

## Statement on Positive Behavior Guidance



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### NYCDOE Position and Policy

The NYCDOE Division of Early Childhood (DECE) believes high-quality early childhood programs establish, model, and reinforce expectations for respectful and trusting relationships among children, families, and all staff. A child engaged in active learning who feels secure, supported, and valued, is more likely to demonstrate respectful and constructive behaviors and engage in positive interactions. Children’s behavior should be guided in a positive way as part of the developmentally appropriate instruction taking place throughout the program. Children and families should feel secure, supported, and recognized as important members of a program’s community.

**Programs are expected to support children in their least restrictive environment and implement the principles of Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) as outlined in this document. This includes:**

- Research suggests positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) are most effective for young children. All behavior support should be instructive and nurturing, giving children lots of chances to succeed. Focusing on strong proactive strategies ensures caregivers take a preventative approach to challenging behaviors.
- Successful positive behavior support is built upon strong relationships that are grounded in trust and respect. Programs collaborate with families to ensure the program meets the needs of all learners. Teaching staff and administrators develop strategies to build each child’s social, emotional, and behavioral skills based on shared understandings with each family. Establishing regular and ongoing two-way communication with families will create strong relationships that allow for effective collaborations.
- Teaching teams build nurturing learning environments through the use of developmentally appropriate strategies that advance children’s social and emotional development and approaches to learning. In alignment with the DECE Early Childhood Framework for Quality ([EFQ](#)), NYS Pre-Kindergarten Learning Standards ([NYSPLS](#)), Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework ([ELOF](#)), and NYS Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education ([NYS CR-SE](#)).

**Children in NYCDOE-affiliated early childhood programs may not be expelled or suspended. Including:**

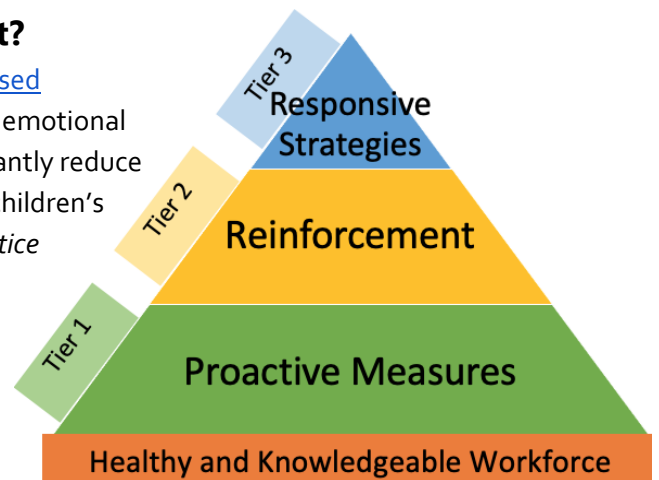
- In-school suspensions: Practices that involve removing or excluding the child from the classroom.
- Out-of-school suspensions: Practices that involve temporarily removing the child from the program.
- Expulsions: Permanent removal or dismissal from the program.
- Soft-expulsions: Practices that make it so that the program is not a viable or welcoming care arrangement for the family and leaves the family with little choice but to withdraw their child.

<https://preventexpulsion.org/overview/>

## What is Positive Behavior Intervention & Support?

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) is a [research-based](#) approach that encourages positive behaviors, as well as social and emotional development in early childhood. This approach is found to significantly reduce challenging behaviors. Rather than taking a punitive approach to children's behavior, this approach ensures children are able to *learn and practice behaviors* that meet their needs and are socially appropriate.

This approach is tiered, meaning all children have access to Tier 1 and 2 supports, which are built upon with more specific, data-driven individualized interventions in Tier 3, when appropriate.



### Social and Emotional Development go hand-in-hand in the early years.

Social development refers to a child's ability to create and sustain meaningful relationships with adults and other children. Children who develop trusting relationships with adults are able to more fully explore and engage in the world around them. They know that the adults will support them in challenging times. Relationships with other children also develop. These relationships provide opportunities to practice skills learned from adults. These relationships also foster problem-solving skills as young children navigate the difficulties and joys of interacting with another child who has different wants and ideas.

Emotional development refers to a child's ability to express, recognize, and manage their own emotions as well as respond appropriately to others' emotions. When children feel good about themselves and what they can do, they engage more fully in learning opportunities.

For many reasons, the rate and path of social and emotional development varies in young children. Cultural and linguistic backgrounds must be taken into account as well as individual differences.

Source: [Early Learning Outcomes Framework \(ELOF\)](#)

### Components

**Healthy and Knowledgeable Workforce:** A well-trained and supportive staff is the key to any effective behavior management in early childhood. This refers to the emotional wellbeing of the early childhood workforce as well as knowledge and skills gained through practice, self-reflection, and regular coaching and professional development. When educators are able to care for themselves, they are better able to provide responsive care from a place of empathy and unconditional positive regard. ([EFO 2, 6](#))

**Tier 1- Proactive Measures:** Establishing safe, nurturing, and predictable environments and relationships are the foundation for positive behavior in early childhood. All children should have intentionally-designed environments that offer age-appropriate predictability, ways to safely practice their growing independence, and support their social and emotional development. Likewise, all educators should intentionally build responsive relationships with children that affirm their identity (including ethnic, racial, cultural identity), support emotional regulation, and provide other meaningful adult support. ([EFO 1, 2, 3](#))

**Tier 2- Reinforcement:** Giving all children time to practice targeted skills related to behavior, social skills, and emotional development is key to reinforcing positive behavior expectations. Children should be reinforced for using positive behavior skills. Verbal praise, social attention, and activities are all ways to provide reinforcement. Data should be used to determine which skills small groups and individual children get additional practice in. ([EFO 2, 3](#))

**Tier 3- Responsive Strategies:** Responsive strategies can be used to help individual children practice a specific skill when a challenging behavior occurs. They should include modeling, opportunities for practice, and/or a [logical consequence](#) to the behavior and follow close after the behavior occurs. Research shows that effectively implemented Tier 1 and Tier 2 strategies provide enough support for about 80% of children to exhibit positive behaviors. ([EFO 3, 5](#))

## Individualized Behavior Planning

When Tier 1 and Tier 2 strategies are used consistently but prove unsuccessful over time, you can implement an individualized behavior plan. Based on data, these plans can be used to help individual children develop specific skills and replace moderate to intense challenging behaviors. Educators should use observation and other data sources to better understand children’s behavior and develop plans to guide children in developing positive, prosocial behaviors to meet their underlying feelings, needs and desires. For more information about how to develop and implement a behavior plan, please connect with your Mental Health Staff, your DECE social worker, or email the DECE Mental Health and Wellness Team at [decemhw@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:decemhw@schools.nyc.gov). Family Child-Care Providers should contact their Education Specialist or Network Educational Director.

## Using a Positive Behavior Support Model helps to ensure care is...

**Equitable and Culturally Responsive.** Research shows implicit bias in the classroom is most prevalent when teachers are engaging in behavior management. For example, [one famous study from Yale Child Study Center](#) showed that when told a challenging behavior would occur in a group of children, teachers of all races spent significantly more time watching Black and male-identified children in the group. Anticipating them to engage in challenging behavior.

The [ELOF](#) reminds us, “Some cultures encourage children to be outgoing, others to be reserved in social interactions and emotional expression.” Positive Behavior Support (PBIS) ensures a more equitable approach to behavior support and instruction by depending on data, observation, and focusing on building upon children’s strengths. This mitigates implicit bias and foster healthy identity development for children of all backgrounds.

**Trauma Informed.** Trauma Informed Care means proactively acknowledging and mitigating the impacts of stress and trauma. PBS helps ensure a trauma-informed approach by promoting teacher wellbeing, self-awareness, and unconditional positive regard for children. It reinforces behavior management as a form of instruction and avoids restricting children’s interaction in classroom activities through harmful behavior management strategies like isolation, punishment, or shortened (truncated) schedules. **Truncated schedules** should only be used in very rare circumstances, when approved by DECE, as a temporary measure to establish a better plan for support (see policy handbook).

## Strategies for Implementing Positive Behavior Support

### Healthy and Knowledgeable Workforce

We cannot give away what we don’t have. As early childhood educators, we must care for our own wellbeing in order to show up effectively with children, especially in tough moments. Personal and Professional Self-Care is necessary to engage meaningfully in caring for young children. Self-Awareness is necessary to provide equitable care.

### Strategies for Fostering a Healthy and Knowledgeable Workforce

- Care for yourself first. Make time for your physical and mental wellbeing. Taking your breaks, staying hydrated, and having a quiet moment to yourself are little things that make a big difference over time.
- Practice unconditional positive regard. Invest in ongoing self-reflection to practice the belief that all children are capable of learning and deserve loving, nurturing care even when they are engaging in challenging behaviors.
- Build connections with your team. Use your team wisely to support each other in tough moments, including planning for consistent care and responses across team members.
- Engage in continuous professional development. Professional Learning, coaching, observation, and feedback can help staff feel more competent and confident in providing appropriate and effective behavior support.

## **Strategies for Implementing Positive Behavior Support: Infants and Toddlers**

### **Social Development in Infants and Toddlers**

Infants and toddlers develop relationship-building skills and behaviors through their earliest interactions with important adults in their lives. Critical social skills, such as compromise, cooperation, and reciprocity, are beginning to develop. Young children need support from adults as they learn and practice these skills.

### **Emotional Development in Infants and Toddlers**

Emotional development in infants is closely tied to their social development with adults. These early relationships teach young children how to express and interpret a wide range of emotions.

### **Tier 1: Proactive Measures to Promote Positive Behavior in Infants and Toddlers**

Children enter early childhood programs at varying developmental levels. There is a wide range of behaviors and skills that are considered “typical” for children in this age group. Each child is unique. Programs should individualize skills and strategies to advance children’s learning and development across all domains. To support each child’s growth in social-emotional development and promote full participation in the program, staff are required to develop and implement proactive, developmentally appropriate behavior guidance strategies such as those described below:

1. Foster respectful, caring relationships
2. Practice flexibility and responsiveness
3. Create supportive physical environments and activities
4. Use developmentally appropriate instructional strategies
5. Plan for thoughtful transitions

#### **1. Foster respectful, caring relationships among staff, children, and families.**

- Use a [primary care model](#) whenever possible, ensuring each child has one member of the teaching team assigned as their primary caregiver and main point of contact with the family. This promotes strong, healthy attachment and more comprehensive care between school and home.
- Consistently use welcoming and positive language and tone, and ensure adults in the program interact positively with each other as well as with children. Each child should be comfortable with all adults in the room.
- Practice unconditional positive regard by communicating and acting on the principle that all children are capable of learning and making developmental progress. Always communicate care in your voice and try to distinguish the child from their challenging behavior.
- Consistently acknowledge and respond to children’s emotions and communication, verbal and non-verbal. When an infant makes a face or sound you might acknowledge the child by looking at them or moving closer, and respond by making a face or speaking to them.
- Explicitly welcome families into the classroom environment and foster daily two-way communications between families and teaching staff.

#### **2. Practice flexibility and responsiveness to children’s skills, interests, and needs during planning and instruction.**

- Infants and toddlers rely on the predictability and responsiveness of their caregivers to begin developing their skills for interacting and expressing emotion. Working alongside families is critical to establishing continuity of care, including:
  - Maintaining the same eating and sleeping schedules.
  - Ensuring caregivers at home and school are in alignment about what their expectations are for the child so they have consistency. Respect culture and family ideas about expectations like when children should start feeding themselves, washing their own hands, etc...
- Intentional teacher placement and active supervision

- Plan where each member of the teaching team will be in the room or play space (including outdoors) ahead of time to ensure smooth transitions and clear roles amongst staff.

### 3. Create supportive physical environments and activities that promote children’s development and foster positive relationships.

- **Create an environment** that is safe for infants and toddlers to move around freely.
  - Offer infants multiple opportunities throughout the day to freely explore varied, age appropriate materials on the floor. Limit time children spend in restricted areas like cribs ([see page 16](#)).
  - Use soft, varied spaces for appropriate ages to explore and play (which includes falling, at this age) safely while developing their gross motor skills.
  - Furniture should be designed for infants and toddlers. Chairs should be the right size and type of support to hold them safely during seated activities.
- Consider sensory needs. Infants and toddlers (and some preschoolers) are still developing their sensory receptive system. Using natural colors, being intentional about lighting, and keeping wall decorations calm (mostly children’s work and minimal commercially produced items) will help avoid children from being overwhelmed by sensory stimulation. Be mindful of the soundscape in the room, by using music intentionally rather than as a constant backdrop.
- Establish a consistent routine that can be flexible to meet children’s needs. Sequence and loose timing of activities of the day should be as consistent as possible, while allowing for flexibility based on individual and group needs on any given day.
  - Use a visual schedule (flow of the day) of pictures to help children anticipate what is coming next. You can also use simple First/ Then charts to show what is happening now and what will happen next for individual children.

### 4. Use developmentally appropriate instructional strategies to establish a positive classroom culture and keep children actively engaged.

- Ensure that materials are safe and developmentally appropriate for your age group(s). Make sure children are offered varied and engaging materials meant for their age. Using materials meant for older children may be a choking hazard and reduce engagement if they require advanced fine motor skills and/or conceptual thinking.
- Ensure that there are sufficient materials so the children are not forced to share. Support children in gradually developing turn taking strategies, such as asking for a turn and making a trade or finding something else to play with while they wait. It takes time and trust for children to learn that when they let go of something they will have another opportunity to use it again.
- Whenever possible, offer older infants and toddlers choices throughout the day, such as choosing which toys to clean up or where to sit at mealtime.
  - When offering a choice, give two options *that are both acceptable to you*, such as “Do you want to help me pick up the blocks or the cars?” “Do you want to hold my hand or hold Ms. Maria’s hand?”
- Infants and toddlers change significantly over short periods of time. Caregivers should stay closely connected to the developmental expectations for the children they care for and align their own expectations to each child.

### 5. Plan for successful management of transitions.

- Making transitions go smoothly takes some pre-planning about where staff will be, what roles they will play, and how to keep children engaged. Transitions are a great time to bond with a child or create a sense of belonging for the group.
  - Minimize wait times during transitions in order to maximize children’s active engagement throughout all times of day. For example, integrate diapering and toileting into choice time to individualize care routine; take children in small groups to wash hands so that they don’t have to wait in a long line.



- Give children advance notice before a transition to help prepare them and reduce resistance.
- Use songs, fingerplays or simple games to turn transition times into playful learning opportunities and keep children engaged.
- Some transitions you should plan for are:
  - Diaper changes
  - Daily activities
  - Moving from one space to another
  - Saying goodbye

### ***Tier 2: Reinforcement Strategies for Infants and Toddlers***

Positive reinforcement acknowledges and motivates further positive behavior. We reinforce the behaviors we want to see again. It is important to let children know that they are making progress toward a new skill and encourage their effort. Positive reinforcement can be done in many ways, and should be tailored to what is motivating to individual children. Children working on new and more complicated behaviors may need additional reinforcements.

- Respond to communication. Very young children learn about interaction and create attachments through simple and caring interactions with caregivers. When an infant or young toddler is using sounds, motions, or eye contact to communicate, a caregiver should reinforce that emerging behavior by mirroring, this includes:
  - Eye contact
  - Smiling
  - repeating or extending vocalizations
- Positively narrate what you see an infant or toddler doing to make them feel seen and cared about to build the bond between child and caregiver.
  - Give positive feedback for following directions or a positive interaction. Be specific and meaningful, “You were a kind friend waiting very patiently while they finished playing with the ball you wanted.”
- Offer words to acknowledge and describe various feelings and to build children’s emotional vocabulary. I.e. “You are wrinkling your face and frowning, I think you are feeling frustrated.”
- Create opportunities for children to work on certain skills and celebrate accomplishments. Set up games, situations, and play opportunities where children can work on specific skills. Then celebrate their willingness to try new things with specific praise, smiles, and high-fives.

### ***Tier 3: Responsive Strategies for Infants and Toddlers***

All programs are required to develop and implement strategies for responding to behavior that is disruptive to other children or unsafe for the child and/or others. Nearly all children engage in unsafe or challenging behavior at some time, and we must be prepared to respond in a way that keeps our environments safe while giving the child an opportunity to practice a different way of communicating. All strategies for guiding children to appropriate behaviors should be implemented in a calm, consistent, and non-punitive way to support children’s social and emotional development and approaches to learning.

1. Understand Contributing Factors
2. Provide Individualized Support in the Moment

#### **1. Understand Contributing Factors**

- Ask the question: “What is this child trying to communicate when they demonstrate this behavior?” Factors contributing to a child’s behavior may include:

- Talk with families/caregivers to understand what is going on outside of the program, including if there are recent changes to routine, family dynamics, physical health, etc...
- Talk with families/caregivers to see if they are noticing the same behaviors at home. If the child is not showing the behaviors at home, explore what might be different at home than at the program.
- Use a developmental screening tool and/or authentic assessment, to see if the child falls within the age range in most domains.
- Use [Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence \(ABC\) charts](#) to understand what happens before the behavior, what happens after, and when behaviors occur during the day to help find triggers, patterns, and the [function of the behavior](#).

## 2. Provide Individualized Support in the Moment

- Adjust environmental factors that may be overwhelming or causing confusion for the child, based on observation.
  - Remove materials that may be overstimulating from the environment and observe whether that helps the child self-regulate. You can narrate what you are doing “This light is very bright, let’s move it and see if that’s more comfortable for you.”
  - Indicate transitions to children one-on-one (e.g. instead of the whole class, ensuring that individual child understands). Help individual children anticipate transitions by giving them personal reminders of what is about to happen and how.
  - Create individual visual schedules for children so you can show what is coming next during each activity and prepare them for transitions.
- Provide physical support
  - Move closer to the child to provide support. A caregiver’s physical presence nearby or gentle touch helps very young children develop their self-regulation skills through co-regulation.
- Model appropriate behavior for the child and narrate what you are doing, including how it keeps people safe.



## Strategies for Implementing Positive Behavior Support: Preschoolers (3-5 years old)

### Social Development in Preschoolers

As children move into the preschool years, they become increasingly interested in forming relationships with peers. Critical social skills, such as compromise, cooperation, and sharing, are developing at this time. Young children need support from adults as they learn and practice these skills.

### Emotional Development in Preschoolers

Though children express emotions at birth, the preschool years are a critical time for learning how to manage emotions in ways that can help children build strong social skills and get the most out of their time in the early childhood program. Preschoolers are developing more concrete ideas about their own identity—who they are and what they can do. A sense of identity and belonging contributes to school readiness and learning by helping children gain self-confidence.

### **Tier 1: Proactive Measures to Promote Positive Behavior**

Children enter early childhood programs at varying developmental levels. There is a wide range in the behaviors and skills that are considered “typical” for children in this age group. Each child is unique and requires individualization of skills and strategies used as programs advance children’s learning and development across all domains. To support each child’s growth, programs are required to develop and implement proactive, developmentally appropriate behavior guidance strategies such as those described below:

1. Foster respectful, caring relationships
2. Practice flexibility and responsiveness
3. Create supportive physical environments and activities
4. Communicate clear expectations
5. Use developmentally appropriate instructional strategies
6. Plan for thoughtful transitions

#### **1. Foster respectful, caring relationships among staff, children, and families.**

- Practice unconditional positive regard by communicating and acting on the principle that all children are capable of learning and making developmental progress. Always communicate care in your voice and try to distinguish the child from their challenging behavior.
- Consistently use welcoming and positive language and tone, and ensure adults in the program interact positively with each other as well as with children. Children model the relationships they see between adults.
- Consistently acknowledge and respond to children’s emotions and communication, verbal and non-verbal.
- Explicitly welcome families into the classroom environment and foster daily two-way communications between families and teaching staff.
- Deepen knowledge of each child’s skills, interests and needs through implementation of developmental screenings (including Social Emotional screenings like ASQ:SE-2), authentic assessment, and regular conversation with families.
- Acknowledge and respect children’s rich backgrounds, cultures, and linguistic diversity and tailor your practices appropriately to meet these needs. This fosters not only trust, but positive identity development.

#### **2. Practice flexibility and responsiveness to children’s skills, interests, and needs during planning and instruction.**

- The flow of the day/daily schedule should be in a predictable sequence and include ample time for both child-initiated and teacher-facilitated activities.
- During child-initiated times of the day, empower children to self-select and engage with a variety of classroom centers, learning materials, and peers, encouraging purposeful play.



- Use information gathered from observations and authentic assessments to develop lessons and activities that build on children’s strengths and interests while addressing their needs.
- Support children’s active participation by encouraging children to plan, talk, and share their ideas for learning.
- Give children freedom of movement by allowing them to choose how and where they sit, stand, or move within small-group and whole-group learning experiences, as long as this does not interfere with other children’s learning. Limit the amount of time children are expected to remain sitting during facilitated activities to short periods of about 10-15 minutes at a time.
- If children do not appear to be engaged during periods of whole-group instruction, consider:
  - Including additional whole-group movement.
  - Increasing children’s participation through role play, singing, hand games, visuals, etc...
  - Shortening or changing the activity.
  - Reducing the frequency of whole-group activities.
  - If just one or two children are having difficulty, consider offering these children alternative activities to do that will not disrupt the whole group (e.g. puzzles, books, use of table toys, etc.)

### 3. Create supportive physical environments and activities that promote children’s development and foster positive relationships.

- Arrange the environment to allow children to utilize shared space collaboratively.
  - Stock centers with diverse materials that are suitable for the range of skills, interests, and abilities of children in the group.
  - All children should have opportunities to participate without competing for materials or adult assistance. Ensure children can access materials independently, and provide duplicates of popular toys.
  - Ensure that each area of the classroom has sufficient space to allow for the number of children that will utilize the space at a given time. For example, if the science area allows three children, ensure there is enough space for 3 children to engage with the materials within the designated area.
- Use visual displays (e.g. Tools of Autonomy) that support children in understanding how to uphold classroom/ group agreements and practice the social emotional skills they have been introduced to.
  - [Tools of Autonomy \(3K\)](#) are the supports in the learning environment that encourage 3-K and Pre-K children to develop independence and self-sufficiency. They include center systems or choice charts, visual daily schedule (flow of the day), interactive attendance charts, feelings chart, and job charts.
  - Other examples of visual displays include:
    - using labels for center and material organization to assist children in choosing or returning materials after their use
    - visuals showing self-care or routine sequences; i.e. toileting or handwashing
    - visuals to remind children of specific behavior expectations such as a mouth that can remind children to use soft voices indoors

Class-wide behavior charts are ineffective and inappropriate in early childhood. A class-wide behavior chart- such as a traffic light where children’s names or photos are moved based on their behavior throughout the day or week- are not appropriate at this age because:

- They do not provide young children with any guidance or support in how to change their behavior. Children need to be taught, shown, and reminded what they should do instead.
- The negative social and emotional impact of such systems can increase challenging behavior. Open displays of a child not meeting expectations can lead to that child being isolated from peers, feeling shame, weaken their relationship with caregivers, and harming their self-esteem.

- Establish a [cozy area](#) reserved for quiet activity or create opportunities for children to find space for privacy and relaxation. This area offers children the chance to escape the classroom environment and relax in a soft space.
- Offer extra support, attention, and modelling when children are engaging in a new activity and gradually introduce new materials and manage resource access to keep children from being overwhelmed.
- Frequently monitor, or “scan,” the classroom, and proactively intervene in situations to avoid escalation. When a potential conflict arises, you can step in to support children in practicing the relevant social and/or emotional skills for the situation such as reminding them of calm down techniques, or giving language for them to use.

#### 4. Communicate clear expectations for children that help them develop independence and self-regulation skills, and engage in respectful interactions with peers and adults.

- At the beginning of the year, encourage children to participate in creating a set of community agreements in the classroom. Revisit, model, and practice those agreements throughout the year.
- Provide regular opportunities to model, role play, and reinforce behaviors that meet the community agreements. For example, the agreement “We are safe.” may include expected behaviors like walking feet, gentle touches, blocks are for building.
- Expectations and [commands should be specific and positively stated](#). Young children need to know what action to replace their challenging behavior with: “Use walking feet.” *not* “Don’t run”. Very rarely, using negative language like “no” or “stop” may be appropriate to keep a child safe in an emergency.
- Explicitly teach children how to use and move through the classroom space/centers, treat their materials and environment with respect, and remind children of classroom expectations frequently, especially before transitioning to another activity and at the beginning of the year.
- Throughout the year, offer children instruction on key social and friendship skills like how to initiate play with others, different ways to take turns, considering the perspectives of others, and resolving social conflicts. This may include giving children simple phrases to use when asking to play, using puppets to model navigating a common classroom interaction, or [using visuals that offer solutions for resolving conflicts](#).

#### 5. Use developmentally appropriate instructional strategies to establish a positive classroom culture and keep children actively engaged.

- Use story telling, literature, puppetry, etc. to engage children in thinking about the impacts of certain behaviors, and to extend children’s empathy and understanding of emotions.
- Use narration to demonstrate how emotions might be influencing yourself or a situation. This gives children a model and better understanding of how to navigate their emotions and relationships.
  - Narrate your own thought process, “I am sad that you ripped my picture up, I had been working hard on that. I am going to take a deep breath and get another paper, please keep your hands on your own picture.”
  - Narrate a child’s actions, “You tried to get a magnifying glass but there were none left! Your scrunched face tells me you might be feeling frustrated. Do you want help asking for a turn?”
- Engage children in interactive problem-solving regularly during play and establish the expectations that children talk with each other to resolve conflicts. You can “problematize” anything: how to distribute 2 kinds of fruit at snack, setting up the easel with different colors so children must engage each other to share, etc...

#### 6. Plan for successful management of transitions.

- Give children reminders before major transitions so they have time to finish what they are doing and prepare for the next activity. Let them know 5 and 1 minutes before it is time to change activities. Consider using a visual timer like a sand timer or count down clock. Individual children may benefit from personal reminders as well.

- Make transitions or wait times fun and educational by singing songs, rhyming words or names, or going over the expected behaviors of the next setting. This will keep children engaged in learning and prepared for the next event.
- Minimize wait times during transitions in order to maximize children’s active engagement throughout all times of day. For example, during bathroom routines, rotate small groups of children so that all children can engage in productive learning activities for as much time as possible rather than waiting in line.

## **Tier 2: Reinforcement Strategies for Encouraging Positive Behavior**

Positive reinforcement acknowledges and motivates further positive behavior. We reinforce the behaviors we want to see again. It is important to let children know that they are making progress toward a new skill and encourage their effort. Positive reinforcement can be done in many ways, and should be tailored to what is motivating to individual children. Children working on new and more complicated behaviors may need additional reinforcements.

Developmentally appropriate reinforcements include:

- Using social reinforcements such as praise, smiles, encouragement, high-fives, or thumbs up.
  - Praise should be specific and provide meaningful feedback, especially when the behavior is relatively new to the child, (e.g. “You were very thoughtful to share the toys with your friend. He seems really happy that you included him in the game”). Avoid more general feedback (e.g. “good job”).
  - A high-five or thumbs up are appropriate non-verbal reinforcements for behaviors that are encouraged (e.g., the child has been working on sharing and you notice them share their toys from across the room), you catch their eye and give them a thumbs up immediately following the positive behavior.
- Using activity reinforcements as a reward for desired positive behaviors, such as being able to choose a song or activity for the group or during center time. Other examples include having time to play one on one with a teacher or go for a walk to say hello to another classroom teacher. This is a way to recognize behavior growth that goes beyond praise.
- Material Reinforcements can be used to reinforce a behavior that is particularly challenging for a child. Teaching teams should use free or very low cost items as reinforcements, and **never use food**. A small paper cut out, a note from the teacher, or a sticker can be used to let children know you saw them engaging in a really important skill that is tough for them. It is a simple, tangible way to say, “I see you working hard and I am proud of you.”

### **Common misconceptions about using reinforcements in the classroom.**

Misconception #1: *Using reinforcement prevents children from developing intrinsic motivation for positive behavior.*

- Reinforcements are what help us see the value in taking on a new behavior. When something is really hard for a child, they may need more intense reinforcement like a heart cut out given to them by the teacher. However as the skill gets easier, a teacher may begin giving high-fives and verbal praise. Eventually as the child masters their new skill, external reinforcements become less important.

Misconception #2: *Other children will be jealous/ feel left out/ become dysregulated if an individual child gets a reinforcement.*

- Young children have a strong sense of justice. That means they may want to know why someone else is getting something and they are not, however it also means that they understand the idea of equity (everyone gets what they need, everyone doesn’t get the same) when it is explained to them. Be honest with children about why someone is receiving a reward. For example you might say, “She got this sticker because she has been practicing sharing blocks really hard and I just saw what a nice friend she was to you when she gave you the block you asked for.”

### **Tier 3: Responsive Strategies for Preschool Children**

All programs are required to develop and implement strategies for responding to behavior that is disruptive to other children or unsafe for the child and/or others. Nearly all children engage in unsafe or challenging behavior at some time, and we must be prepared to respond in a way that keeps our environments safe while giving the child an opportunity to practice a different way of communicating. All strategies for guiding children to appropriate behaviors should be implemented in a calm, consistent, and non-punitive way to support children's social and emotional development and approaches to learning.

1. Understand contributing factors
2. Redirection Strategies
  - a. Offering choices
  - b. Supporting the child's sense of security, self-regulation and self-soothing skills
3. Limiting negative attention
4. Logical consequences
5. Replacement/alternative behaviors

#### **1. Program staff members should work together with families and others to better understand the factors contributing to a child's behavior.**

- Ask the question: "What is this child trying to communicate when they demonstrate this behavior?" Factors contributing to a child's behavior may include:
  - Programmatic structures or conditions such as the flow of the day/daily schedule, room arrangement, noise level, etc.
  - The child's feeling of security within the classroom or their relationships with adults or peers.
  - The child's unique circumstances. For example:
    - The child has not yet learned appropriate behaviors for social interactions and may be grabbing toys instead of asking or hitting when upset.
    - The child is going through a transition at home and experiencing emotional distress as a result (e.g. a new baby in the family) or has experienced trauma.
- Use [Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence \(ABC\) charts](#) to understand what happens before the behavior, what happens after, and when behaviors occur during the day to help find triggers, patterns, and the [function of the behavior](#).

#### **2. Strategies for responding to and redirecting behaviors:**

- Whenever possible, offer choices. Allow children control over their own behavior, such as choosing which toys to put away or where to sit at the lunch table.
  - When offering a choice, give two options *that are both acceptable to you*.
- Redirecting or providing acceptable substitutes to help children identify options for their behavior, such as when a teacher may notice there are too many people at an activity table and suggest a child engage with a different activity while they wait for a turn.
- Supporting the child's sense of security and development of self-regulation or self-soothing skills.
  - Empathize with a child's emotions, reassure them of their safety, value, and care in the classroom.
  - Write a letter to a caregiver or hold a special object from home.

**3. Limiting the amount of negative attention given to children by ignoring non-disruptive inappropriate behavior and focusing on the positive.**

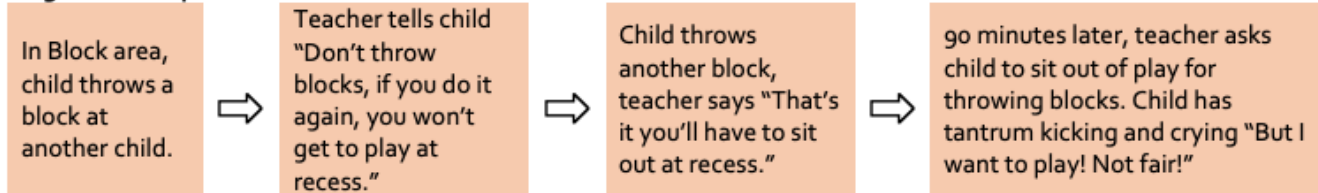
- Staff may choose to ignore non-disruptive behavior and continue to focus children on another learning activity. “Active Ignoring” means not looking at or acknowledging the behavior, and so, not rewarding it with attention. As soon as the child displays a positive behavior, it should be reinforced with positive attention *immediately*.
- A strategy of actively ignoring a child’s behavior should not be utilized in isolation or to the extent where it becomes a detriment to a child’s well-being. This strategy does not replace the expectation that teachers and program staff actively engage all children in the curriculum and encourage their participation in the program.

**4. Implementing logical consequences, where a child’s access to an activity or resource is restricted in direct response to an unsafe or disruptive behavior.**

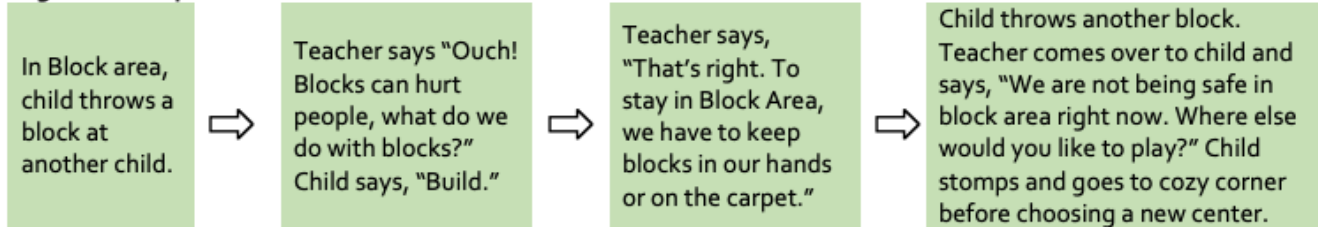
- The severity of the consequence should be appropriate and relevant (e.g. not being able to stay at the water table because they continue to pour water on other children).
- This strategy may be used along with redirecting, providing acceptable alternatives, and self-regulation skills.

**Example of an Illogical vs. Logical Consequence:**

**Illogical Consequence**



**Logical Consequence**



**5. Helping the child develop appropriate replacement or alternative behaviors.**

- 
- Prompt the child to use strategies that have been introduced and practiced in the classroom that would help them in the moment, e.g. “We use gentle touches to stay safe, you could ask “Can I use that?””
- Use small groups with other children to give the child practice. E.g. you may play a turn-taking game with the child and narrate how she is utilizing her new sharing skills.
- Use visual cues like cards, personalized schedule, or [Scripted Stories](#) to help build mastery of the replacement behavior.



## Moderate to Severe Challenging Behaviors: Individualized Behavior Planning

If a child's externalizing (crying, kicking, yelling, etc.) or internalizing (withdrawn, silent, etc.) behaviors are not changing with consistent attention and instruction, it's time to invest in deep observation and create a plan. **Children only continue engaging in a behavior because that behavior is working for them.** Our goal is to help a child meet the same need the challenging behavior is providing, but in a more appropriate, safe, or engaged way. According to research, if the 3 Tiers of support are consistent and robust, only about 5% of children will need additional supports.

Teaching staff should collaborate with a child's family to help the child develop and practice appropriate alternative behaviors consistently and in various contexts. Programs should communicate with families throughout the process of positive behavior guidance to exchange information about strategies and progress. Your Mental Health Staff and/or DECE Social Worker can help you engage in thorough observations and make a data-driven plan to support you in the process.

### The Behavior Planning Process

A data cycle should be used in any plan for behavior support:

1. Collect information. Use observation, documentation, family engagement, etc. to understand what is happening
2. Analyze. Examine the evidence and how it should impact your practice
3. Inform practice. Make planned changes to your practice or program systems.
4. Repeat cycle to determine effectiveness of your plan and make necessary changes. Plans should be used consistently for at least 3 weeks before changes are made.

#### ● Get a better understanding of what the child is trying to communicate with their behavior.

- Understand contributing factors that may be occurring for the child (see Responsive Strategies above)
- By consistently observing and documenting children's behavior, teaching staff may identify the situations that trigger disruptive or unsafe behaviors and help determine the factors that contribute to such behavior.
  - Use observation to examine an adult's interactions with a child, is there something about the interaction that may be leading the child to engage in challenging behavior? A caregiver's tone, way of stating demands, or physical habits may lead to a child trying to escape a situation or assert control through challenging behaviors.
  - Determine how often and at what times of day the challenging behavior is occurring to help you figure out what is being communicated or gained/ avoided through the behavior.

#### ● Once you have an idea of *why, when, and/or where* this pattern of behavior is occurring. Make a plan for teaching and reinforcing the replacement behavior for that child, starting at Tier 1 and working up.

- Individualized Proactive Strategies:
  - Staff may collaborate with the child and family to strengthen the child's relationships with children and adults in the program.
  - The child may be encouraged to bring a "security object" (e.g. blanket, teddy bear) to help feel more comfortable in the classroom.



- The child may be encouraged to utilize the quiet space or create a space for privacy in the classroom where children can calm down from feelings of anger or frustration.
    - The child can be encouraged to practice breathing techniques, getting a drink of water, or other strategies that assist in processing strong emotions or related negative physiological responses.
    - The child may be encouraged to self-soothe using sensory materials or objects, such as sand or water play, or any other activity calming to the child's senses.
  - Individualized Reinforcement Strategies (see list in section above):
    - All staff working with the child should know what behaviors they are looking for and praise the replacement behavior any time the child uses it.
  - Individualized Responsive Strategies (see list in section above):
    - All staff working with the child should be on the same page about what responsive strategies are going to be used in response to different behaviors to ensure consistency.
- **Include Child in Beginning Implementation of the Behavior Support Plan**
  - Staff may use different strategies depending on the program's philosophy and the unique needs of the child and family. One possible strategy for programs and families is outlined below:
    - Identify the inappropriate behavior in a non-judgmental, factual way.
    - Calmly communicate with the child about the impact of the behavior on him/herself and others.
    - Help the child identify contributing factors and identify an appropriate alternative behavior or way to address the situation.
    - With the child, develop strategies for demonstrating the appropriate alternative behavior, along with any supports the child may need (for example, a phrase or visual cue that the teacher and student agree on to help remind the student to use the alternative behavior).
    - Collaborate with the child's family throughout the process.
    - Celebrate with the child when he/she makes progress over time.
- **Track Progress**
  - Celebrate growth, even very small ones!
  - Track which interventions are done effectively
  - Implement the plan consistently for 3 weeks before making adjustments to the plan based on your follow up data.

### Additional Supports

After implementing these positive behavior guidance strategies with the support of an assigned DECE Social Worker or other Mental Health professional, the program and family may need additional support from an outside agency.

- These supports include, but are not limited to, parenting or family support classes, professional learning opportunities for program staff, referrals to counseling/therapy, psychological evaluation, or collaboration with the Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE).
- In some cases, the outside agencies may not be able to provide services to the child or family immediately. In these cases, the child may require more direct supervision for a period of time. This will help ensure a safe, nurturing environment for the child and his/her peers.
- For a child who already has an IEP, contact the child's parent or legal guardian and DOHMH/CPSE to discuss scheduling a new IEP meeting to consider whether any changes to the IFSP/IEP are needed to support the child's development.
  - For a child without an IEP, the behavior can most often be addressed using the positive behavior guidance strategies described above. However, a referral for special education evaluations may be appropriate if a child is not making meaningful progress even with the interventions that the program

has implemented. In these cases, speak with the parent about making a referral to the CPSE for preschool special education evaluations.

### Modifying programmatic structures as appropriate.

- Staff may make modifications to daily schedules (such as scheduling center-time to take place earlier in the day) or the physical environment (such as moving the quiet and noisy centers further apart in the classroom) to accommodate the needs of children and minimize their frustration throughout the day. This can be an effective support for a group of children or individual children.
- Programs may not shorten the school day of any child unless the program receives approval from the DOE's Division of Early Childhood Education and written consent of the child's parent or guardian. In particular, any proposed changes that would modify a child's access to the program by temporarily shortening the length of a child's day must be planned with the support of your program's assigned Early Childhood Social Worker in collaboration with the child's family. These changes can be implemented only with voluntary written consent of the child's parent or legal guardian on a form provided by the Social Worker informing the family of the option of continuing with a full-time program. This written plan must outline the strategies that the program will use to aid the child to return to full access and program participation within a specified timeline (not to exceed three weeks). Programs may only place children on shortened schedules if they follow these procedures and if the child's parent or legal guardian consents. Parents' written consent to a shortened schedule must be kept on file and be made available upon request.
  - If you are considering using this strategy, please contact the DECE Policy Team for more information by emailing [EarlyChildhoodPolicy@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:EarlyChildhoodPolicy@schools.nyc.gov) with the following subject "Request for modified schedule at (insert program name)"
- Any changes to programmatic structures must not discriminate against any child or family, where a child or family's right to successfully engage in a full day of high quality care is limited due to any characteristic or perceived characteristic of that child or family.

Please reach out to [decemhw@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:decemhw@schools.nyc.gov) with any questions, concerns, and for more information.



## Resources

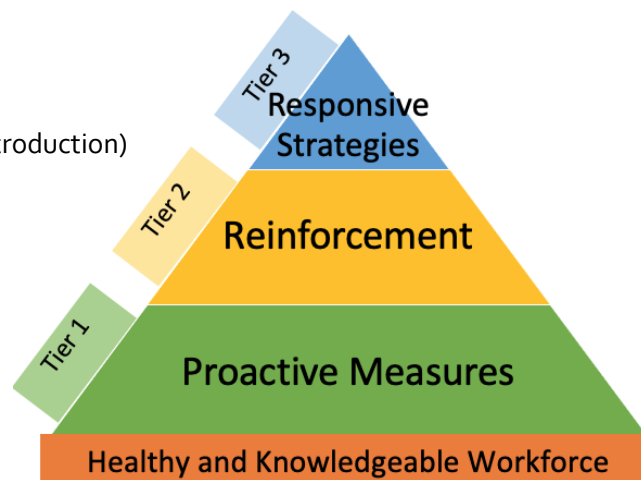
### Understanding Behavior and Development

- [What does it mean to be an infant and toddler?](#) (see introduction)
- [What does it mean to be 3?](#) (see page 2)
- [What does it mean to be 4?](#)
- [Functions of Behavior Overview](#)
- [Antecedent- Behavior- Consequence \(ABC\) Chart](#)

### ***Healthy and Knowledgeable Workforce***

#### Supporting Staff Wellbeing and Reflection

- [Hot Button Self-Reflection Activity for Staff](#)
- Racial Equity and Identity
  - [Professional Learning Toolkit: High Quality Programs Respect and Value Differences\\*](#)
  - [Social Identity Wheel Self-Reflection Activity for Staff](#)
- [Professional Learning Toolkit: Play-Based Learning and Responsive Instruction\\*](#)



### ***Tier 1: Proactive Measures***

#### Environments and Routines that Promote Positive Behavior

- [Setting up Nurturing Environments for Infants and Toddlers](#)
- [Cozy Corner Guidance](#)
- Predictable Routines that Keep Children Engaged throughout the Day: [Let's Play \(pages 30-35\)](#)
- [Tools of Autonomy for 3-year-olds](#)
- [Tools of Autonomy for 4-year-olds](#)
- [Using Effective Commands](#)
- [Visuals for Solutions to Navigate Social Conflict](#)

#### Keeping Children Engaged Promotes Positive Behavior

- [DECE Curriculum: Infants & Toddlers \(Connections\), 3-Year-Olds \(Explorations\), and 4-Year-Olds \(Units of Study\), and Family Child Care \(Let's Play\)](#)
- [FUN skills for Child-Led Play](#)

### ***Tier 2: Reinforcement***

- [Types of Reinforcement and Effective Praise](#)

### ***Tier 3: Responsive Strategies***

- [Responsive Strategies Based on the Function of Behavior](#)
- [Active Ignoring](#)
- Books and stories on feelings, transitions, friendship skills, etc. Find Book Lists in DECE Curricula: [Connections](#), [Exploration 1](#), [Units of Study Booklist](#)

### ***Individualized Behavior Planning***

- [Sample Individualized Behavior Support Plan Template](#)
- [Scripted stories](#)
- [Routines-based support guide for Birth-36 months](#)
- [Routines-based support guide for 4-8 years old](#)

\*Please note to access the Professional Development Toolkits, you will need to log into or [create](#) a Protraxx account.