



Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

"The Big 5" for Preventing Challenging Behaviors

Has your child ever refused to do something you asked? Does he bite, hit, or kick? Many parents and caregivers struggle with behavioral concerns such as these. Decades of research have shown that embracing a **prevention approach** to behavioral concerns can effectively prevent challenging behaviors from happening, and yield a lifetime of benefits for your child. The National Center for Pyramid Model Innovation (NCPMI) has identified "The Big 5" practices to effectively promote positive social emotional development and prevent challenging behaviors.

"The Big 5" practices are:

- ♥ **Use a 5:1 ratio of positive vs. negative attention.** Give positive attention to a child 5 times more than negative attention.
- ♥ **Use predictable schedules.** By keeping a daily schedule of routines, you maximize a child's ability to predict what comes next; thus, reducing challenging behaviors.
- ♥ **Establish routines within routines.** Each routine done throughout the day, such as diaper changing or going to bed -- is made up of a sequence of steps. When children know the steps in a routine, it helps them to understand expectations and can reduce behavioral problems.
- ♥ **Teach behavioral expectations.** By teaching the behaviors you wish to see, the child knows exactly what is expected of him and this creates a more predictable environment.
- ♥ **Actively teach social skills.** This means providing instruction on skills such as sharing, taking turns, negotiating, and following another child's lead. These skills children learn pave the way for healthy social interactions later in life.



In this newsletter, we will discuss three of "The Big 5" practices and we will provide examples of what this looks like at each age level. You can find more information about the other two practices -- *Use predictable schedules and establish routines within routines* in our November 2024 newsletter, "*Using Visual Supports for Positive Behavior*," found on our website.

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, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

Infants

The National Association for the Education of Young Children reminds us that early brain development is directly influenced by infants' day-to-day interactions with their caregivers. By using the "Big 5" strategies beginning at birth, you will lay a strong foundation for your child's healthy brain development, and the prevention of challenging behaviors.

- ♥ **Use positive attention.** Pay attention to the cues your infant sends to communicate his needs and responding appropriately with care. For example, if your infant is looking or smiling at you, he's ready to engage! Smile back, talk, sing, and interact with him. Imitate the cooing or babbling sounds he makes. If your infant is not hungry and has a clean diaper, but is crying, squirmy, or looking away, he may be overwhelmed, so decrease stimulation by talking softly, rocking him, swaddling, or laying him down in a safe place.
- ♥ **Teach behavioral expectations.** Use simple language to explain actions while modeling. For example, "Let's put the toy back on the



shelf," or "Time to wash hands." Also, include what your infant can do when using the word, "No." For example, "No touch," then give him something he can touch. "Here's a rattle you can shake."

- ♥ **Teach social skills.** You are your infant's first and favorite playmate. Play simple social games like peek-a-boo and taking turns cooing back and forth. These games develop turn taking, which is an important building block for later social development.

Activity for Infants: *Ways to Play Peek-a-Boo with Baby*

(Adapted from *Games to Play with Babies* by "Miss Jackie" Weissman)

What You Need:

Lightweight baby blanket, baby's toy and a washcloth large enough to cover it, a mirror

What to Do:

1. Cover your eyes with your hands, then take your hands away as you say, "Peek-a-Boo." Next, place baby's hands over his eyes, and gently move them away as you say, "Peek-a-Boo!"
2. Hold up a blanket or a large stuffed animal between you and baby. Peek out from the side, the top or the bottom of the blanket or stuffed animal as you say, "Peek-a-Boo!"

Variations:

1. Hide baby's toy under a wash cloth or behind a blanket, then lift up the washcloth or blanket to reveal the toy, and say, "Peek-a-Boo!"
2. Show baby his reflection in a mirror (either handheld or on the wall). Play peek-a-boo with baby's reflection.

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



Toddlers

Toddlers seek cues from their caregivers to help them understand what they are experiencing and decide how to respond. By applying "The Big 5" practices, you can help toddlers feel safe and secure and prevent challenging behaviors as they learn to manage their big emotions.

- ♥ **Use positive attention.** For every "No" and "Don't" you say, use these 5 ways to give your toddler positive attention:
 - *Use descriptive praise, for example, "You are stacking the blocks so carefully!"*
 - *Acknowledge effort, for example, "You tried hard to put your shoes on all by yourself!"*
 - *Follow their lead.* For example, if your child is pretending to make food, join in and say, "Oh, may I try some? Mmmm this is delicious!"
 - *Celebrate small successes.* "You picked up all your toys! Give me a high five!"
 - *Praise positive behaviors.* "You helped Koa pick up the crayons. You are a kind friend."
- ♥ **Teach behavioral expectations.** Expectations should be developmentally appropriate. For example, toddlers like to explore and move around, so don't expect them to sit for long periods. When setting expectations, focus on



what they can and should do rather than using words like "don't." For example, you can say, "Let's walk together," instead of saying "Don't run."

- ♥ **Teach social skills.** Toddlers typically play next to, instead of with peers. With adult help, this important "parallel play" can give children the chance to practice taking turns and resolving conflicts. Include turn-taking into the activities you already do daily, such as cooking. Simply pointing out to your child that you are taking turns helps to reinforce the skill. You can say, "You stirred the batter first, and I stirred next. We are taking turns! This is fun!"

Activity for Toddlers: Choices

What You Need:
None

What to Do:

1. Giving your child choices is a great way to reduce your "No's." As much as possible, let your toddler decide for himself but limit the number of choices you give him, and make sure they are ones that you approve. For example, "Do you want to wear your blue t-shirt or your striped t-shirt?" "Do you want to brush your teeth before or after you put on your pajamas?" "Do you want to put away the blocks or the balls?"
2. If there is no choice about what he can do, such as holding hands while crossing the street together, explain the reason to him so he understands why.



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

Preschoolers

Preschoolers start to develop an understanding that others have thoughts and feelings that are different from their own. Many of the challenging behaviors occur at this age because they are still trying to figure out how to interact with others. By applying "The Big 5" practices you can help your preschooler develop social skills.

♥ **Use positive attention.** Recognizing and celebrating positive behavior can build preschoolers' confidence and help them repeat these behaviors. Use specific words of praise such as:

- "It made your friend really happy when you helped her clean up today."
- "You have worked so hard on...Tell me more about it!"

♥ **Teach behavioral expectations.** Clearly state what you want your child to do. For example, "Elijah, please put your napkin in the trash can." In addition, practice appropriate behavior and expectations through modeling, using puppets, and role playing. For example, you can role play



what it looks like to "look with eyes" instead of touching something fragile.

♥ **Actively teach social skills.** There are specific friendship skills that are foundational to making and keeping friends. One of the first skills is trading which teaches children how to use their words to engage in conversations with friends and is the first step to learn how to negotiate. Trading is a solution that allows both people to feel happy with the outcome right away.

Activity for Preschoolers: Teach Your Child How to Trade

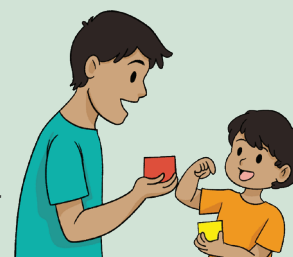
Adapted from: NCPMI Backpack Connection Series

What You Need:

2 objects that mean little to your child and are similar, such as 2 blocks

What to Do:

1. As you play with your child, give him opportunities to learn the skill of trading. For example, say to your child, "I have a blue block. Can I trade for your red one?"
2. You can also use puppets or toys to practice how to trade. For example, "Oh no! Thomas the train does not like bananas. Can Bertie trade him for the strawberry?" The follow up to this interaction is also important. "Wow! Now they are both happy and have food they like."
3. Trading can be useful when working through disagreements between siblings. For example, if one sibling is playing with another sibling's favorite toy, you can say, "I know how frustrating it is when your sister takes your special car. Look here is another one! Tell your sister, 'We can trade!'"
4. You can also use trading as a possible solution to a problem. For example, if two children are fighting over a ball you can say, "There are two boys and only one basketball. Would you like to play together or trade for the soccer ball?"



(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

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

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Build trust in you and other important people
- ♥ Feel important and good about himself

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Increase his observation, listening and understanding skills, and his attention span
- ♥ Build verbal skills and vocabulary

Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop his thinking and problem-solving skills
- ♥ Begin to understand cause and effect



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!

5-minute Meatball Skewers

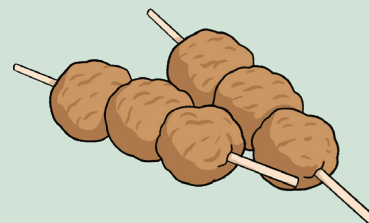
Adapted from: <https://foodlets.com/2015/09/08/5-minute-meatball-skewers/>

Ingredients:

- 1 pkg frozen but fully cooked chicken meatballs (you can also use turkey or beef meatballs)
- Kebab ingredients of your choice: e.g., cherry tomatoes, baby spinach, small squares or cubes of cheese: cheddar, mozzarella, smoked gouda, etc.

Directions:

1. Warm the meatballs in the microwave for 30-60 seconds, just enough to get them warm so the flavors come out and the skewer goes through.
2. Thread the meatballs and ingredients on the skewers in a pattern (e.g., meatball, spinach, tomato, cheese, meatball, spinach, tomato cheese). Note: 2 or 3 meatballs per skewer should be fine for a child's appetite.
3. Ready to eat! Enjoy!



Resources

NCPMI Solution Kit: Home Edition

The National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI) has developed a home version of solution cards with pictures (visuals) that you can use with your child to teach him expected behaviors and friendship skills. You can find this solution kit at: https://challengingbehavior.org/docs/Solution_kit_cards_home.pdf

Positive Solutions for Families

University of Florida's Technical Assistance Center of Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children (TACSEI) share eight practical tips for parents of young children to help with challenging behaviors. https://challengingbehavior.org/docs/positive_solutions_for_families.pdf



Suggested Books

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

Infants and Toddlers

***Baby Be Kind* by Jane Cowen-Fletcher**

Baby Be Kind is a great book to introduce infants and toddler to what kindness is and simple ways to show kindness. From saying hi to your friend, to being nice to your puppy, or helping someone up when they fall down – children will learn many ways to show kindness.

***Corduroy* by Don Freeman**

Corduroy is a timeless classic about a little bear, a little girl, and the friendship they find in each other. A captivating and delightful story that children are sure to enjoy!

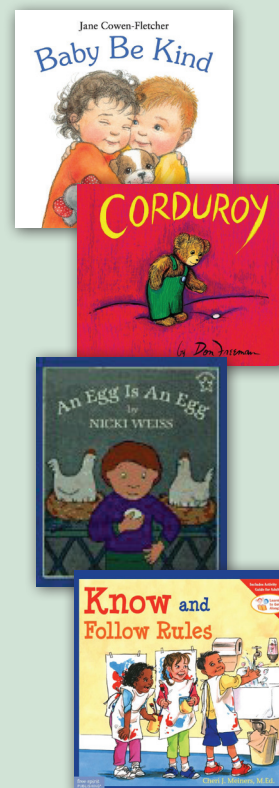
Preschoolers

***An Egg Is An Egg* by Nicki Weiss**

A poetic explanation of how everything changes--eggs to chicks, branches to sticks, green to white, and day to night, and so on, except... for a mother's love for her child.

***Know and Follow Rules* by Cheri Meiners**

This book helps children learn, understand and practice a basic social and emotional skill – following rules. This story starts with simple reasons why we have rules then it presents four basic rules: "Listen," "Best work," "Hands and body to myself," and "Please and thank you." The focus throughout is on the positive sense of pride that comes with learning to follow rules.



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 and Instagram @uhlearningtogrow