 - b.) the classroom layout, expectations and experiences
 - c.) their own values and beliefs about challenging behaviors
 - d.) all of the above
- 4.) Teachers should first list a child's _____ as a way to set a positive approach to helping a child learn to use more positive behaviors.
 - a.) hobbies
 - b.) favorite toys
 - c.) positive characteristics or strengths
 - d.) assessment scores
- 5.) As teachers prepare to work with a child with challenging behaviors, they will find that their _____ with that child is at the heart of the process.
 - a.) trusting relationship
 - b.) friendship
 - c.) academic focus
 - d.) all of the above

Name: _____ Center/Classroom: _____ Date: _____

What is Challenging Behavior? Applying What You Have Learned...

After watching this segment of Facing the Challenge, and ideally, having a chance to participate in related training and self-reflection on the content, here is an additional “take-home” activity to further enhance your ongoing professional development.

- Reflect on your classroom of children... listing all the behaviors you would classify as “challenging”. Remember to include behaviors that are inhibiting a child’s learning and development, even if the behaviors are not harming others (such as wandering aimlessly, not participating in group activities, etc.). Before each school day begins, revisit the list— making notes (mentally, or in actuality) that will help guide your use of positive guidance for that behavior during the day. After the day is done, again, revisit the list. Reflect on the behaviors you saw that day, and make notes about what went well, and what you could do differently in the future to help children learn more positive behaviors. As the school year moves along, check off the behaviors that have ceased, and add additional behaviors as they surface. As the school year comes to an end- if there are still unresolved challenging behaviors, make a “to-do” list for additional resources, reading, training sessions, and other helpful information that will help you deal more effectively with that behavior in the future.