

“I’m Trying to Tell You Something!”

Understanding The Messages in Children’s Challenging Behaviors

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Sharing A Vision 2015

Behavior is...

- ✓ a way of interacting with the world
- ✓ a reflection of a child's thoughts and feelings about him/herself
- ✓ a goal-directed response to an environmental stimulus
- ✓ a form of communication

Key Questions:

1. Where is this child coming from?
2. How does the child feel? What does the child think?
3. How is the behavior working?
4. What is the child trying to tell us?

1) Where is the child coming from?

BEHAVIOR IS INFLUENCED BY BOTH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

Internal (within child): temperament, diagnosis, sensory issues, hunger, illness, etc.

External (environmental): parenting style, level of chaos at home, poverty, etc.

2) How does the child feel? What does the child think?

CHILDREN’S SELF ESTEEM & SELF CONCEPTS ARE BASED ON INPUT FROM OTHERS

3) How is the behavior working? What is the FUNCTION of the behavior?

Gain/Obtain

Avoid/Escape

(Modify)

4) What is the child trying to tell us?

- “I have unmet needs.”
- “I don’t know how. I lack the skill.”
- “Something isn’t working for me.” (lack of environmental fit)

SUCCESSFUL PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION:

- ✓ Replacement behaviors MUST honor the child’s original functional goal
- ✓ Responding to the child’s specific message(s) results in an individualized plan, suited to that specific child.
- ✓ Keep it simple- even if the challenging behavior looks complex.
- ✓ Include families in the plan – write plans suitable to home & school
- ✓ Base on DATA – not opinions.

Sample intervention/prevention strategies:

CHILD’S GOAL / MESSAGE	SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTION MUST:	POSSIBLE RELATED STRATEGIES
Function: GAIN	Allow child to gain	teach the child to ask schedule time with the teacher
Function: AVOID	Allow child to avoid or Reduce related stress	modify task to make it less threatening pair with a peer
Message: UNMET NEED	Meet child’s need	allow child to sit in chair at circle time schedule talk time with the teacher
Message: LACK OF SKILL	Teach the child missing skills	teach turn taking teach asking to play
Message: DOESN’T WORK	Adjust environment to better suit the child	provide fidget preferential seating

To contact the presenter for staff professional development training, classroom consultation, behavioral analysis & positive behavioral support plans, reflective supervision of parent educators, program design or workshops for families:

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