



Family Engagement in Early Care and Education

Understanding Children's Behavior
as Communication

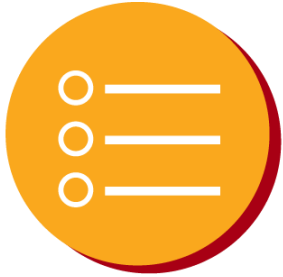


NATIONAL CENTER ON
Parent, Family and Community Engagement

Overview

This module will focus on:

- Understanding that children's behavior has meaning
- The importance of responsive relationships between parents and educators for children's emotional well-being and development
- Effective ways to communicate with families about children's behavior
- Partnering with families when adults find a child's behavior to be challenging



**By the end of this module,
you should be able to:**

OBJECTIVES

- Describe behaviors that children use to communicate and their possible meanings
- Explain the effect of responsive relationships on children's well-being and development
- Identify effective elements in communicating with families about behavior
- Partner with families seeking help with behavior that they find challenging



LEARNING ACTIVITY

How We View Behavior

Form small groups and read the scenarios about children.

In each case, think about the possible perspectives and feelings of the parent, educator, and child.



Understanding the Meaning of Children's Behavior

Behavior as Communication



Young children communicate their needs and wants through *cues* or behavior.

Influences on Behavior



Possible influences:

- Typical developmental stages
- Relationships with others
- Experiences and culture
- Individual differences, such as temperament and health issues



DISCUSSION

Observing Children's Cues

How do infants, toddlers, and preschoolers communicate with you and families?

Form groups and brainstorm responses for each age group.

Ways That Infants Communicate



- Smile
- Cry
- Gaze
- Reach
- Wave arms
- Turn away
- Arch back, stiffen body
- Kick feet

Ways That Toddlers Communicate



- Say words
- Use facial expressions
- Squeal
- Walk
- Run
- Climb

Ways That Preschoolers Communicate

Preschool-age children typically are beginning to use language, but they also communicate with their bodies.

They may:

- Say words and sentences
- Smile
- Laugh
- Scream
- Kick
- Hit
- Cry

Expressing Emotions



Starting at birth, children quickly develop their abilities to experience and express their feelings as well as their ability to manage them.



DISCUSSION

What Could This Behavior Mean?

- A young infant arching her back
- A mobile infant pulling a peer's hair
- A young toddler holding onto his mother's leg
- A preschooler throwing a toy

Looking for Clues

- When you observe children's behavior, look for clues that indicate what it means.
- Sometimes the behavior's meaning is clear, such as when a child smiles at someone. Other times, you may need to guess.
- Over time, you can learn what a particular child's communication means.

Talking About What Behavior Means

Conversations with parents about children's behavior are important so that everyone:

- Knows what a child is doing in home and early learning environments, and with different adults
- Can discuss the meaning of behavior and best responses to support the child

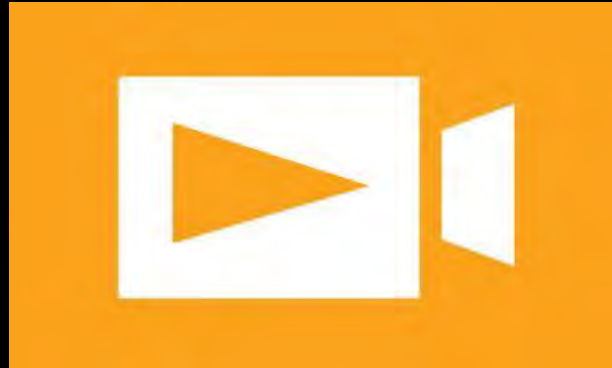


VIDEO

The Tower

Think about these questions while you watch this video:

- What is the child in the foreground doing?
- What do you think the behavior means? Why do you think that?
- How does the adult respond?
- What else could the adult have done?



VIDEO: The Tower



VIDEO

Video Debrief

You may have noticed the child:

- Trying to put a block on another child's tower
- Turning away and picking up a train when the other child pushes her hand away
- Helping to knock down the tower when it starts to fall



RESOURCES

*Understanding Your
Child's Behavior:
Reading Your Child's
Cues from Birth to Age 2*





The Importance of Responsive Relationships



DISCUSSION

Noticing Positive Interactions

Describe a time when you noticed a parent's warm response to his or her child's behavior and shared that observation with the parent.

What else could you have added to this interaction or to future conversations with parents?

Strong Partnerships With Parents



Ongoing, positive relationships that you form with parents are important for close **parent-child relationships**

Supporting Parents and Children

- Notice and describe parents' positive and responsive interactions with their children.
- Listen for times when families need help in responding to children; and provide modeling, information, and resources to match the family's needs.

Children Grow in Relationships



Children grow and learn in the context of **supportive and reliable relationships** with parents and other caregivers.



Responsive care of young children requires paying attention to, accurately observing, and responding to their cues.

Responsive Interactions . . .

- Help children to feel safe and to trust that their needs will be met
- Build brain architecture and cognitive skills
- Help children learn to calm themselves
- Teach children that interacting with others can be positive

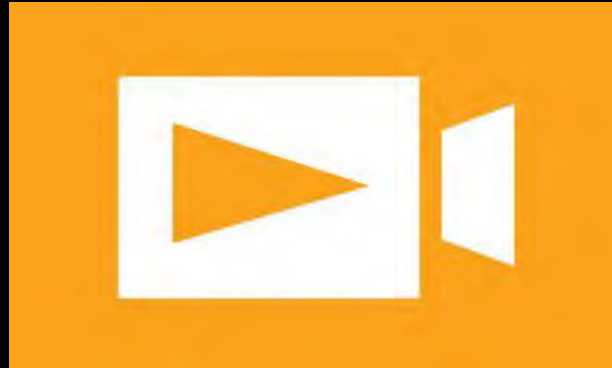


VIDEO

Reading Together

Watch the upcoming video and think about:

- What does this mother do to build a relationship with her child?
- How does she respond to the child's communications?



VIDEO: Reading Together



VIDEO

Video Debrief

The mother:

- Responds to her child's interest (which is shown by the child's intense gaze, arms on the book, and waving) by describing with excitement what the child may see
- Matches the child's tone and moves up and down when the infant waves her arms

Responding to Infants and Toddlers

Some ways that educators and parents can respond to the communications of infants and toddlers include:

- Matching children's tone and facial expressions
- Commenting on children's interests
- Helping children transition to a new activity

Responding to Preschoolers

Educators and parents can respond to children's communications and encourage their language skills by:

- Expanding their words, or repeating what they say and adding more
- Asking open-ended questions
- Listening to what children say

Learning to Manage Emotions



When adults respond to children in a warm and supportive manner, children learn to understand, express, and regulate their emotions and behaviors.

Challenges for Adults



Helping children manage their emotions can be difficult for families and educators.



DISCUSSION

Responding to Our Own Feelings

- How do you respond when a child's communication or behavior stirs up negative feelings for you?
- What else would you like to do?
- Find a partner and share.



Communicating About Behavior



DISCUSSION

Learning From Families

- What strategies do you use to learn from families about their children's behavior?
- How do you demonstrate that you value and use the information they share?
- What kinds of information about behavior would be important to share?



Talking about and responding to children's cues and behavior should be part of an ongoing relationship that you have with parents that includes:

- **Strengths-based attitudes**
- **Relationship-based practices**

Viewing Videos With Families

Video can be a useful tool for looking at children's behaviors with families. You can:

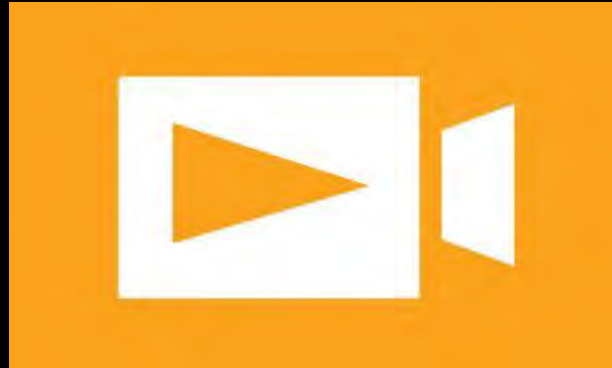
- Highlight positive aspects of children's behavior and the parent-child relationship
- Encourage families to guide the discussion and share what they see
- Remain strengths-based, and listen to family observations
- Acknowledge what families notice, and share feedback



VIDEO

My White Shoes

- While you watch the story time in the video, think about positive observations you might share with a parent about De'Angelo.
- Consider including the child's strengths, using specific, objective language and questions for the parent.



VIDEO: My White Shoes



VIDEO

Video Debrief

Find a partner and act out a possible conversation between De'Angelo's parent and the educator.

Using the reading activity as a focal point, include observations about De'Angelo's strengths, using specific, objective language and questions for the parent.

Different Expectations



Parents and educators may have different expectations about how children should behave based on their culture, knowledge, gender, and experiences.

These expectations can influence how parents and educators respond to and guide children's behavior.



LEARNING ACTIVITY

Cultural Perspectives

- Create a list of questions to ask families about their expectations for young children's behavior and how they model and teach those.
- Reflect on your own answers to those questions.
- Compare lists with a partner, explaining why you chose the questions you did.
- Talk about how you would approach a situation where a family had expectations that were different from yours.



When Adults Find a Child's Behavior to Be Challenging



DISCUSSION

Perspectives on Behavior Adults Find Challenging

- What is your definition of behavior that is challenging?
- What makes behavior feel challenging?

Behaviors That Adults Find Challenging Send Messages

- Children will use certain behaviors until they learn new ways to communicate what they want and need.
- To address and influence behavior that adults find challenging, adults need to understand what the behavior means.
- Gaining a better understanding of what the behavior means for the child can help the adult develop effective strategies that meet the child's needs.



RESOURCES

GLASS Poster

Family Engagement in Early Care and Education

Understanding Children's Behavior as Communication GLASS Poster



- G** Get close.
- L** Label what you are noticing.
- A** Ask a question.
- S** Stick with it.
- S** Say something positive.

For more information about this resource, please contact us:
PFCE@ecetta.info | 1-866-763-6481



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Communicating With Families



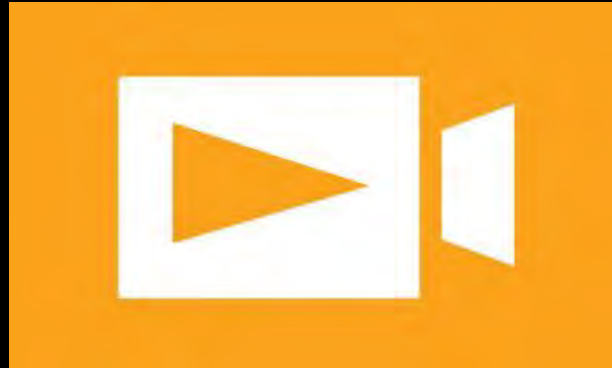
- An established positive relationship with families helps when you need to discuss child behaviors that adults may find challenging.
- Start with the family's perspective.



VIDEO

Libby & Kim: Middle Ground Conversation

As you watch the video on the next slide, think about what effective practices the educator uses that are strengths-based and that help to build the relationship with the parent.



**VIDEO: Libby & Kim
Middle Ground Conversation**



VIDEO

Video Debrief

The educator:

- Starts by asking the parent a question about what she sees
- Shares a positive observation about the child
- Recalls a previous conversation
- Describes a challenge the child is having, and asks the parent if she is seeing this at home too

Seeking Help



When behaviors that adults find challenging persist, families and educators may need to reach out for help.

How Can You Help?

- Listen to families' concerns and priorities for their children.
- Check in with families regularly about their progress toward goals, and help them follow through if needed.
- Get to know your community agencies.
- Connect families with professionals who can help them meet their goals.



VIDEO

Resources for Families

In the video on the next slide, listen to the recommendations of Dr. Kathleen Meeker in the College of Education at the University of Washington.



VIDEO: Resources for Families



VIDEO

Video Debrief

The speaker recommends several possible resources for family members who have concerns about their children:

- Pediatricians
- Early childhood mental health providers
- Local school districts

Who Else Can Help?

A variety of professionals in Head Start can help when families and educators have concerns about their children's behavior:

- Behavior specialists
- Mental health consultants
- Disability specialists
- Family services staff

Factors That Influence Families and Children

Possible factors that influence family well-being and children's behavior and development are:

- Poverty
- Unemployment
- High housing costs
- Food insecurity
- Community violence
- Poor health
- Stressful work environment



Think about a time when your family was facing a challenge.

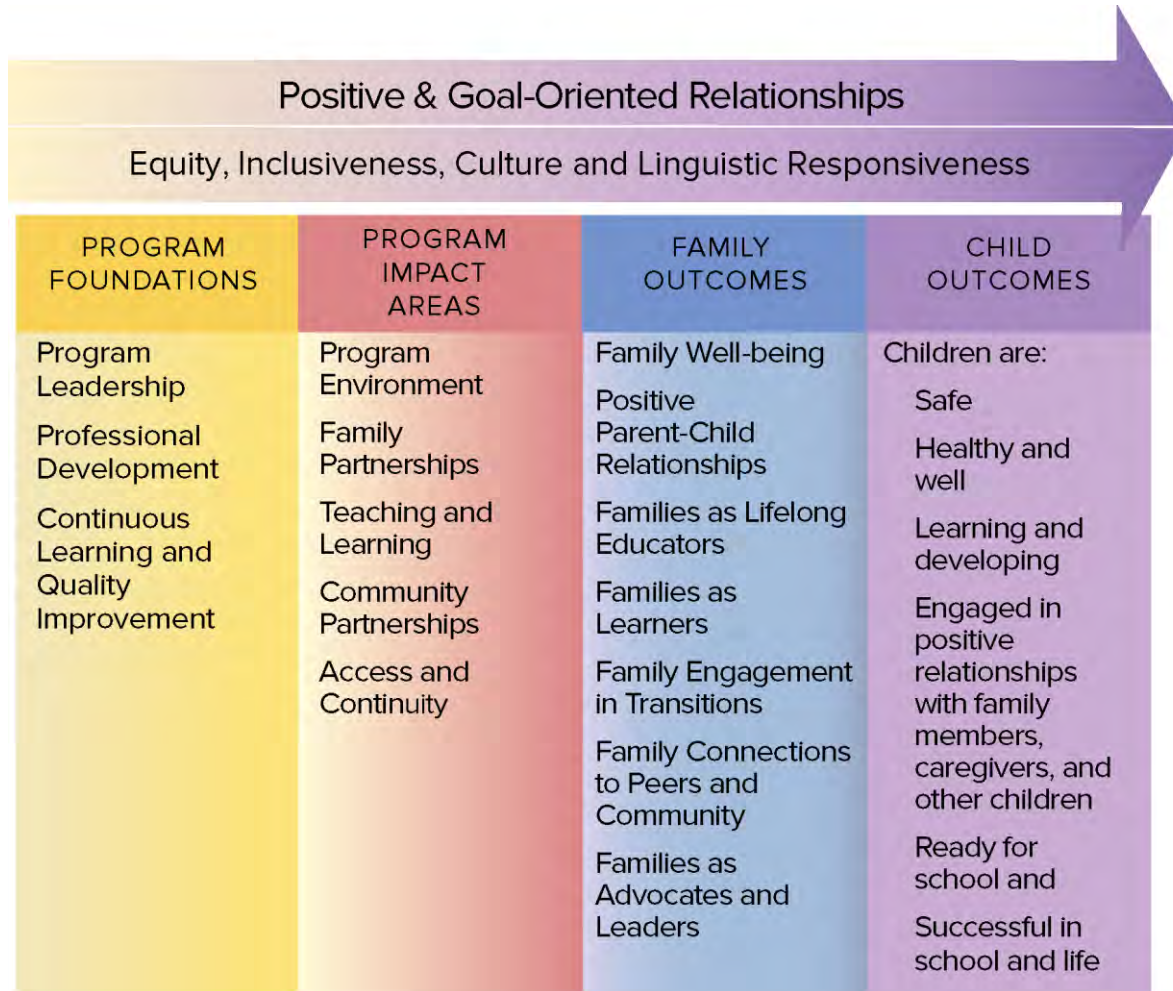
REFLECTION

- How did this challenge affect you and your family?
- How did you respond to the challenge?
- What helped you respond to and manage the challenge successfully?



Bringing It All Together

The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework





DISCUSSION

Where Does It Fit?

Which part of the Framework does this topic relate to?

- Form a small group and share ideas.
- Be ready to share your thoughts with the whole group.



SESSION SUMMARY

- Families and educators can work together to understand and respond sensitively to children's behavior.
- Positive relationships impact children's well-being and behavior.
- Effective communication about child behavior is an important part of educator-parent conversations and efforts to address behaviors that adults find challenging.



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES



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