



Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

Challenging Behaviors - Why Do They Do That?!

What is challenging behavior? According to *Challenging Behavior in Young Children* by Barbara Kaiser and Judy Sklar Rasminsky, 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.

According to *The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL)*, "Children's behavior has meaning — it's just that adults don't always understand what the meaning is. In the early years, before children have strong language skills, it can be especially hard to understand what a baby or toddler is trying to communicate." Sometimes the behavior can be misinterpreted as aggressive, and challenging when it is persistent and unpredictable. Oftentimes, what is described as challenging behavior is actually developmentally typical behavior for young children.

Past experiences, culture, and beliefs all influence how we interpret behavior. Take some time to reflect on what you perceive as challenging and why those behaviors might be particularly challenging for you.

Remember **all** behavior has meaning! This newsletter presents an overview of some of the challenging behaviors you may encounter within each age group (infants, toddlers and preschoolers). We will address possible meanings behind the behavior, and how you can respond to



the challenging behaviors in order to help guide your child to communicate his needs and get them met.

This newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Resources:** for more information about this topic, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

Infants

Some common behaviors that infants might exhibit that could be challenging for you are crying and separation anxiety. Infants use their whole bodies to communicate. They lack the ability to self-regulate or calm themselves down.

Possible Meanings Behind Behavior:

- ♥ His basic needs are not met – he is hungry, tired or has a soiled diaper.
- ♥ He is overstimulated by the environment.
- ♥ He may have experienced a change in caregiver or routines.
- ♥ He understands that someone he cares about is gone.

To help your infant stop crying, ensure that his basic needs are met, hold him close to your body (you can use a carrier) and take slow calming breaths, sing or hum to him. If crying is persistent and you feel yourself getting frustrated, place your infant on his back in a safe sleep area and walk away for a few minutes to calm down (stay within hearing and sight distance), check on him every 5-10 minutes. NEVER SHAKE AN INFANT - remember, it is normal for infants to cry - it's okay and it won't hurt him.



To help with separation anxiety you should never sneak out and should always say goodbye. Sneaking out can cause your child to worry that you will disappear at any time. Parents and caregivers should work together to develop a consistent goodbye routine with hugs and kisses. You may create a book called *Mommy (or Daddy) leaves... Mommy comes back*, with photos of yourself leaving and picking your child up. You can also leave an article of clothing that he can cuddle with when he needs to feel close to you.

Activity for Infants: *Feeding Time is Bonding Time*

What You Need:

- A soft sock
- A baby bottle

What to Do:

1. Hold your baby close to you while you feed him.
2. When you are feeding, let him hold onto your finger or grasp your clothing or a soft blanket. Gently stroke his head, hand, or arm during feeding and softly talk or sing to him.
3. As your baby's hands reach around the bottle, talk to him in a sing-song voice called Parentese to help promote language and bonding



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)

Toddlers

Toddlers naturally strive for independence and control. This stage of development can be challenging. Two of these challenging behaviors may be biting and tantrums. Biting is a very common behavior among toddlers. According to Zero to Three, “Most times toddlers bite in order to cope with a challenge or fulfill a need.” It is important for providers to respond and not react to the child who bites. Avoid yelling, harsh punishment, shaming him, or labeling him a “biter”, as it does not reduce biting.

Possible Meaning Behind the Behavior:

- ♥ He lacks the language skills to express strong feelings like frustration, anger, or even joy.
- ♥ He is overwhelmed by sounds, activity level, and the environment.

How You Can Respond:

You can teach your child to say power words to build language skills like “STOP!” or “I WANT!” You can also shift attention to the child who was bitten. This teaches empathy.

Tantrums are most likely to happen when toddlers are tired, hungry or over-excited.

Most toddlers lack problem solving skills, have trouble asking for things and expressing emotions.



Possible Meanings Behind the Behavior:

- ♥ He needs help and doesn't know how to ask.
- ♥ He is hungry, exhausted or overstimulated.

How You Can Respond:

If it is safe and appropriate you can ignore the tantrum, and you can say “I am here when you need me to help you.” Remember to try to stay calm - count to 10 - and breathe! You are setting an example and showing him how to appropriately handle strong emotions.

Activity for Toddlers: *Caring for Teddy*

What You Need:

A teddy bear or any other stuffed animal

What to Do:

1. Give your toddler simple directions. For example, “Rock Teddy in your arms.” “Give Teddy a kiss.” “Hold Teddy up in the air.” “Tickle Teddy on his tummy.” “Have Teddy wave ‘bye-bye.’” “Wiggle Teddy’s toes.”
2. Show him how to do the different actions by demonstrating on him. Then ask him to do them with his teddy.
3. Praise him for taking good care of teddy

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)



Preschoolers

Preschoolers are developing prosocial or friendship skills. Many of the challenging behaviors at this age are because children are still trying to figure out how to interact with others. Aggressive behaviors such as hitting, pushing or yelling may be a challenging behavior for this age group.

Oftentimes, aggressive behaviors for preschoolers are a cry for help. Most times the aggression is not to intentionally hurt the other child.

Possible Meanings Behind the Behavior:

- ♥ He may still lack self-control.
- ♥ There may be too many transitions or the transition is too long for him.

How You Can Respond:

It is important to observe your child's patterns



and recognize his triggers. Carefully observe and catch him being kind and gentle with friends. By telling him what you see, you are reinforcing these positive behaviors. Give him a warning when transitions are about to happen, for example you can say to him, "In five minutes we are going to clean up and wash our hands."

Activity for Preschoolers: *What Comes Next?*

What You Need:

- Two 8-1/2 x 11-inch sheets of paper
- Jumbo crayons or washable markers
- Tape



What to Do:

1. Cut two 8-1/2 x 11-inch sheets of paper in half. Use three of the four half pieces for this activity.
2. On the first sheet, have your child draw a picture of something he normally does in the morning such as eat breakfast.
3. On the second sheet, have him draw something he does at midday such as play outside.
4. On the last sheet have him draw something he does at night.
5. Ask your child to put the pictures in order by asking, "After you get up in the morning, which do you do first? Which comes next? Which one is last?"
6. Tape the three sheets of paper together in the correct sequence from left to right. Number the sheets 1, 2, and 3.
7. Ask your child to tell you about each activity he drew. Write down anything he says to create a short story that you can read together. You can say, "We are making a schedule of what we do every day."
8. You can tape the schedule in a place where you and your child can look at it and point to what is coming next. You can always add to the schedule as needed. This may help with transitions.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)

How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

Physical Development

- ♥ Learn to use his body with intention
- ♥ Develop eye-hand coordination

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Learn to interact with others
- ♥ Feel important and good about himself

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Increase his observation, listening and understanding skills, and attention span
- ♥ Learn to ask and answer questions

Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop his creativity and imagination
- ♥ Develop his curiosity about how things work



Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show him how to handle items safely and allow him to do as much as he is capable of. Praise his efforts, and ask questions throughout the process to encourage his thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

Easy Cinnamon Applesauce Ornaments

Ingredients:

- 1 cup smooth applesauce
- 1-¾ cup ground cinnamon

Directions:

1. In a large bowl, mix together cinnamon and applesauce until a smooth ball forms. Dough should not be sticky. It should be moist and easy to handle. If necessary, adjust cinnamon or applesauce until easy to handle.
 2. Divide dough into two equal parts, and shape into discs. Optional: chill dough for an hour. Chilled dough will become slightly firmer and easier to handle.
 3. Preheat the oven to 200° F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.
 4. Sprinkle a work surface well with cinnamon. Place one disc of dough down on the cinnamon coated surface, sprinkle top with cinnamon and roll to ¼ - inch thickness. Cut out shapes using cookie cutters. Use a straw to carefully remove a hole for where the string goes later. Transfer to prepared baking sheet and repeat with remaining dough.
 5. Bake ornaments for 2 hours or until completely firm.
 6. Cool completely. Thread string or ribbon through the ornament holes.
 7. Ornaments can be hung on trees, or given as gifts
- Dough will make roughly 2 dozen 3-inch ornaments.



Resources

Teaching Belly Breathing

<https://youtu.be/oFlKuSCw7ag>

This short video from Sesame Street Community introduces a song about belly breathing when the monster comes out. Help children learn how to Belly Breathe.

Learn About Communicating With Your Child

<https://youtu.be/mEqaNDwaKfk>

This short video discusses things you can do to better communicate with your child. It shares 4 steps to positive communication: praise, imitation, description and active listening.



Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai'i State Public Library** www.librarieshawaii.org.

Infants and Toddlers

Bye-Bye Time (Toddler Tools) by Elizabeth Verdick

This book uses simple language to talk about saying goodbye and uses simple rituals to help with the transition: hugs and kisses, a big wave, a deep breath.

Teeth Are Not for Biting by Elizabeth Verdick

This book illustrates "OUCH! Biting hurts!" and offers other things that toddlers can do instead of biting.

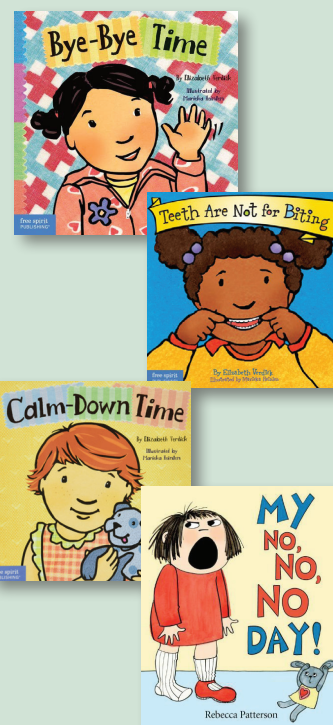
Preschoolers

Calm-Down Time by Elizabeth Verdick and Marieka Heinlen

This book uses simple words to help children and caregivers learn ways to calm-down, such as finding a quiet space with a beanbag or pillows, breathing with me 1...2...3.

My No, No, No, Day! by Rebecca Patterson

This book introduces many reasons for Bella to be upset, yell, and say no, but a cuddle with Mom brings a bright look at tomorrow.



Learning to Grow is a project of the University of Hawai'i, Windward Community College, with funding from the Hawai'i Department of Human Services. Visit our website at www.learningtogrowhawaii.org or visit us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/learningtogrowhawaii