

Communication

Take a proactive approach to challenging behavior by partnering with: parents, early childhood program staff at other off site locations (if applicable), and contact and/or consult with early childhood social emotional specialist/counselor (contacts for this information: http://larimer.org/kids/local_providers.pdf or <http://summitstonehealth.org/>)

Take a proactive approach to challenging behavior by partnering with parents and getting early childhood specialist consultation to reduce the likelihood of expulsion.

1. TEAM MEETING

Consider a coordinated team meeting with parents and other specialists when challenging behaviors are first deemed persistent or puzzling instead of waiting until the issue/s become significant or highly problematic.

2. FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Always involve the family – Communication between families and early childhood center staff is essential.

- Communicate often with the family.
- Build an ongoing relationship with open communication with the family.
- Present a question of the day for parents to engage and “break the ice”. This could open doors for positive and casual communication in order to build an initial relationship in an informal way. Example: Invite the parents to school events and/or volunteering opportunities.
- Use a balance of positive and challenging behaviors in discussion and communication with the family.
- Send home frequent reports (daily if possible, but at least weekly) of the positive and challenging behaviors the child displayed.

3. COMMUNICATION STEPS

Step 1. Briefly state your concern and questions. “I wanted to talk with you because I am wondering about (name)’s (area of success or concern). I am wondering if you have noticed this?” Parents are much more likely to engage if you can give them some success to build on.

- Try to figure out what leads to the challenging behavior. What is the child trying to communicate through this behavior?
- Try to introduce the subject or issue and establish a partnership with the family. Problem solving comes later.
- Keep the focus on the child. Avoid using words like “problem” which might place blame.
- However the parent responds will set the tone for how you will proceed. If it is negative or defensive, back off and gather more information and proceed at a later time. If it is positive, proceed but don’t just focus on the problem.

Step 2. Collect Information. Respect the parent as the expert on their child. “Please share with me what you have seen or thought about this?”

- Gets the parents on the same wavelength, and helps guide what you say. This is less threatening and may confirm what you also see.
- Encourage sharing. “Please tell me more.”

Step 3. Share information. Share facts, not interpretations. “I have observed...”

- Be specific: What, when, where - use direct observations and avoid interpretations or diagnosis.

- Give your observations but leave room for doubt for another viewpoint from the parent for their specific child.

Step 4. Brainstorm alternatives.

Option A. Parent shares your concern. If both of you have similar viewpoints proceed with brainstorming ideas for addressing it. "What have you tried or thought of?"

- Make every effort to pull ideas from the parent first rather than sharing your own ideas. You can offer ideas and solutions, or go first if the parent is at a loss and unable to think of any solutions. If you go first you might identify several alternatives, you have thought about rather than just one.
- If behaviors are present at home and at the preschool, opt for joint strategies when possible. If behaviors are extensive, you may want to include the concept of a professional to help.
- If you are wanting an early childhood classroom observation and/or early childhood child specific consultation contact an Early Childhood Specialist: <http://summitstonehealth.org/>.

Option B. Parent Disagrees. If the parent does not see what you see and denies the possibility or gets upset with you, suggest "let's both keep our eyes and ears open the next couple of weeks and see how (name) is doing in terms of (specific behavior), and then discuss again."

- Stop and back off. Allow some room for doubt. Do not get into an argument or try to justify yourself, as it may escalate the disagreement.
- Do set up a mindset that it will be brought up again in the future.

Talking with Families about Problem Behavior: The Do’s and Don’ts

Do’s	Don’ts
Begin discussion by expressing interest in their child.	Begin the discussion by indicating the child’s behavior is not tolerable.
Let the parent know that the goal is to help the child.	Indicate the child must be punished or “dealt with” by the parent.
Ask the parent if he or she has experienced similar situations or concerns.	Ask the parent if something has happened at home to cause the behavior.
Tell the parent that you want to work with the family to help the child develop successful behavior and social skills.	Indicate the parent should take action to resolve the problem at home.
Tell the parent about what is happening in the classroom (positive and challenging) but only after the parent understands that you are concerned about the child, and not blaming the family. Discussions about challenging behavior should be framed as “the child is having a difficult time” rather than losing control.	Initiate conversation by listing the child’s challenging behavior.
Offer to work with the parent in the development of a behavior support plan that can be used at home and in the classroom.	Leave it up to the parent to manage the problems at home; develop a plan without inviting family participation.
Emphasize that your focus will be to help the child develop the skills needed to be successful in the classroom and at home.	Let the parent believe the child needs more discipline.
Stress that if you can work together you are more likely to be successful in helping the child learn new skills.	Minimize the importance of helping the family understand and implement positive behavior support.

4. RELEASE OF INFORMATION – Get a [release of information](http://bit.ly/1UPzMMj) (http://bit.ly/1UPzMMj) signed by parents to talk with other early childhood programs, early childhood counselor specialists, school counselors, classroom teachers, or other agencies that may have relevant information. This ensures the ability to receive and give information to others involved in the child’s care.
5. CONTACT OTHER SCHOOL – Contact other early childhood program for a dually enrolled child when applicable to see if a [behavioral support plan](http://bit.ly/28L8k3T) (http://bit.ly/28L8k3T) is in place.

6. EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIALIST – Contact Counselor/Early Childhood Specialist (if applicable) to see if a behavioral support plan is in place and/or to seek classroom/individual consultation:
<http://summitstonehealth.org/>
7. OTHER RESOURCES – For additional support beyond the suggestions in this tool, here are local early childhood resources related to: screening and evaluation and early childhood coaching:
[Screening and evaluation](http://larimer.org/kids/local_providers.pdf)
http://larimer.org/kids/local_providers.pdf
[Early childhood coaching](http://www.ecclc.org/child-care-providers/quality-support-team-coaching)
<http://www.ecclc.org/child-care-providers/quality-support-team-coaching>
8. MANDATORY REPORTING – Child abuse laws prohibit the physical, emotional, or sexual abuse of children. In its efforts to protect children from abuse, Colorado's child abuse statutes require certain third parties and professionals with access to children (such as school employees, counselors, and medical personnel) to report suspicion or knowledge of abuse to the authorities. The Larimer County Child Abuse Hotline phone number is: 970-498-6990.

Early Childhood Challenging Behavior Tool

<http://www.ecclc.org/child-care-providers/challenging-behavior-tool>

