

Tips for Preventing Challenging Behaviors and Responding to Them Successfully

Early care and learning educators can use the following strategies and links to supplemental resources to **BE PREVENTATIVE** by reducing behavioral dysregulation and **BE RESPONSIVE** by being developmentally supportive when challenging nonverbal communication occurs:

1

Create a predictable classroom environment. Use [consistent routines](#), and make and post a visual schedule for children to see what they can expect from the day. Set up the physical space with stations or dedicated spaces for different activities, such as a reading rug, a play station, and a snack table.

2

Set clear expectations for children's behavior. Use [strategies](#) like describing what you want to see from the child ("Let's walk with our buddies down the hallway"), provide appropriate and limited options ("Do you want to play with the blocks or the dolls?"), and set up first/then statements to give a timeline of events ("First we will clean up our stations, then we can move to the table for snack time").

3

Develop and maintain relationships with caregivers and family members. [Warm, responsive interactions](#) with caregivers will both increase the sense of safety that a child feels at school, and establish relational trust with family members that can let you know if there are any particularly exciting or troubling events happening outside of school that can inform the way you interact with the child in school.

4

Once a child has begun to escalate, **search for recent changes in the environment** (class transitions, new people in the room), the child's physiological state (hunger, needing to use the bathroom), or your emotional state (increased stress, tiredness) that [may be the underlying cause](#). Often, once the trigger/cause is clear, the solution will become clear as well.

5

Focus on de-escalation instead of consequences and punishment while the child's emotions are intense and agitated. Once you have ensured that the behaviors are not creating a safety issue for the child or other children, the only goal should be [bringing the child back to a calm and regulated state](#). Once they are calm you can revisit the situation to teach alternative ways of expressing their needs and utilize [logical consequences](#) for their behavior.

6

Use tally sheets and checklists to inform your decision-making about how to respond to challenging behavior. [Simple tools](#) like tally sheets or checklists can show if there are patterns in which students' behaviors, what times of the day, and what activities or transitions are particularly difficult. Taking a step back to count what kind, when, and where challenging behaviors occur may enable you to come up with solutions when you have more space to think through the best response.