6.2: Factors that Influence Behavior

There are many factors that influence the behaviors of children. It's important for teachers to keep these in mind as they observe, interpret, and respond to children's behaviors.[1]

Developmental Factors by Age

While each child develops at their own rate and in their own time and may not match every listed item, here are some general descriptions of children by age:

1-2 Year Olds

• Like to explore their environment
• Like to open and take things apart
• Like to dump things over
• Can play alone for short periods of time
• Still in oral stage, may use biting, or hitting to express their feelings or ideas

2-3 Year Olds

• Need to run, climb, push and pull
• Are not capable of sharing, waiting or taking turns
• Want to do things on their own
• Work well with routine
• Like to follow adults around
• Prolong bedtime
• Say “no”
• Understand more than he/she can say

3-4 year Olds

• Like to run, jump, climb
• May grow out of naps
• Want approval from adults
• Want to be included “me too”
• Are curious about everything
• May have new fears and anxieties
• Have little patience, but can wait their turn
• Can take some responsibility
• Can clean up after themselves

4-5 Year Olds

• Are very active
• Start things but don’t necessarily finish them
• Are bossy and boastful
• Tell stories, exaggerate
• Use “toilet” words in a “silly” way
• Have active imaginations

5-6 Year Olds

• Want everything to be fair
• Able to understand responsibility
• Able to solve problems on their own
• Try to negotiate

Table 6.1: Positive Approaches for Developmental Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages/Stages</th>
<th>Developmental Factors</th>
<th>Examples of a Positive Approach to developmental factors to manage behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infant/Toddler</td>
<td>Children this age:</td>
<td>Children in this stage tend to dump and run, so plan games to enhance this behavior in a positive way. Have large wide-mouth bins for children to practice “dumping items” into and out of. This strategy redirects the behavior of creating a mess into a structured activity to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Actively explore environments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Like to take things apart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have limited verbal ability, so biting or hitting to express feelings is common</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages/Stages</td>
<td>Developmental Factors</td>
<td>Examples of a Positive Approach to development factors to manage behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Older Toddlers</strong></td>
<td>• Like to dump things over</td>
<td>match the development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Need to run, climb, push and pull</td>
<td>Teachers of this age often find children trying to climb up on tables, chairs and shelves. Incorporate developmentally climbing equipment and create obstacle courses to redirect activity into positive behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Are incapable of sharing; waiting or taking turns</td>
<td>Avoid using the word “no” and create expressions that teach what to do instead of what not to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Express beginning independence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Work well with routines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Say “no” often</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Comprehend more than they can verbally express</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children this age:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Young Preschool</strong></td>
<td>• Like to be active</td>
<td>Young preschoolers become curious and create many misconceptions as they create new schemas for understanding concepts. Listen to ideas sensitively address them quickly and honestly. Model exploration and engagement in new activities (especially ones they may be fearful of engaging in)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3-4 years)</td>
<td>• Are curious and ask many questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Express new fears and anxieties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have little patience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can clean up after themselves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can take some responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Seek adult approval</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Older Preschool</strong></td>
<td>Children this age:</td>
<td>Ask the children to create new silly, but appropriate words to represent emotions rather than focusing on the “bad” words they use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4-5 years)</td>
<td>• Are highly active</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can be “bossy”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have an active imagination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Exaggerate stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Often use “toilet words” in silly ways</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Start things but don’t always finish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Ages/Stages

**Young School-Age**

Children this age:
- Are able to problem solve on their own
- Begin to understand responsibility
- Think in terms of fairness
- Attempt to negotiate

Fairness is a big issue for this group so working with this age group, a teacher should sit with children to develop "rules" and "consequences" so they can take ownership of behavioral expectations.

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### Environmental Factors

- Weather
- Adequate Play Space
- Room Arrangement
- Materials Available (not enough)
- Peers they interact with
- Parent/child relationship
- Sibling Relationship
- Relationships with friends
- Daily Routine (Rushed, busy, not enough time to play, run or exercise)
- T.V. Exposure (screen time- amount and quality)
- Lack of Sleep
- Nutrition

Table 6.2: Positive Approaches for Environmental Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weather</td>
<td>Plan for alternate gross motor experiences during inclement weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide flexibility in the daily routine to accommodate weather extremes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate Play Space</td>
<td>Ensure the space provided for each center/learning area is adequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If there is crowding, look at the messages the space is giving the children about how many can play there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make sure you are using all the spaces of the classroom effectively (is the unused space in the center of the room?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Room Arrangement     | Separate active/boisterous spaces from those that are quiet
| Watch that you don’t create “runways” and “islands” to run around
| Provide protection for children’s creations (try to avoid creating walkways through spaces where children are engaged)
| Put messy spaces where it is easier to clean up (near sinks and on flooring that can be easily cleaned) |
| Materials            | Especially for younger children, have duplicates of popular toys
| Make sure that there are enough materials to ensure that children always have new choices available (without waiting)
| Ensure that they are stored in an organized way
| Make them accessible to children to get out and put away independently |
| Relationships        | Support children’s relationships and attachment to their families/parents
| Support relationships between children in the classroom
| Build a strong sense of classroom community
| Facilitate problem-solving and conflict-resolution |
| Technology           | Create a policy on the use of screen media in which technology is used as a learning tool (rather than entertainment) |
| Basic Needs          | Schedule adequate rest time for children and create a peaceful environment for resting
| (sleep, nutrition, etc.)
| Serve nutritious snacks and meals for children that are offered every couple of hours |
Consider how to provide for children who are sleepy and hungry at other times of the day

**Individual Factors/Personal Styles**

- Temperament (Easy, Difficult, Slow to Warm)
- Learning styles/personal uniqueness

**Social Emotional Needs**

- To feel loved
- To be included
- To feel important
- To be heard
- To feel valued
- To feel safe
- To have friends[6]

**Positive Approaches for Individual Factors, Personal Styles, and Social/Emotional Needs**

Young children communicate their needs and wants through behaviors. Educators and parents can observe children’s behavior and look for clues about what it means. Since families know their children best, early childhood educators can ask families about their children’s behaviors and what they notice at home. Sometimes, the behavior’s meaning is clear to adults. Other times, educators and parents need to try different responses and watch the child’s reactions. Over time, adults will likely improve in responding effectively to a particular child’s communications.[7]

**Motivation behind Behavior**

In order to respond effectively to children’s behaviors and to extend positive relationships with children, it’s important to understand the motivation behind children’s behaviors and then match your approach.[8] Table 6.3: Motivation[9]
### Motivation

| Power - To be the “boss”                      | Provide many opportunities for choice making (choices you can live with) and practice decision-making |
| Revenge - Children that are hurt want to hurt others to feel important | Acknowledge intense feelings and stay positive |
| Inadequacy - Children don’t want others to expect anything from them for fear of failure | Provide opportunities for positive success |

### Having Appropriate Expectations for Behavior

It is really important that we realize that often what adults consider to be challenging behaviors are entirely age-appropriate responses from children. So it is important that teachers:

- Respond adaptively to individual children, considering each child’s age, temperament, language, communication skills, culture, interests, and abilities.
- Examine their own expectations of “appropriate” and “safe” behavior, looking for potential bias toward gender or developmental skills.[10]

[11]

Challenging behavior can often be addressed through prevention strategies. For children with disabilities who have challenging behavior, the process is the same as for all children, but the strategies might differ depending on children’s Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and their specific needs and strengths. The following strategies can be individualized as needed.

#### Classroom schedules and routines:

- Have consistent schedules and routines
- Make sure the content and length of activities are developmentally appropriate
- Be intentional about using visuals to teach routines
- Give consistent feedback
- Provide more individualized support for children with disabilities who have challenging behavior during routines. They may need an individualized visual schedule or a peer buddy, for example.

#### Transitions:

- Try to minimize the number of transitions
• Teach expectations
• Model or provide visual examples of appropriate things to do while waiting (counting, singing a group song, playing Simon Says)
• Allow children to transition at separate times or in smaller groups as needed

**Large Group Activities:**

• Consider the length of the activity (especially circle time). Is it age appropriate?
• For children who are working on expanding their attention, shorten wait times and allow breaks.
• Use visuals to make rules clear and to break tasks into smaller steps
• Provide ongoing feedback to expand children’s understanding, participation, and learning

**Types of Supports**

• **Visuals**
  ◦ To help children communicate their needs
  ◦ To break down tasks
  ◦ To clarify expectations

• **Timer**
  ◦ To provide a safety signal so children know when something is coming to an end

• **Adult support**
  ◦ To facilitate large group and small group activities
  ◦ To model and provide examples, and help children who need more intensive support
  ◦ To provide choices

• **Peer support**
  ◦ To model, think-pair-share, or be a buddy

• **Child preferences**
  ◦ To increase children’s motivation and engagement in tasks that can trigger challenging behavior

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**Involving Children in Guidance Curriculum**

It is a valuable learning experience to involve children in creating/defining the classroom rules. They become invested in those expectations. Teachers should use the following umbrella when creating classroom rules:

• Keep self safe: (walk inside, feet on the floor, etc…)
• Keep others safe: (keep hands to themselves)
• Keep materials/environment safe: (keep books on the shelf to prevent tearing, throw balls, dig with shovels, etc…)

[10]

**Classroom Teaching Strategies for Positive Interactions and Prosocial Behavior**[12]
Instruction is more effective when it is embedded in the meaningful activities and contexts that occur throughout a child’s day (Katz & McClellan 1997). Here are suggestions and examples for teaching social skills within classroom activities.

**Modeling.** Demonstrate the skill while explaining what you are doing. As you pass a block to a child, say, “Look, I am sharing my blocks with my friend.”

**Modeling with puppets.** Use puppets to model the skill while interacting with a child, an adult, or another puppet. A puppet can explain to the teacher and the class how she became angry and hit her brother to get a toy. You can ask the puppet to consider other solutions and then discuss what a child might do when he or she wants a toy that another child is using.

**Preparing peer partners.** Ask one child to show another child the skill or to help the child use the target skill. You can prompt the peer by saying, “Carmen, Justin is still learning how to wait and take turns. Since you know what to do, can you help him? Show him the line-up picture while you wait for a drink at the water fountain.”

**Singing.** Introduce a new skill through a song. To teach children to trade toys, pass out small toys during a large group activity, then sing the following song to the tune of “Mary Had a Little Lamb” and practice trading:

I can be a problem solver, problem solver, problem solver, I can be a problem solver, let me show you how.  
Maybe I can trade with you, trade with you, trade with you, Maybe I can trade with you; let me show you how.

Children then practice trading toys with each other.

**Doing fingerplays.** Introduce the skill with a finger-play, then follow up with a discussion or story. While showing fingers, have children recite this rhyme:

One little friend cried, “Boo-hoo”; a friend gives a hug and then there are two.  
Two little friends share with me; we play together and that makes three.  
Three little friends ask for more; they all say “Please,” and then comes four.  
Four little friends take turns down the slide; another comes to play, and that makes five.  
Five little friends have fun at school, because they follow every rule.

**Using a flannel board.** Introduce a new skill using flannel board activities and stories. For example, to teach turn taking you could have flannel pieces for Humpty Dumpty and change the rhyme so that “All the king’s horses and all the king’s friends / Work as a team to put Humpty together again.” As you say the rhyme, have the children take turns putting the pieces (castle, bricks, Humpty Dumpty pieces, horses, and friends) on the flannel board. When you finish the rhyme, extend the activity by talking about how Humpty felt when he sat on the wall; when he fell; and when his friends helped put him back together.

**Using prompts.** Give a child verbal, visual, or physical prompts to use a skill during interactions and activities. When a child who has difficulty with initiating play interactions moves toward a group playing together, you might say privately, “Remember to use your words and ask to play.”
**Giving encouragement.** Provide specific feedback when the child uses the skill. For example, describe what the child did: “You asked Joey for a turn. I saw that you two had a good time playing together.” Encouragement can be verbal or a signal (a thumbs-up or high five).

**Using incidental teaching.** Guide the child to use the skill during interactions and activities. Quietly say to the child, “Quan, I see that you are very angry that all the trucks are being used. What can you do when you are angry? Let’s go over the steps.”

**Playing games.** Use games to teach problem solving, words that express feelings, identification of others’ feelings, friendship skills, and so on. Place photographs of each child in a bag. Have the children take turns pulling a photo out of the bag and offering a compliment to the child in the photo.

**Discussing children’s literature.** Read books to help teach friendship skills, feeling words, problem solving, and so on. While reading a story, pause and ask the children how a character in the story might feel or ask them to suggest ideas for solving the character’s problem.

### Stating Behavior Expectations

Behavioral expectations are the appropriate behaviors expected from children during specific activities and routines. By stating behavioral expectations in advance of activities, routines and transitions, we allow children more opportunities to be successful. When children clearly understand what we expect of them, they can more securely play and work within a set of parameters. Other benefits of teaching behavioral expectations are that it:

- Maximizes children’s learning time. When we tell children our expectations ahead of time, we spend less time playing catch-up during the activity.
- Builds a common language. When we outline behavioral expectations for activities, routines and transitions, we help build a common language among the teachers and children. Using the same phrases during the same activities, help children to understand the meaning of the expectations (i.e., walking feet and putting breakfast dishes in the brown bucket).
- Provides a consistent message to children. Giving children mixed messages about what is okay and not okay detracts from learning and engagement over time. When we say, write, and model our message consistently to children, they are more likely to get it.
- Sets the stage for learning. Developing behavioral expectations before activities begin creates an atmosphere ripe for engagement and learning.
- Helps prevent behavior problems before they happen. When we tell children in positive ways what is expected of them before they act, we can more readily reinforce the behaviors we want to see, based on our stated expectations. [13]

**Tips for Teachers – Stating Behavioral Expectations**

**Anticipate** – Think through activities, routines, and expectations

**Plan** – Develop a plan to support appropriate behaviors by determining which behaviors you want children to use and which behaviors you do not want to see

**Prepare children**
- State expected behaviors in advance.
- Post expectations.
- Provide demonstrations.
- Use role play.
- Lead discussions.

**Recognize appropriate behavior** – give recognition and feedback

- Catch children following the expected behaviors.
- Make a statement about their effort.

Encourage them to keep it up![14]

**State What Children Should Do**

1. Tell a child what to do instead of what not to do.
2. Show the child by modeling or using a picture of the action.
3. Clearly and simply state what you expect the child to do.
4. Remember that young children may use inappropriate behavior because they do not understand the social rules and/or because they are unable to consistently apply what they are in the process of learning.
5. Talk to young children using language they understand. Young children may not understand a word like “don’t” because it is a short word for “do not” and he/she may not know what the “negation” of a word means.
6. Encourage the child in a way that lets him/her know that he/she is exhibiting the desired behavior. Use positive, descriptive acknowledgement while the child is making an effort or is doing the desired behavior.
7. Some children will respond better to more subdued expressions, and acknowledging them in a “matter of fact” way might be more effective.
8. For the most part, be enthusiastic and generous with encouragement. Most children can never get enough!

Here are some examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoid</th>
<th>Say/Model</th>
<th>Positive Descriptive Acknowledgement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Don’t run! | • Walk  
            • Use walking feet  
            • Stay with me  
            • Hold my hand | • You’re holding my hand. That is so respectful.  
                          • You walked across the classroom. You made a safe choice.  
                          • You are walking beside me and keeping me company. That is so friendly! |
| Stop climbing! | • Do you need something up high? Let’s find | • Wow! You have both feet on the floor! You |

[14](http://www.academica.com/)

[15](http://www.academica.com/)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoid</th>
<th>Say/Model</th>
<th>Positive Descriptive Acknowledgement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a safe way to reach it.</td>
<td>are being safe.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Don’t touch! | • Look with your eyes  
    • Keep your hands down | • You were really listening; you are looking with your eyes!  
    • You kept your hands down. That is respectful. |
| No yelling! | • Use a calm voice  
    • Use an inside voice  
    • Turn the volume down | • You are using a calm voice! You look happy.  
    • You are using a soft voice inside the classroom. How respectful. |
| Stop whining! | • Use a calm voice  
    • Talk so that I can understand you | • You are talking so clearly! That is so helpful.  
    • You told me with your words what was wrong. That is respectful.  
    • You used your words. How respectful! |
| Don’t stand on the chair! | • Sit on the chair  
    • Chairs are for sitting  
    • Do you need something up high? | • Let’s find a safe way to reach it.  
    • You are sitting on the chair. What a careful girl.  
    • You were responsible when you sat in the chair.  
    • You stood on the ladder. You chose to be safe. |
| Don’t hit! | • Gentle hands  
    • Hands are for playing, eating, and hugging. | • When you used gentle hands you were being respectful.  
    • You used your hands for clapping! You like being safe.  
    • You are hugging her. What a friendly girl. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoid</th>
<th>Say/Model</th>
<th>Positive Descriptive Acknowledgement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No coloring on the wall!!</td>
<td>• Color on the paper</td>
<td>• You put the paper on the easel. That is being responsible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Put the paper on the easel if you want to</td>
<td>• Wow. You are coloring so carefully. You are focused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>color standing up</td>
<td>• You are an artist standing at the easel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t throw your toys!</td>
<td>• Play with the toys on the floor</td>
<td>• You are playing with the toys on the floor. So safe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Toys stay close to the ground</td>
<td>• You decided to keep the toys on the table. You are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Please keep the toys on the table</td>
<td>respectful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop playing with your food!</td>
<td>• Food goes on the spoon and then in your</td>
<td>• You’re using your spoon. You’re being careful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mouth</td>
<td>• You said “all done.” That is helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Say “all done” when you are finished eating</td>
<td>• You are eating your food using your spoon and fork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>That is practicing manners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t play in the water/sink!</td>
<td>• Wash your hands</td>
<td>• You washed your hands. What a healthy guy!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• If you’re finished washing your hands,</td>
<td>• You followed the hand washing steps! You try hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>please dry them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[16]

The concept of time is very abstract for young children thus stating, “Clean up in five minutes” is not meaningful in terms of time. Suggested alternatives for directing clean up actions can include statements, “When the lights go off it will be time to clean up, “When you hear the ringing of the timer, it will be time to…”

To further gain cooperation in transitioning from one activity to another consider,

- Talking individually to children at their level so they can hear you and know you are addressing them in particular
- Allow them a space to place unfinished work to revisit at a later time
- Provide choices for cleaning up areas

Assign jobs each day for clean-up (book collectors, snack helper, etc…)
References

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