

B is for **BEHAVIOR**

Practical Strategies for Promoting Young Children's Positive Behaviors

Families and practitioners often have questions about how to promote children's positive behaviors. Did you know there are strategies that are easy to use and effective for helping young children learn positive behaviors and that prevent or address challenging behavior?

Strategies for Promoting Positive Behaviors

Here are six practical strategies to use with older toddlers or preschoolers to promote positive behaviors and prevent or address challenging behavior.

1. Let children know what they should do rather than what they should not do.

Young children need to learn what to do instead of a behavior they are told not to do. That is why it is important to focus on telling and showing children what to do rather than what not to do.

2. Share behavior expectations in advance.

Young children might not always remember expectations, even for activities or routines they do often. Let children know what they are expected to do before they begin to do something. This helps them understand and remember the expectations.

3. Give directions that are short.

Giving directions that are short makes them easier for children to understand. When children understand what to do they are more likely to follow a direction the first time they hear it.

4. Use "First/Then" directions.

When children know they will get to do something they like after they follow a direction, they are more likely to do what you ask them to do. "First/Then" directions tell children what to do ("first") and what they will be able to do after they follow the direction ("then").

5. Show children what you want them to do.

This helps them see the behavior so they can do it more successfully. One way to show children what to do is by doing it yourself. Another way is to show them a picture.

6. Tell children about their positive behavior and describe the behavior.

This helps children know what you want them to do and encourages them to do it again in the future. Although this can be general (e.g., good job), it often is better to give specific descriptions so children know which behaviors were appropriate.

Examples of Strategies that Promote Positive Behaviors

1. Let children know what they should do rather than what they should not do.

Instead of Saying: “Don’t snatch toys from your friends.”

Try Saying: “Ask your friend for a turn,” while showing how to tap a friend on the arm and ask for a turn.

Instead of Saying: “Stop it,” when a child is banging a spoon loudly on the table.”

Try Saying: “Scoop the macaroni with your spoon like this,” while modeling how to use the spoon to scoop.

2. Share behavior expectations in advance.

“We need to clean up toys in a few minutes to get ready for bed.”

“When we get out of the car you will need to hold my hand.”

“If you want to play with the ball, ask your friend for a turn.”

3. Give directions that are short.

“Put your toys in the toybox.”

“Hold my hand in the parking lot.”

“Say, ‘Can I have a turn?’”

4. Use “First/Then” directions.

“First put your toys in the box. Then we will read a story.”

“First ask for a turn. Then you can play with the ball.”

“First put your shirt on. Then you can play.”

“First go potty. Then you can color.”

5. Show children what you want them to do.

Put a toy in the toybox and say, “Put your toys in the box like this.”

Show a picture of two people holding hands and say, “Hold my hand like this in the parking lot.”

Say, “I’m going to ask my friend for a turn. ‘Julie, can I have a turn?’”

6. Tell children about their positive behavior and describe the behavior.

“Thank you for putting your toys in the box!”

“I like how you held my hand the whole time in the parking lot.”

“That was really nice to ask Julie for a turn.”

What We Are Doing

The Anita Zucker Center is helping families and practitioners learn to use strategies that promote children’s positive behaviors and prevent or address challenging behavior.

Visit our website to access more information or resources and learn more about what we are doing.