



May 16, 2023

## Responding to Persistent Challenging Behavior as a Leader

This viewer's guide provides ideas for supporting education staff in preventing and addressing persistent challenging behavior. The role of early learning leaders includes caring for the well-being of staff, providing needed training and professional development, and guiding staff to use strategies and tools effectively. The reflection questions and activities will help you think about ways to support children's learning. Helpful resources are available in the Resources section of this guide.

### Webinar Topics

- Staff Well-being
- The Behavior Equation
- Developmentally Appropriate Practice
- Focus on Equity
- Resource Spotlight

**Take a moment to write down what you hope to learn during today's webinar.**

*Persistent challenging behavior: any repeated pattern of behavior that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with the child's optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers and adults*

**In one word, describe the feeling that comes up for you or your staff when addressing persistent challenging behavior.**

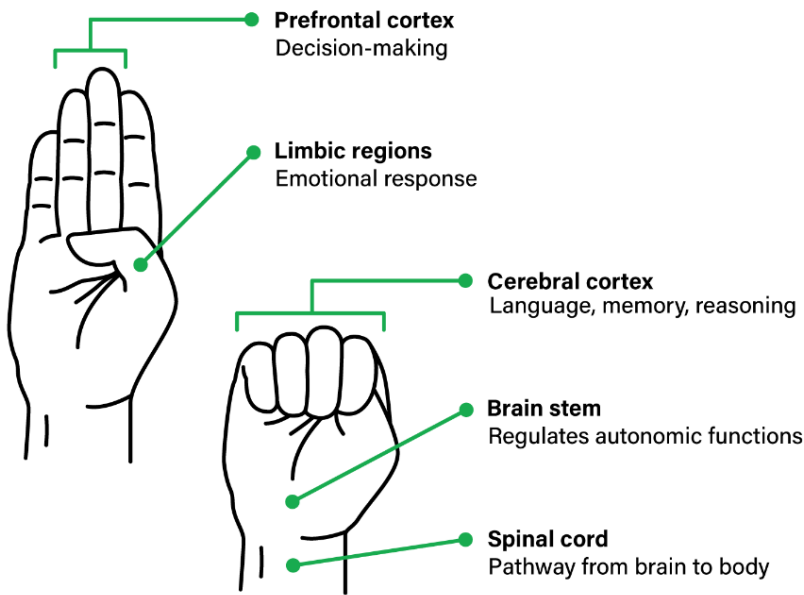


**Persistent challenging behavior can lead to the emotional exhaustion of staff.**

Which in turn may result in:

- Decreased capacity in supporting children’s learning and development,
- Increased frustration with challenging behavior, and/or
- Staff turnover.

## Flipping Our “Lid”



Credit: Dr. Dan Siegel

The brainstem and limbic system work together to release cortisol and prepare our body for the fight/flight/freeze response to feeling overwhelmed or large amounts of stress. That can be a good thing when we need to react to danger. Usually, the prefrontal cortex kicks in and calms us down once we realize the threat is unreal or over.

But, when we are in survival mode, we “flip our lid” and the limbic system takes over. When we have flipped our lid, our cortex is no longer in control. We can no longer effectively communicate with others, control our emotions, or respond to reasoning.

We don’t have to be in real danger to flip our lid. Any stressful situation can cause our cortisol levels to rise and shut down our thinking brain. For young children the caregiver must be responsive to the child’s needs, supporting the child with co-regulation. Young children need help to close their lids to bring the cortex back into control to process emotions and consider solutions.

In stressful situations, adults can also flip their lids. It’s important that we have strategies to help us “put our lids back on” so we can best support the children in our care. In other words, we need to manage our hot buttons so we can give the children the support we know developmentally they need to manage their emotions and behavior.

**Notes:**



**Learning leaders can help education staff:**

- Use thoughts and feelings as a signal to reflect.
- Ask for help.
- Observer to learn.
- Use the Behavior Equation

A recent [Stanford News article](#) highlighted that we often underestimate how willing people want to assist others and how positive they feel when they can help. Yet, it is often still difficult to ask for help.

**Reflection question: How do you support staff to ask for help?**

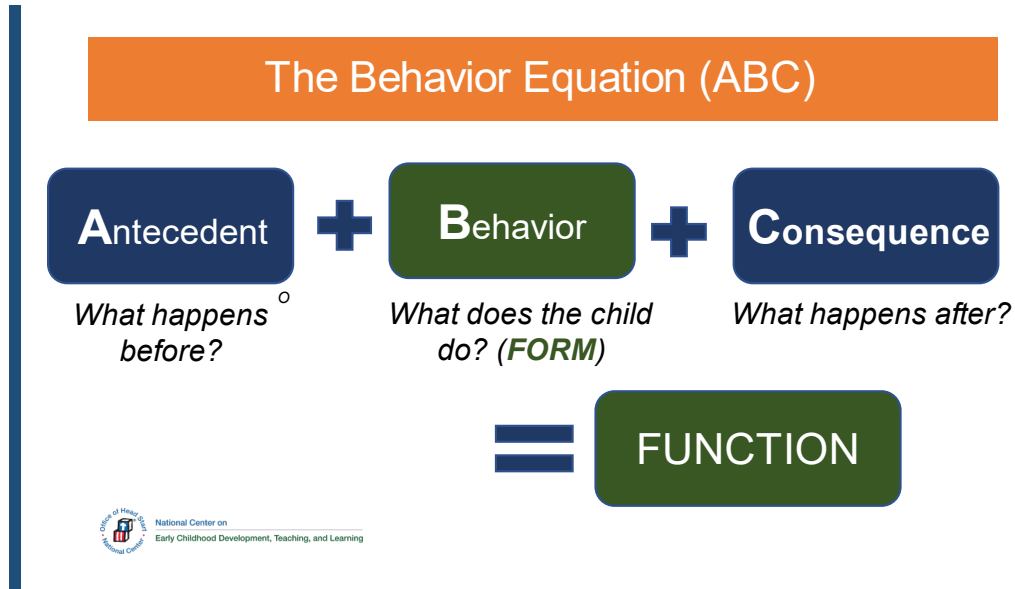
**Children engage in challenging behavior because “it works” for them.** Challenging behavior results in the child: Gaining access to something or someone OR avoiding something or something.

**Challenging behavior communicates.** Communicates a message when a child does not have language or is used instead of language by a child who has limited social skills or who has learned that challenging behavior will result in meeting his or her needs.

**Every behavior can be described by its form and function.**

**Form:** the behavior used to communicate

**Function:** the reason or purpose of the communicative behavior



**Notes:**

# Create a Behavior Support Plan

Prevent	Teach	Respond
<p><b>Individualized prevention strategies:</b> select and use individualized strategies and supports that will make it less likely that the child will need to use the behavior to communicate.</p>	<p><b>Select a new, prosocial/more appropriate behavior</b> that will meet the same communicative function as the challenging behavior.</p> <p><b>Intentionally plan when and how</b> you'll teach the child to use the new behavior.</p> <p><b>Carefully observe and take note of changes</b> in the child's skills or behavior to ensure your instruction is effective.</p> <p><b>Collaborate and communicate with the family.</b></p>	<p><b>Plan how we'll respond</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• when the child uses the new replacement behavior</li> <li>• if the child does engage in challenging behavior</li> </ul>

*Note: Please download the ABC Observation Card and Behavior Support Plan: Prevent, Teach, Respond (PTR) tools available as separate handouts.*

**Reflection Question:** How does our program support education staff to prevent and respond to challenging behavior and teach new skills? What do I as a learning leader do well? Where might I improve?

# Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (HSELOF)

	CENTRAL DOMAINS				
	APPROACHES TO LEARNING	SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT	LANGUAGE AND LITERACY	COGNITION	PERCEPTUAL, MOTOR, AND PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT
▲ INFANT/TODDLER DOMAINS	Approaches to Learning	Social and Emotional Development	Language and Communication	Cognition	Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development
● PRESCHOOLER DOMAINS	Approaches to Learning	Social and Emotional Development	Language and Communication Literacy	Mathematics Development Scientific Reasoning	Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development

As children grow from birth through the first five years of life, they develop different social and emotional abilities and use different behaviors for communication. The [Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework](#) is a tool education staff can use to build familiarity with child development milestones. It is helpful to review with families when developing individualized learning goals.

Developmentally Appropriate Expectations

## *Child manages actions and behavior\**

### By 36 months, with the support of familiar adults

- Participates in and follows everyday routines with the support of familiar adults.
- Manages short delays in getting physical needs met with the support of familiar adults.
- Learns and follows some basic rules for managing actions and behavior in familiar settings.

### By 60 months, with increasing independence

- \*actions, words, and behavior*
- Demonstrates control over actions and words in response to a challenging situation...May need support from adults.
  - **Begins** to understand the consequences of behavior.
  - Waits for a turn, such as waiting in line to wash hands or waiting for a turn on swings.

It is important to note that children in the first five years of life are learning many new skills. Infants and toddlers rely on the support of familiar adults to learn new skills and preschool-age children are practicing these skills with increasing independence with adult assistance.

## Focus on Equity



### **Black boys are nurtured less and disciplined more.**

- Studies show that educators are less likely to form strong relationships with African American boys.
- These boys receive more discipline and are suspended and expelled at a higher rate. Such experiences can have a lasting effect and negatively affect the development of social and emotional skills.
- African American boys develop their sense of identity in the context of a society that often undervalues them.

### **Adultification: Black boys are seen as less childlike than their white peers.**

- The adultification of African American boys creates a bias that their behavior is intentional and malicious.
- Instead, they are children with developing emotional and behavior self-regulation skills like their white peers.

## Resource Spotlight

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### **[5 Questions with Child Development Experts | Dr. Walter Gilliam – Implicit Bias](#)**

Dr. Walter Gilliam is a well-known expert and researcher on racial bias and early childhood education. In this video, he answers five questions about his work. Learn about implicit biases, how they harm children, and what you can do to address implicit biases.

## Review – Reflect – Resilience

<p><b>Review:</b> the universal practices that all children need</p>	<p><b>Relationship and Environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How have I worked to establish a trusting relationship with this child and family?</li> <li>• Am I aware and accepting of the child’s temperament?</li> <li>• In what ways have I intentionally designed the environment to support the child?</li> </ul> <p><b>Teaching Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How am I teaching the child to understand and regulate emotions?</li> <li>• How am I teaching the child problem-solving skills?</li> <li>• Are my expectations developmentally appropriate?</li> <li>• How have I incorporated the child’s home culture and values into my planning and expectations?</li> </ul> <p><b>Context</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there anything outside the child’s control impacting behavior—could the child be sick, tired, hungry, uncomfortable, or overstimulated?</li> <li>• Is there anything outside of my control impacting the child’s behavior—such as homelessness, food insecurity, grief, or trauma? How am I showing empathy or adjusting for this in my expectations and responses?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reflect:</b> on my own values, thoughts, and feelings about the behavior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why is this behavior challenging for me? For other children?</li> <li>• Am I frustrated with the behavior or the child?</li> <li>• Is there something about this child’s cultural norms that are different from mine?</li> <li>• Am I making any assumptions about the child’s intentions?</li> <li>• How have I partnered with the child’s family to understand the behavior?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Resilience:</b> to build it by asking yourself key questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does my typical response to the child’s behavior make me feel?</li> <li>• What steps can I take to calm myself when I start to feel triggered by the child’s behavior?</li> <li>• How is my typical response impacting the pattern of the child’s behavior?</li> <li>• What self-care practices can I try or do more often?</li> </ul>



# Helpful Resources

## Online Resources

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- Teacher Time Series: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/teaching-practices/teacher-time-series/teacher-time-series>
  - Special Episode: 10 Tips: Creating supportive environments can prevent behaviors that challenge us: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/teaching-practices/teacher-time-series/10-tips-creating-supportive-environments-can-prevent-behaviors-challenge-us>
  - Positive Behavior Support Series: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/teaching-practices/teacher-time-series/positive-behavior-support-birth-5>
- Supporting the School Readiness and Success of Young African American Boys – Culturally-Responsive Strengths-Based Practice Strategies: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/supporting-school-readiness-success-young-african-american-boys/supporting-school-readiness-success-young-african-american-boys>
  - Webinar Series – June Registration Link: <https://event.on24.com/wcc/r/4139557/3E2CAC6CDC4F6EE260A3D9C70AC526B7>
- Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework
  - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/interactive-head-start-early-learning-outcomes-framework-ages-birth-five> (English)
  - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/es/marco-interacti-vo-de-head-start-sobre-los-resultados-del-aprendiza-je-temprano-de-los-ninos-desde-el> (Spanish)
- Challenging Behavior: Support Plans for Children with Disabilities
  - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/challenging-behavior-support-plans-children-disabilities>
- Behavior Has Meaning 15-minute In-service Suite
  - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/behavior-has-meaning> (English)
  - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/es/salud-mental/articulo/comprender-y-gestionar-los-comportamientos-de-los-ni-nos> (Spanish)
- Understanding and Managing Children’s Behaviors: Individual Support Plans (ISP)
  - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/mental-health/article/under-standing-managing-childrens-behaviors-individual-sup-port-plans-isp> (English)
  - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/es/salud-mental/articulo/comprender-y-gestionar-los-omportamientos-de-los-ni-nos-planes-de-apoyo-individual-isp> (Spanish)
- Cultivating Wellness: 8 Dimensions of Staff Well-being
  - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/cultivating-well-ness-8-dimensions-staff-well-being> (English)
  - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/es/publicacion/cultivar-el-bienestar-las-8-dimensiones-del-bienestar-del-personal> (Spanish)

- Understanding Challenging Behavior: The Path to Behavior Support
  - <https://challengingbehavior.org/webinar/understanding-challenging-behavior-the-path-to-behavior-support/>

## Research Briefs

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- Facts About Young Children with Challenging Behavior (Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention)
  - [https://challengingbehavior.org/docs/facts\\_about\\_sheet.pdf](https://challengingbehavior.org/docs/facts_about_sheet.pdf)
- You're the Best Teacher! Responsive Interactions with Young Children
  - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/youre-best-teacher-responsive-interactions-young-children>
- Supporting Children with Disabilities or Suspected Delays
  - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/supporting-children-disabilities-or-suspected-delays>
- Responsive Learning Environments
  - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/responsive-learning-environments>

## Mobile Apps

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- ELOF2GO Mobile App
  - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/elof2go-mobile-app>
- **\*\*MiELOF Spanish**
  - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/es/preparacion-escolar/articulo/aplicacion-movil-mielof-en-espanol>
- ELOF@Home and Text4HomeVisitors
  - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/teaching-practices/article/mobile-tools-home-visitors>
- Text4Teachers
  - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/teaching-practices/article/text4teachers>

## Online Communities

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- MyPeers: Education Leaders Community
  - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/mypeers-collaborative-platform-early-care-education-community>



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