



CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

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PAUKTUUTIT
INUIT WOMEN OF CANADA



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Challenging Behaviour



INTRODUCTION

As educators and parents, we have all had experiences with children's behavior that have challenged our patience and skills. Regardless of the reasons, some children in our programs require extra attention from staff to manage in a group setting. How many of us have felt overwhelmed and frustrated because we have one or two children in our group whose behavior stands out from the others? We hope that this chapter of Piaranut supports what you are already doing to help children with challenging behaviour, as well as give you new ideas and strategies to try.

WHAT IS CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR?

Most children go through stages or periods of time when their behaviour is challenging. A child who is tired or hungry will behave differently than one who is rested with a full tummy. A toddler who is frustrated because she can't tell you exactly what is bothering her may lash out at others to get what she wants. Many factors affect children's behaviour on an ongoing basis, e.g., time of the day, hunger, fatigue, changes in routine, emotions, parenting styles and family transitions such as the loss of a loved one or divorce.

Children who experience typical daily frustrations need our assistance to learn how to express their feelings and play cooperatively with others.

However, some children need even more assistance, guidance and patience. Children whose behaviour is affected by other factors such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), learning disabilities, or speech and language delays need us even more to have the knowledge and skills to assist them in developing appropriate behaviour so that they can succeed in groups setting such as Head Start, daycare, playgroups and ultimately elementary school.

Regardless of the cause, challenging behaviour can be defined as any behaviour that:

- 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.⁵⁵

"If you love the child, there is a way to improve. We were taught to treat people equally." Elder⁵⁶

We often think of children with challenging behaviours as those children who are aggressive towards others, e.g., hitting, biting, kicking, taking toys, etc. While children who display aggression are challenging for educators, we also know that



children who are disruptive and impulsive, who have trouble paying attention, and who can't follow routines also require additional attention and assistance.

The following sections provide information, ideas and suggestions gathered from various Inuit Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs combined with current research on supporting children with challenging behaviour.

PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy of an ECE program will determine how children with challenging behaviours and their families are supported. A program's philosophy is like a guiding light that illuminates the road ahead or an Inukshuk on the land telling us where to go. It guides your decision making, program planning, and determines your approach to behaviour guidance.

Programs that believe that every child is unique and special and that it is their role to assist all children reach their potential have the following beliefs in common:

1. Children First: Most people who work with children believe that children's needs come first. Most ECE staff believe that children need to be surrounded by caring adults in order to grow into caring adults themselves. Our purpose in becoming caregivers and educators of young children is to teach and guide them in becoming the best they can be.

2. Strength Based: All children come to our programs with strengths and needs. Building on each child's unique strengths is essential to developing new skills and behaviours. For example, if a child has difficulty paying attention at circle time but really likes to help teachers, having him/her sit beside you to turn the pages of a storybook will engage him/her in the circle activity while focussing on the positive 'helping' behaviour.

Strengths that you might look for in children with challenging behaviours include:

- Creative
- Artistic
- Musical
- Helpful
- Affectionate
- Persistent, committed
- Energetic, physical
- Self assured, confident
- Love hands-on activities

*Every child has special strengths and abilities that deserve to be celebrated. Emphasize these strengths as often as you can. Find one area of interest or skill in the child and build on it."*⁵⁷

3. Understanding the Behaviour:

Children with challenging behaviour are not behaving in a particular way on purpose. Most often, challenging behaviours are caused by other factors and the child is not in control. It is true that children can learn certain behaviours to get attention, but even that is based on a need of the child i.e. the need for attention.

*"These kids are not mean and 'bad' on purpose. Dealing with them means a lot of patience, understanding and being non-reactive, and redirection instead of correction or direction. The parent or caregiver needs to stay calm, consistent and supportive."*⁵⁸



4. Change Environment Not Child:

Children with challenging behaviour often have difficulty fitting into a regular group setting such as daycare or Head Start. Early Childhood Education staff may need to make changes to the physical environment or routine to help a child manage in their program. For example, the bathroom is quite small and you know that it causes a lot of stress and frustration for some children to have too many children in there. You could decide to have a basket of books outside the bathroom for waiting children and only allow two children inside at one time. Rather than expecting the child to fit into the environment, you change the environment to fit the needs of the child.

5. Success for Child: A fundamental belief necessary for supporting children with challenging behaviours is the desire for their success in your program. Even though staff may feel frustrated at times, an underlying desire to help the child succeed is necessary. It takes maturity and professionalism to rise above the difficulties to do everything you can to help the child do well in your program. At the end of the day, if every child goes home feeling good about themselves, you have succeeded.

"Children who do not listen, or act on my requests make me a better teacher. They cause me to reflect on my actions and change or accommodate the children's interests and my own." Educator



CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE

As ECE staff managing the daily routines, activities and events in a busy program, most often we wish for the day to go smoothly. Children with challenging behaviour present situations on a daily basis that interrupt the routine, hurt other children, test our patience and disrupt well-planned activities. This can lead to frustration and disappointment for educators as they try to meet the needs of all the children in their group.

However, as professionals in our field we must look beyond our own needs to the needs of the children. We must challenge ourselves to take the perspective of the child by looking at the situation or behaviour from his/her point of view. This helps us to remember that children do not behave in a certain way to intentionally 'ruin' the activity or the day. Most often, their behaviour is an outcome of an underlying need, emotion, or factor beyond their control.

For example, a child who continuously takes toys from other children may in fact be trying to engage in play with the other children, but does not have the social skills to know how to do this. The other children probably react negatively to that child because she/he always takes their toys. So the child gets the message loud and clear that the other children do not want to play with him. But inside she/he really wants to be with them, so she/he uses the only way

she/he knows to get their attention which is to take their toys. Without adult support and intervention, it becomes a vicious cycle of a child seeking negative attention from her/his peers and in the end not learning how to play appropriately with others.

"Preschoolers with aggressive behaviour who are also rejected by their peers experience more stress."⁵⁹

Questions to ask yourself or to discuss with your team when trying to understand a child's behaviour include:⁶⁰

- What is the child trying to tell us?
- Does the child feel enough control over his situations; do we give him enough choices?
- How would I/we feel if we were in this child's situation?
- Can I/we look at the problem differently?
- Have things changed for this child that affect how he behaves?
- How can we help him?
- Are things happening that could cause anxiety for this child?
- Have there been any recent changes in the child life?

- Have there been any changes to the child's routine?
- What are the child's strengths and abilities?
- How can we build in these strengths to find a solution?

"Often what is considered to be problem behaviour is no more than a person finding different ways of making sense of their world."⁶¹

See Appendix A for exercises that can help educators understand what a child might be telling them through his/her behaviour.

LEADERSHIP/ TEAM WORK

Supporting children with challenging behaviour effectively depends on program leadership and teamwork. The role of the Centre Director is critical in setting the tone for program staff. A solution-based and positive attitude goes a long way in leading others to have the same. Centre Directors encourage, motivate, model, and praise their staff in their daily interactions with children.

It is also important to have ample time to discuss the program's approach to behaviour guidance to ensure consistency and commitment to specific strategies. Everyone interacting with children, including volunteers must understand what strategies are encouraged and which are not.

- Meet regularly as a team to review and discuss children's progress.
- Decide as a team what strategies will be used when to ensure consistency amongst staff.
- Observe co-workers for frustration and tag team if necessary to support one another.
- Develop action plans for individual children that identify their strengths, areas of need, triggers, etc.
- Provide ample orientation to volunteers so they know what is expected of children and staff.
- Develop behaviour management policies and distribute to parents and volunteers.
- Post reminders of behaviour guidance strategies around the room to visually remind staff of what strategies they can use.
- Find out about professional development opportunities within your community or region; attend when possible to continue to develop as an early childhood educator.



POLICIES

Most provincial/territorial regulations require that all Inuit ECE programs develop a policy on behavior management. Behavior management, child guidance or discipline are interchangeable terms for the same thing – how adults help children to express feelings appropriately, resolve conflict with others, and control aggression. Program staff, parents and volunteers use a variety of strategies to teach, model and support appropriate behavior. A strong policy on behavior management will cover the following:

- What strategies are encouraged and permitted i.e. redirection, praise.
- What strategies are not permitted i.e. hitting, spanking, humiliating.
- Suggested strategies and how to implement them i.e. consequences, redirection, time-out.
- What the consequences are if a staff member engages in prohibited acts i.e. written warning or termination of employment.
- What the consequences are if a child is continually aggressive or harmful to children or staff i.e. temporary removal from the program.



BONDING

Developing positive relationships with children in our programs is essential to their well-being. Bonding with children with challenging behaviours can be difficult at times as we face our own feelings of frustration and reactions to their behaviour. Making a commitment to connecting to those children will assist educators in their work with them.

"Your connection with a child is the most powerful tool you have as a teacher."⁶²

Ultimately, it is easier to guide children's behaviour when you have a strong relationship with them. Some suggestions about how to build relationships include the following:⁶³

- Be positive about what the child is doing well, e.g., praise for sitting at circle.
- Spend one-on-one time with the child every day. Find a time to sit and do an activity with the child no matter how hectic the day is. It could be doing a puzzle together or asking him to help you prepare snack. Giving the child the choice of what to do together is also helpful.
- Share personal stories or experiences with the child, e.g., your trip on the land over the weekend.
- Use his name often, which shows respect and caring for him.
- Create a special signal of praise that is just between you and him, e.g., a special wink that tells him he is doing well.

See Appendix B for more ways to develop relationships with children.

ELDERS

Elders play a very important role in Inuit ECE settings. Including Elders in your program will ensure that cultural knowledge, stories and traditions are maintained. Storytelling in particular is a traditional way to teach children how to behave in a group, family or community. In addition, stories have a calming effect on many children.



"The unikkaaqtuat [old stories] are beneficial to children. At one time these stories were true, but because they are so old they just became stories. They are very useful for children. There are all sorts of stories that can be told to children. Most times, children start settling down when you tell a story. Most of the stories that we heard were true and they have a definite benefit for children." Elder⁶⁴

Knowing this makes our job as early childhood educators all the more important as we guide and teach young children in our programs. If we can help a child at a young age develop appropriate behaviours they will do better later in life.

"Behaviour problems can lead to trouble at school. Because of their problems with social skills, emotional control, and language development, many children with challenging behaviour come to school unprepared for the most basic task of their early school years – learning to read." ⁶⁶

EARLY INTERVENTION

Research tells us that children with "attention and behaviour difficulties are at risk for experiencing problems such as negative parental-child interactions, problems with aggression, learning difficulties, grade repetition, increased contact with police, substance abuse, depression, anxiety, stress, social concern and lower self-esteem."⁶⁵

*"By believing in the child, expecting a lot of him, and supporting him as he extends his reach, a caring adult can help him to believe in himself and to develop competence and confidence."*⁶⁷

BASIC MESSAGES

Underlying all your interactions in guiding children's behaviour are basic messages about what you believe as an adult helping children. Your words and actions should support the following messages:

- I care about you and what happens to you;
- I am here to teach and help you;
- You can't hurt other people;
- You can't hurt yourself;
- You can't hurt toys, or furniture;
- You don't always get what you want;
- I am on your side; and
- If you make a mistake, keep trying.

"If children are taught about how they are supposed to behave, they can try to do these things. As they try to do the new things, it will be awkward at first but with practices they will get better." Elder⁶⁸

PREVENTION

Prevention is key! Supporting and teaching children with challenging behaviour is highly affected by our ability to prevent problems or conflicts before they occur. Planning, preparation, and keen observation help to ensure that a child has the best chance at success while in your program. The following prevention strategies may help a child in your program.

a) *Environment*

A caring environment that is consistent and predictable for children supports the development of appropriate social skills. Children with challenging behaviour need to know that they are in a safe and calm place, and that they can predict their daily experiences to some degree.

Physical environments that are chaotic and over-stimulating can make some children feel overwhelmed and agitated. Having too much to look at and choose from is distracting for many children.

- Simplify the décor of your room. Limit decorations, pictures and other items on the walls.
- Keep hands-on activities simple and straightforward.
- Limit the number of children at activity areas to avoid crowding and frustration.
- Store toys and materials in an orderly fashion, i.e. labels on storage containers.
- Create an area of the room that is quiet and calm for children to relax in when they are overwhelmed or over-stimulated.

- Dim the lights and play calming music during quiet activities.
- Close or cover activity areas of the room that are off limits.
- Display materials in ways to promote independence and reduce frustration, e.g., accessible bins or baskets at the child's level.
- Use soft paint colours when decorating the room. Avoid bright colours on the walls.

"An environment which is noisy, overly cluttered, has strong smells, is brightly lit with fluorescent lighting or has busy patterned carpets or bright wall colours can create over-stimulation and distract the [child] from the information you are trying to share."⁶⁹

See Appendix C to help you evaluate your environment.

b) Curriculum/Activities

When planning daily activities, ECE staff considers the needs of all the children. However, special consideration of the needs of children with challenging behaviour will help staff plan activities effectively and possibly prevent problems.


- When setting up activities, set up a few items that help children engage in positive play when they enter that area. For example, in the dramatic play area, set up the table with dishes and put a few dolls on the chairs.

- Allow children to make choices throughout the day so that they feel empowered.
- Provide sensory toys or gadgets for child to manipulate during group activities such as circle. This allows the child to fidget with something like a squishy ball while listening to a story.⁷⁰
- Break children into smaller circle groups so there are fewer wait times for turns.
- Ensure that there is ample opportunity for appropriate active play, e.g., gym time, outdoors, music and movement, creative dance, etc.
- Provide small mats for children to sit on during circle time. This sets the expectation that children stay on their own mat. If a child is having a particularly difficult time staying in their space, try using a booster seat on the floor.
- Make up stories to share at circle time about the expectations in your program for appropriate behaviour.

c) Triggers

Triggers are events or actions in a child's environment that lead to a certain response or behaviour. By observing children in your program and working closely with parents, you can learn what triggers individual children.

For example, a child may be sensitive to noise. If one day, you have a guest speaker come in to circle time who is particularly loud, you may realize that the child seems irritated and overwhelmed by the visitor. This in turn may affect his behaviour during circle time.



Knowing this child's triggers ahead of time allows staff to react more supportively of the child rather than assuming the child is being disrespectful or disruptive at circle time. Perhaps during that time the child can come away and work on an individual activity in a quiet area, rather than participate in the circle.

Another example might be a child who you know becomes extremely irritated and agitated by how things feel such as clothing or materials. A scenario with this child might be in the dramatic play corner when a group of children decide to dress up as animals and put on a spontaneous play. The animal costumes in the center are very fuzzy and have thick seams on the inside. You know this ahead of time and you might offer an alternative to this child. You might suggest that he/she draw a picture of his animal to tape to his shirt instead. In this way, you respect the child's sensitivities, have preempted a possible breakdown and have allowed him to be successful in the group.

d) Structure/Routines/Consistency

Structure and consistency in a program is important for children with challenging behaviour. Being able to predict the events of the day allows them to feel a sense of control and confidence in their surroundings.

- Keep routines and transitions consistent. If there are changes, be sure to give children advance warning so they can be prepared for the change.
- Make sure you have the children's attention before giving instructions about an activity or routine.
- Establish eye contact when talking to a child about something. Bend down to the child's level to speak to him/her.
- Use pictures or other visuals that break down routines into simple steps, e.g., taking off coat, hanging up coat, put mitts in basket.
- Use group time to ask children to review the daily routine and select visuals that represent certain times of the day. For example, you might assume that a picture of a toilet would indicate bathroom time, but in fact the children prefer a picture of a sink.
- Use songs or catchy phrases as cues to begin transitions in the routine. For example, tidy up songs, turning lights off and on before snack time. Be creative and ask the children for input about what songs or transition cues could be used.
- Create rituals that help to ease transitions. For example, as you begin a quiet activity such as story time or nap time, you might say to your group "zip it, lock it, and put it in your pocket" with accompanying actions.⁷¹
- Be consistent about routines such as meals, e.g., children sit in the same spots every day, put their dishes in the same bins when finished, etc.
- Repeat your instructions for routines or expectations as much as needed. Ask the child to tell you back what you told him.
- Give warnings to children of upcoming transitions. For example, let the children know that in five minutes it will be tidy-up time. This allows children to prepare for the transition emotionally and physically as they finish up what they are doing and mentally say good-bye to the activity.
- Be concrete and simple in your explanations or instructions. Tell them step by step what to do.

"The best way to do this is through balanced discipline. Don't let them become quick-tempered. You need to be consistent with them. If you consistently show both love and discipline, the child will grow nicely. Children will become fearful of you if they have been intimidated too much." Elder⁷²

See Appendix D for information on evaluating routines and transitions.

e) Setting Limits

Setting limits allows children to know ahead of time what is expected at certain times of the day or areas of the room. Examples of limits are being able to slide down the slide but not walk up the slide or having a 10 minute turn on the swing.

- Set limits about how many children are allowed in an activity area at one time. Post this as a visual reminder to the children by having three faces on a card in that area for example.
- Discuss as a group what the rules and limits for the classroom might be. Children who contribute to rule setting are more likely to follow those rules.

f) Modeling

Modeling is a very effective strategy to teach children what is expected of them. If we want children to be respectful of others, then we must show them how, through our interactions with them, with parents and with co-workers. If we want children to express their feelings, then



we model this for them by sharing ours, e.g., "it makes me very happy when you share with Thomas."

g) Choices

Offering children choices gives them a sense of control and independence that they need to develop feelings of empowerment and self-motivation.

While allowing for choice is encouraged in early childhood settings, keep in mind that for some children it may be difficult. Deciding where to play at free play time may be overwhelming for some children. It may be helpful to walk with them to two or three centres to allow them to make a choice. They will be able to see what is offered in that area that day and make a concrete choice.

"If you allow the children to decide for themselves – rather than controlling them – they don't have to look for inappropriate ways to seek power and assert their independence."⁷³

h) Expectations

Children need to know what is expected of them throughout the day. We can't assume that children always know what to do and when. Stating what the expectation is for a certain activity can help prevent difficulties.

For example, at the end of circle time as you prepare for snack time, you might say to the children, "As we go to snack, I expect you to walk quietly to your spot at the table." Or, as you prepare to go to the school library for a visit, you might review what the expectations are for walking through the hallways.

- Make your directions clear and concise. Use simple language to explain what a child is expected to do.
- State what the expectations are for the children during a particular routine or activity before you begin, e.g., when we walk to the gym, where do we put our hands?
- Allow children to tell you what the expectation is, e.g., "can you tell me what we should do when we walk to gym?" (walk quietly, keep our hands to ourselves, and stay in line).
- Adjust your expectations accordingly. Some children may not be able to complete the dressing time quickly. If rushing them through the routine always ends in mutual frustration, then adjust your expectation for that child. Allowing them to take an extra 10 minutes (providing they can be supervised) to get dressed to go outside demonstrates a child-centered and supportive approach.
- Repeat, repeat, repeat!

i) Supervision

Adequate supervision is a critical strategy to prevent situations from occurring and/or escalating. Keen observation will help educators learn about what the precursors are for certain children or which children have more difficulty getting along.

- Watch children's reactions such as body language and facial expressions for signs of frustration that may lead to conflict or outbursts.
- Avoid certain combinations of children who may have difficulty together, e.g., sitting two children away from each other at snack time to prevent conflict.
- Arrange the room to ensure that you can see all areas from anywhere. Avoid having corners and other areas that you cannot supervise well.

GUIDANCE STRATEGIES

Planning ahead will help children with challenging behaviours manage in a group setting. However, ultimately early childhood educators must intervene many times a day to help children develop self-control, express their feelings and play cooperatively with their peers. The following strategies prove useful in guiding children's behaviour.

a) Ignoring

Children with challenging behaviours may feel as though they are "getting into trouble all the time." If behaviour is not putting the child or other children at risk of being hurt, it is often effective to ignore it. Ignoring certain behaviour allows the child to have a break from the constant attention he most likely experiences.

"If you discipline the child all the time, constantly, it seems that they tune you out. If they are doing something and you know nothing bad is going to happen, you should just let them be. Don't discipline the child. You should only discipline them at appropriate times" Elder⁷⁴

b) Redirection

Redirection is perhaps the most widely used strategy to guide children's behaviour. Redirection is an effective method to intervene and refocus a child's attention and energy elsewhere. It is particularly effective with toddlers, whose attention shifts frequently anyway. With preschoolers, warnings and explanations are important so that children understand why they have to move to another activity or area of the room.

c) Repeat and Redo

Repeat and redo is a specific technique to help children learn appropriate behaviour in a concrete way. For example, the expectation while in the community school is that children walk from the gym to the classroom. If a child runs from the gym, a repeat and redo approach would mean she/he has to return to the gym and repeat what was expected, in this case walking. Then he/she would be praised for meeting the expectation, e.g., "nice job walking from the gym."

d) Conflict Resolution

Children in preschool settings are not too young to learn how to identify and solve conflicts amongst themselves. Using the following six steps to assist children in resolving conflicts teaches them about problem solving:

- i. Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions;
- ii. Acknowledge children's feelings;
- iii. Gather information;
- iv. Restate the problem;
- v. Ask for ideas for solutions and choose one together; and
- vi. Be prepared to give follow-up support.⁷⁵

"It's useful to remember that conflicts are normal events that provide excellent teaching and learning opportunities and that children are more likely to honor solutions they've thought of themselves." ⁷⁶

e) Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement for children's behaviour is a very powerful strategy. Most children are highly motivated by adults' response to their actions, work, behaviour and interactions. They crave validation and attention for their efforts. Providing attention for behaviour that you want to see will go a long way in encouraging positive behaviour.

- Praise children when they engage in behaviours that you want to see, e.g., keeping their hands in their lap at circle time or helping to tidy up.

- Use different types of praise such as a wink, a smile, a thumbs up or a pat on the back rather than always saying something verbal. If you always say the same thing such as “good job”, it can go unheard over time.
- Use positive statements rather than negative ones. Explain to the children what you want them to do instead of what not to do. For example say “I would really like to see you sitting on your chair” rather than “Don’t jump around.” This really helps children know what you want them to do while also framing your language in a positive way to avoid using ‘don’t’ too often. Then when the child does sit down, give him a thumbs up or a ‘thank you’.

“We should not let children be intimidated so that when they grow up they won’t intimidate others. Children who are intimidated take revenge when they become adults. To prevent this cycle, you shouldn’t intimidate them.” Elder⁷⁷

f) Reminders/Warnings

Simple reminders can help children remember what is expected of them. When entering the lunch room for example, you might have a signal, word or phrase that reminds the children to walk quietly to their spot at the table, e.g., “walking feet to where we eat”.

Warnings also allow children to take control of their behaviour and make choices. For example, if a child has been at the sand table and has been reminded

several times about throwing sand, you could provide a warning about what the consequence might be if he isn’t able to stop, e.g., “Johnny, I have asked you two times to stop throwing the sand. I am concerned that Sarah will get sand in her eyes. If it continues, you will have to find somewhere else to play. I know that you are able to play in the sand without throwing it.” In this example you have told Johnny what he is doing that is unacceptable, what the expectation is, why you are setting a limit and what will happen if it continues.

g) Proximity

At times, simply moving close to a child or group of children can change the behaviour. For example, a child who is tossing beads onto the floor from the manipulative table may stop if you move over to the table. Your presence may be all that is needed to remind the child that this is not acceptable. This gives the child to a chance to self-correct his/her behaviour with very little intervention.⁷⁸ At group times or during activities, it is also helpful to position yourself closest to children with challenging behaviours.

h) Consequences

Natural and logical consequences encourage children to take responsibility for their actions. Natural consequences are ones that occur naturally as a result of certain actions or behaviour, e.g., a child’s hands will get cold if they refuse to wear their mitts. Logical consequences are those that educators create that make sense in relation to the behaviour, e.g., if a child spills milk, a logical consequence would be to have him/her help wipe it up. For logical consequences to be effective they should:

- be related to the child’s actions;

- be respectful of the child's feelings; and
- be reasonable so that he/she doesn't interpret them as a threat or form of punishment.⁷⁹

i) Time away

Many educators believe that time-outs are punitive and not very effective in changing children's behaviour. More and more, ECE staff are favouring 'time-away' which allows children to calm down and regroup in a more dignified and respectful manner. A designated quiet space in the room allows children to take time away where they might punch a pillow, read a book, listen to music or whatever is helpful for that child to calm down and return to the group. Unlike time-outs where children are left on a chair or something similar, advocates for time away encourage staff to support children during time away, e.g., talking, rubbing back, sitting together, etc.

The goals of time away include the following:

- To give the child the chance to regain control in a safe place;
- To encourage the child to re-enter the play when he is calm so that he is successful with his peers;
- To help children recognize when their feelings are building to a dangerous level;
- To help children identify when they are ready to reenter the group;
- To allow the rest of the group to continue its activities.⁸⁰

j) Listening to Children

Developing strong listening skills is important if we are to understand what motivates a child's behaviour. Acknowledging the feeling behind the behaviour is important in helping children to identify and express what they are feeling.

By asking a few simple questions, we can assist children in expressing their thoughts and feelings. Questions such as the following will help draw out what is happening for a child at a particular time:

- Your face is very red Sam, are you angry?
- What did John do to make you feel this way?
- Can you think of why you feel so frustrated?
- Where you feeling mad when you threw the block?

Keep in mind the following keys to effective listening skills with young children:

- Acknowledge the feeling behind the behaviour.
- Pay attention to non-verbal behaviour.
- Move to the child's level and make eye contact.
- Use cues to let the child know you are listening.
- Paraphrase what the child has said.
- Check the feelings behind a child's statement or actions.
- Ask open-ended questions.⁸¹



CARE FOR THE CAREGIVER

It is extremely important that ECE staff take care of themselves and each other when supporting children with challenging behaviour.

- Always remember that the child is not willfully trying to challenge you or ruin your day. Tell yourself this in your head over and over if needed, e.g., create a phrase like “he’s a child and he needs me to stay calm” that you can say to yourself when needed.
- Forgive yourself when you handle a situation poorly. Reflect on the situation and try again the next time.
- Talk to your co-workers about how you are feeling.
- Take the breaks you are entitled to, e.g., go for a short walk on your lunch hour to clear your head.
- Seek support from your supervisor.
- Get enough rest so you are fresh for the next day.

WORKING WITH PARENTS

In order to support a child with challenging behaviour, it is really helpful to develop a sense of partnership with his/her family. Open and honest communication between parents and teachers builds a foundation of mutual trust, and support necessary to work together towards the best interest of the child.

When meeting with parents concerning their child’s behaviour, keep the following in mind:

- Be non-judgmental in your approach with parents.
- Understand that parents may feel guilty about their situation.
- Know that parents may be on the defense when hearing about problems with their child.

- Keep a positive attitude toward solving any problems. A solution-based approach will help parents feel as though you are working together.
- Send a message that parents are the experts about their child and that you both have his/her best interests in mind - essentially that you are on the same team.
- Ask about what works at home and be willing to try this if feasible in your program.
- Share with the parent what is working in the centre and offer suggestions for home.
- Use your best listening skills when parents are expressing a concern or point of view. The process is reciprocal and parents will feel respected if you really hear them.
- Begin discussing a plan of action and use positive language to support plan, e.g., “I will let you know... we’ll work together on this...we’ll find a way.’ You may need to schedule a follow up meeting to finalize an action plan.
- Develop methods of regular communication so that parents stay in the loop about the child’s progress, e.g., daily communication book.
- Maintain an open door policy so parents can visit at any time.

See Appendix E for more information about working with parents.



Resources

Publications:

Let's Talk FASD, VON Canada
www.von.ca

The Inclusive Early Childhood Classroom
(Gould and Sullivan, 1999)

Challenging Behaviour in Young Children
(Kaiser and Rasminsky, 2007)

Guiding Children Indirectly Towards Self-
Regulation (Hearron & Hildebrand, 2005)

A Different Look at Challenging Behavior
(Loomis and Wagner, 2005)

Guiding Young Children (7th edition)
(Hearron, P.F. & Hildebrandt, V2005)

Meeting the Challenge: Effective Strategies
for Challenging Behaviours in Early
Childhood Settings. (Kaiser, B, & Ras-
minsky, J.S. 1999)

Guiding Young Children: A problem-
solving approach (3rd edition).
(Reynolds, E. 2001)

Websites:

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation
Website www.challengingbehavior.org

Centre on the Social and Emotional
Foundation for Early Learning
www.vanderbilt.edu

Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-
Being www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca

For routines and transitions visual
symbols that help the kids can be down-
loaded from this and other sites:

[http://www.visualaidsforlearning.com/
products/index.htm](http://www.visualaidsforlearning.com/products/index.htm)

[http://www.practicalautismresources.
com/printables](http://www.practicalautismresources.com/printables)

Behavioural observational triggers/
documentations:

[http://www.polyxo.com/documents/
#data](http://www.polyxo.com/documents/#data)

<http://www.polyxo.com/fba/>

Other:

Meeting the Challenge, An Aboriginal
Perspective CD-ROM and Training
Workshops



Appendix 6A:

Listening to Non-Verbal Behaviour

Children often communicate to us without using words. Their behaviour gives us messages about their thoughts, feelings and needs. As effective listeners, we need to have ways to check that we correctly understand the message they are sending. When we see a child behaving in a certain way, rather than jumping to conclusions about

the behaviour, we first take a moment to think about all of the possible messages the child may be sending. Then decide on the one we think is most likely and check it out with the child by telling what we noticed and asking a question. If we are wrong, we can check out another guess. The exercise below shows that process:

Behaviour	Guesses About Meaning	Checking the Meaning
You are trying to prepare some materials for craft. A child keeps climbing up on your lap. The child grabs a pair of small scissors, and tries to cut up the papers you are working on.	The child likes to cut. The child is interested in what you are doing. The child wants to help. The child wants you to come and play. (Can you think of any other possibilities?)	I notice that you keeping climbing up on my lap. I'm wondering if you want to play with me?
You are vacuuming the floor after lunch. A child keeps pulling the plug out and dashing away.		
Two children are building a roadway with blocks. Another child is standing about a metre and a half away watching and smiling slightly.		
When it's time to clean up, one child continues to read in the reading corner.		

Source: Canadian Child Care Federation, *Meeting the Challenge: An Aboriginal Perspective*

Appendix 6A: continued

Listening for Feelings

When a child or an adult is conveying strong emotion, the first thing to do is to acknowledge that emotion. In order for them to be able to move on (e.g. to problem-solving), the person needs to know that you understand their

feelings. We can make sure we are interpreting feelings correctly by guessing at the feeling then asking a “checkout” question. This exercise will help you practice listening for feelings.

Example	Possible Feelings	“Checkout” Questions
A child, working on a craft activity exclaims “This is too hard!”	She’s frustrated. She’s angry. She’s tired. She’s bored. She’s hungry.	It sounds like you’re having a hard time with this craft, am I right?
A child bursts into tears just after her mother leaves in the morning.		
Your co-worker says, “Try as I might, I just can’t seem to get it right!”		
A child, smiling, shows you a picture that she has just finished.		
A child says to you, “I wish you were dead!”		

Source: Canadian Child Care Federation, *Meeting the Challenge: An Aboriginal Perspective*



Appendix 6B:

Some Ways to Build Relationships with Children

1. Greet children. Smile.
2. Use children's name positively (not synonymous with "no, stop or don't").
3. Make eye contact when speaking to children.
4. Squat, kneel or sit to be at children's level while talking to them.
5. Use descriptive feedback (avoid "good job" syndrome).
6. When you tell a child that you'll listen to him or her later, be sure you do.
7. Describe why you are concerned about a child's behaviour.
8. Give children opportunities to be competent and capable during routines.
9. Give children attention when they are behaving positively instead of focusing on attention while they are misbehaving.
10. Ask children if you can join them in play and don't be upset if they say "no".
12. Make sure that your verbal and non-verbal communication match.
13. Respond quickly to children's cries or other signs of distress.
14. Use routine times (like diapering) to give individual attention to children.
15. Avoid "swooping" in to blow a child's nose or wipe their face.
16. Acknowledge children's feelings when they are upset.
17. Acknowledge children's feelings when they are happy or excited.
19. Tell the child's parent what she/he did well that day.
20. Ask the child if you can put his/her name on artwork.
21. Sit by the children when she/he is playing and comment positively on what is happening.
22. Notice what the child is interested in and bring in a book that she/he might like.
23. Get involved in children's play and follow their lead.

* Compiled by Mary Lynne Matheson, ECE instructor, Grant MacEwan College, 2005



Appendix 6C: Evaluating the Environment

Complete these questions as you look critically at the environment in your room.

- ☐ Is there enough space so that children can play without interfering with each other?
- ☐ Are there pathways and large, open spaces that invite children to run?
- ☐ Are there enough play materials so that children do not have to compete for a chance to play with them?
- ☐ Are there too many toys, pictures, colours that could result in over-stimulation?
- ☐ Does the play environment change to reflect the current interests of the children?
- ☐ Is the environment sterile and uninviting?
- ☐ Are materials and toys developmentally appropriate so that children are challenged yet not frustrated?
- ☐ Are toys stored in bins and labeled with words and pictures so children can easily find them and put them away?
- ☐ Are there elements in the room that soften the environment such as pillows, rugs, water, sand, modeling media, fabric, plants?
- ☐ Are there places to be alone and places to play in small groups?
- ☐ Listen. What do you hear? How does noise impact children's behaviour?

Source: Canadian Child Care Federation, *Meeting the Challenge: An Aboriginal Perspective*



Appendix 6D: Evaluating Programming, Routines, and Transitions

Complete these questions as you evaluate your program:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Are children actively engaged with the materials and activities in the playroom? | <input type="checkbox"/> Is the schedule balanced to include indoor and outdoor, active and quiet experience? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do children know what to do and how to do it? | <input type="checkbox"/> Do we avoid having children spending a lot of time waiting and in lineups? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do children understand the behaviour expectations within the room? | <input type="checkbox"/> Do children have opportunities to be involved in open-ended activities? (activities where there can be many possible results). |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do children have opportunities to be involved in sensory experiences such as modeling media, water and sand play? | <input type="checkbox"/> Is there a large enough block of free play time so that children can be free to become involved in more complex play activities such as block building and dramatic play? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do children have opportunities to make choices about what activities they will be involved in? | |

Source: *Canadian Child Care Federation, Meeting the Challenge: An Aboriginal Perspective*

Appendix 6E:

RESOURCE SHEET

Canadian Child Care Federation



#87

Practitioners and Families Together: Encouraging Positive Behaviour

Families and early childhood practitioners have complementary areas of expertise that make them ideal partners in helping children develop social competence. Families bring their hopes and dreams for their children, along with the deep understandings that they have acquired through their years of childrearing. Practitioners bring their professional skills and experience as well as their observations of the children's interactions in a group setting.

It is fun for practitioners and families to share children's social successes. However, finding ways to work together to address challenging behaviours can be more difficult. Practitioners may hesitate to initiate a discussion they believe will be distressing to parents. Parents' investment in their children may cause them to feel frustrated, inadequate or helpless when their child is having problems; they may respond by withdrawing or becoming defensive. There might be language and/or culture barriers that require extra effort and understanding. While there is much that parents can contribute to discussions of challenging behaviour, it is practitioners who have the professional responsibility to initiate and facilitate a collaborative strategy to address the behaviour.

Preparing for Collaboration

To support collaboration, practitioners should:

- Build a relationship of mutual trust, respect and openness

from the very beginning. Convey warmth and caring, establish regular communication and encourage information sharing.

- Honour the knowledge, experience, goals and feelings of the parents.
- Actively appreciate diversity as an opportunity for learning about different ways to live in the world.

Discussing Challenging Behaviour

Communication skills such as active listening and problem-solving that practitioners use in their work with children are also important in discussions with parents.

- Arrange a time and place for discussion that is private and where neither party feels hurried
- Bring specific observations of the challenging behaviour.
- Be sure to mention things they appreciate about the child.
- Describe the behaviour and why they are concerned about it.
- Ask parents about their experience with, and understanding of, the behaviour.
- Listen carefully and with empathy in order to fully understand families' expectations and viewpoints.
- Engage parents in brainstorming possible causes and solutions.
- Find a mutually acceptable approach that draws upon the strengths of all perspectives.
- Develop a plan of action that shows how practitioners and the family will address the behaviour.
- Plan for another meeting to discuss progress.

Messages from Families to Practitioners

- We appreciate your concern for our child.
- We value your insights and knowledge.
- We are willing to share relevant information about our child's life in order to better understand his/her behaviour.
- We hope that, by working together, we can find ways to address the challenging behaviour.
- We are willing to follow through at home.

Useful Phrases for Practitioners and Families

- "We've noticed that... Have you ever noticed that at home/at the centre?"
- "How do you handle that when it happens?"
- "We've noticed that... seems to help."
- "These are some of the things we're doing to help (your child) learn to (make friends, talk about feelings etc.)."
- "How can we work together to help him/her with this?"
- "Here are some things that are happening at home/at the child care that might be influencing (the child's) behaviour..."

Messages from Practitioners to Families

- We know, appreciate and care about your child.
- Behaviour challenges are an opportunity to teach social skills.
- We respect the knowledge and insights that you bring.
- We know some strategies for dealing with the situation.
- Working together, we will succeed in helping your child develop positive social skills.

Prepared by Carole Massing for the Canadian Child Care Federation. Permission is not required to make photocopies for public education purposes. Photocopies may not be sold. To purchase this resource sheet, contact the Canadian Child Care Federation, 201-383 Parkdale Ave., Ottawa, Ontario, K1Y 4R4. Phone (613) 729-5289 or 1 800 858-1412, Fax (613) 729-3159. Email info@ccc-fcc.ca. Website www.cccf-fcc.ca. © CCCF 2008.



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