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Evidence-Based Practices for Addressing Classroom Behavior Problems

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*L*aura has been teaching in an inclusive preschool for the past few years, and she really enjoys working with the children and feels that she is able to teach them meaningful skills that will help them to transition to a kindergarten setting. However, there is always one child who challenges her patience and creativity, a child like 4-year-old Donny. As Donny enters the classroom in the morning, he immediately runs toward the toys and throws his backpack aside instead of putting it away. Laura reminds him, “You need to put your backpack in your cubby, Donny,” but he ignores her and darts directly toward the cars in the carpet area. Taking the cars away, Laura nudges him toward his cubby and requests, “Let’s put your backpack away, Donny.” Laura gently takes his arm and asks him to stand but Donny escalates into a full-blown “meltdown,” kicking, screaming, and thrashing his arms on the carpet. Laura then lets him cool down for a while before encouraging him to join the group for music time, one of his favorite activities. Thinking back on Donny’s behavior, Laura suspects that his tantrums are growing worse instead of better. After reviewing her anecdotal records that she keeps on each child, her suspicions are confirmed: Donny’s tantrums have increased

from one to two per day at the beginning of the school year to three to four each day by midyear.

Problem behaviors such as those Donny exhibits are not uncommon in preschool settings. Research indicates that early problem behaviors are predictive of ongoing behavior difficulties (Keenan, Shaw, Delliquadri, Giovanelli, & Walsh, 1998; Powell, Dunlap, & Fox, 2006). Challenging behavior can be persistent, interfering with social interaction in the classroom, which in turn can impact learning and academic achievement (Campbell, Spieker, Burchinal, Poe, & the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Early Child Care Research Network, 2006; Keenan et al., 1998). Teachers rate children’s failure to follow instructions as the most common barrier to effective instruction during early childhood (Rodriguez, Thompson, & Baynham, 2010; Wilder, Allison, Nicholson, Abellon, & Saulnier, 2010). Researchers have called for focused attention to problem behaviors during the preschool years because early intervention is more effective than waiting until later to address these issues (Keenan & Wakschlag, 2000).

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The incidence of challenging behaviors is particularly widespread when children have developmental delays. In a study of young children with developmental delays, Keller and Fox (2009) found that a majority of them (70.7%) demonstrated significant behavior problems. The most common problems that they found were tantrums, aggression, defiance, and hyperactivity. Baker, Blacher, Crnic, and Edelbrock (2002) found that children with developmental delays were three to four times more likely to demonstrate significant behavior problems than children without delays. Given these findings, it is not surprising that teachers of young children with disabilities such as Laura find that dealing with behavior problems is an ongoing challenge in the classroom.

When Laura considers Donny's behavior, she can ask herself a few key questions. Does Donny have the language skills to understand what I am asking him to do? Does he understand the classroom rules and expectations? Does he know how to follow the instructions that I am giving him? Is Donny acknowledged when he is behaving appropriately? Does he have plenty of opportunities to experience success, both in his behavior and with developmental tasks in the classroom? Hester, Hendrickson, and Gable (2009) have summarized research on why children often do not respond to teacher requests: lack of skills to understand the expectations, little motivation to respond to instructions, and other issues such as anger and frustration, indicating a possible lack of self-regulatory behaviors. By developing early and effective classroom-level interventions, teachers can help to

prevent further development of problem behaviors and avoid serious social behaviors during later school years (Keenan & Wakschlag, 2000).

Positive behavioral support is a proactive approach to addressing behavior problems, and includes the key features of data-based accountability, environmental design to reduce problem behaviors, an instructional focus to teach appropriate behaviors, and a collaborative approach to behavioral interventions (Carr et al., 2002). Classroom teachers like Laura can implement a positive behavioral support system as a set of class-wide behavioral strategies so that the children in her classroom are successful throughout the day. Laura will need to implement focused interventions for a few children who require individualized supports in academic tasks, group activities, and following the school routine. When needed, Laura can conduct a functional behavioral assessment for an individual child such as Donny so that she can determine the payoff of the behaviors that interferes classroom routine and learning (Stormont, Smith, & Lewis, 2007). Strategies for class-wide positive behavior support, including intervention strategies for children who require more individualized supports in instructional and noninstructional settings, will be discussed in this article.

Classroom Routines and Transitions

Research indicates that not only *what* teachers teach but also *how* they teach can promote positive interactions and learning (Benedict,

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Horner, & Squires, 2007; D. R. Carter & Norman, 2010; Hester et al., 2009). The curriculum content and tasks need to be developmentally appropriate so that children can be successful in the classroom. Behavior problems are not as frequent when children have opportunities to respond with success, and when their successes are acknowledged by teachers and peers (D. R. Carter & Norman, 2010). Key components of a successful classroom structure include consistent and predictable classroom routines, planning for effective transitions, and frequent specific social acknowledgment for appropriate behaviors (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2003; Strain, Lambert, Kerr, Stagg, & Lenkner, 1983). In the classroom, clear expectations and predictable routines promote the children's understanding of appropriate behaviors.

Establish Routines and Expectations

Teachers can post a few simple classroom rules on the wall, along with a picture, photo, or icon to demonstrate what the rule says (Hester et al., 2009). Each classroom routine (circle time, free play, lunch) should have specific expectations (keep hands and feet to self, share with friends) that teachers and the children review together. The rules and expectations make more sense to children when they are illustrated with examples, nonexamples, pictures and photos, and role play.

A picture schedule as a visual support is helpful letting children know what to expect during their day (Jaime & Knowlton, 2007; Rao & Gagle, 2006; Stephenson &

Hanley, 2010). At the beginning of the day, the teacher can review the schedule and later point out each activity on the schedule as it begins. When the activity is completed, a “finished” box or envelope can be used. Later at the end of the day, the teacher and children can review that day's activities before leaving to go home.

Scaffold Transitions

Another aspect of classroom structure involves planning for transitions throughout the day. Typically developing children, as well as children with disabilities, often have difficulty changing activities. Problems with transitions can involve tantrums, aggression, or simply refusing to follow instructions to move on to the next activity with the group. In addition, issues with transitions can hinder children's developmental progress because the associated behavior problems take time away from instruction (Wilder, Chen, Atwell, Pritchard, & Weinstein, 2006).

When changing activities, particularly when ending an enjoyable routine, teachers can tell children that it is almost time to change to a new activity. They also need to let children know what behaviors they would like to see during the transition and provide a positive reason to move to the next activity. Describing the next activity or situation can facilitate effective transitions (Stormont et al., 2007). For example, before it is time to return from the playground, Laura can say to the children, “It is almost time to come inside. We will get a drink of water when go inside.” Laura can give the children a 2-min cue, telling them that they are going

to finger paint at the art tables in a few minutes. Letting children know in advance about these transitions decreases the likelihood of problem behavior (Benedict, Horner, & Squires, 2007; Cote, Thompson, & McKercher, 2005). Dividing the class into smaller groups and using a peer-buddy system during transitions can be a useful strategy in an inclusive setting (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2003).

Like typically developing children, children with disabilities often have difficulties in adjusting to unpredictable routines or changes in routines, resulting in problem behaviors during transitions. Children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) can become dependent on their daily routine and are likely to have difficulties with changes in their environment (Schmit, Alper, Raschke, & Ryndak, 2000). When a change in routine is anticipated (e.g., a school picnic or a program in the school gym), teachers can teach children to adjust to the changes in advance. For example, Laura can begin teaching the children during morning circle on Monday about the upcoming change in routine for Friday's program in the school gym.



Teacher Strategies

In addition to providing the general structure to prevent behavior problems, there are specific actions that teachers can take to help children with appropriate social behaviors. These actions include instructing children in how to follow directions, analyzing the tasks that teachers expect children to complete, providing choices, and acknowledging children when they are successful. The following section describes ways that teachers can interact with young children to minimize challenging behaviors in the classroom.

Teaching Children to Follow Directions

Throughout the day, teachers make many requests of the children in their classrooms. These requests may occur during small group instruction, circle time, table tasks, centers, free play, or snack time. Regardless of the activity or the place, teachers need to be specific in their requests (Bouxsein, Tiger, & Fisher, 2008). For example, "Please pick up the books in the play area" is preferable to "It's time to clean up." Brief, clear, and direct requests improve the ability of young children to understand what is expected. Also, teachers need to phrase requests positively with "do" instructions rather than "don't" instructions (Neef, Shafer, Egel, Cataldo, & Parrish, 1983; Stephenson & Hanley, 2010).

There are other ways that preschool teachers can help children to follow directions and adjust to the classroom. Research has demonstrated that stating the child's name, establishing eye contact, and

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maintaining close proximity to the child can improve the child's ability to follow instructions (Stephenson & Hanley, 2010). Similarly, studies also show that children improve in their ability to follow directions when they are positively acknowledged (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2012; Neef et al., 1983; Stormont et al., 2007). When Donny puts away his backpack in the morning with her help, Laura needs to be specific in acknowledging his actions such as, “Donny, thank you for putting up your backpack in your cubby! Let's go see the cars!”

When teachers acknowledge or praise young children, their feedback needs to be specific, consistent, and related to the actions of the child (Hester et al., 2009). Using specific praise or feedback improves the child's ability to continue positive interactions (Benedict et al., 2007; Hester et al., 2009). For example, when Donny and Jayden have been playing cooperatively in the transportation center, the teacher can say, “Wow! Donny and Jayden really had a great time playing with the trucks! That looked like fun!” This statement is more specific than saying, “Good playing!” Likewise, “good job” for most situations throughout the day won't be as effective as more descriptive comments. Teachers should also ensure that their feedback is not intrusive because too much teacher involvement can interfere with the children's interactions with their peers. When adults provide positive comments *after* children have finished their play, it is less intrusive than commenting during play, which can actually result in shorter engagement time during play (Joseph & Strain, 2013).

In many cases, preschoolers will learn to follow directions with the strategies we have discussed.

However, children with significant delays often need additional teaching strategies (Stephenson & Hanley, 2010). Preschoolers with language delays may not understand teachers' verbal instructions. As a result, they will need additional physical prompting to follow instructions (Stephenson & Hanley, 2010). Teachers also can pair gestures with verbal instructions and then provide immediate reinforcement for the following directions given with gestures. The reinforcers can be edibles, physical contact, toys, or praise, whichever is most naturalistic yet effective for individual child. Soon, the child will be able to make associations between the directions, following them, and reinforcement as the child experiences this contingency. Gradually, teachers can fade the prompt and delay the reinforcement as the child progresses (Mancil, Conroy, & Haydon, 2009).

Analyzing the Nature of Tasks and Activities

The nature of the tasks and how they are ordered can impact children's motivation to engage in them (Cali, Wacker, Ringdahl, Cooper-Brown, & Boelter, 2004). Teachers need to consider the difficulty of the task, how long it takes, and the degree of physical engagement when planning instruction. The time spent in seated group activities such as circle time should be limited (Zaghlawan & Ostrotsky, 2011). Teachers can schedule instruction at the beginning of the school year for shorter periods of time until the children become used to the routine. They can also alternate activities with plenty of physical movement with those requiring children to sit or work at

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tables. For example, circle time or table tasks can be alternated with outdoor play, center time, or music time with dancing and marching.

Providing Choices

Providing choices is a proactive strategy for reducing problem behaviors (Dyer, Dunlap, & Winterling, 1990; Kern, Mantegna, Vorndran, Bailin, & Hilt, 2001; Tiger, Hanley, & Hernandez, 2006). Having the opportunity to make choices can enhance the reinforcing nature of the activities and thus will help smooth transitions within routines (Dunlap et al., 1994). Teachers also can improve children's abilities to stay engaged in classroom activities by providing opportunities to make choices among several activities and engaging children in planning the day (Dunlap et al., 1994; Kern, Vorndran, & Hilt, 1998). For example, during the morning routine, children can have opportunities to make choices among activities for center time. In this way, their choices are incorporated in planning the day. Choice making can also be embedded into the daily routine (Kern et al., 2001) throughout the day by using naturally occurring opportunities for choice such as drinks, snacks, art materials, and toys. When offering choices, teachers can incorporate visual supports by providing picture cards, picture symbols, or photographs that represent activities and ask children to select activities and to sequence the activities (Preis, 2006). For example, Laura can provide two sets of three pictures cards; one set of cards represents nonpreferred activities and the other, preferred activities. If Donny's favorite activities are center play,

playground, and music, then Laura can offer these in the set of preferred activities. Conversely, she can include table tasks, art, and reading books in his set of less preferred activities if she knows that these are not among his favorites. Laura can ask Donny to select activities from each set, and later she can vary the number of activities that he can select from each set.

Considering the Individual Child

So far, we have examined strategies to help children learn to adjust to the classroom and follow the routine. By implementing these strategies, teachers can help most of the children learn to adjust to the classroom and follow instructions, thus avoiding some common problem behaviors. However, in some cases like Donny's, children show lasting behavioral patterns that interfere their learning or social interactions with peers and adults in the classroom. In these cases, teachers need to address the issues at the individual level. The following section will address the importance of identifying the function of the behavior, using appropriate reinforcers, and offering cues and prompts.

Identifying Functions of Behavior

Determining the function of the behavior, the payoff for the child, has demonstrated research-based effectiveness for reducing problem behaviors when this information is used to target an appropriate replacement behavior (Hanley, Piazza, Fisher, & Maglieri, 2005; Iwata, Dorsey, Slifer, Bauman, & Richman, 1994). Most problem

Table 1
Common Functions of Interfering Behaviors

Function	Example
Gain attention	Child runs out of classroom to engage teacher in “the chase”
Avoid attention	A new child in the classroom hides under the table to avoid interaction with peers
Gain objects or activities	Child hits peer to get toys he is playing with
Avoid demanding situation	Child throws crayons on floor to avoid drawing task
Gain sensory stimulation	Child rocks his upper body back and forth making humming sounds when he doesn’t have environmental stimulation

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behaviors serve a purpose, usually to get something or to avoid something. Table 1 summarizes the most frequent functions of problem behavior and provides an example of each. The most common functions of problem behaviors are gaining the attention of adults or peers, getting preferred items such as toys or candy, gaining access to preferred activities, or avoiding tasks (Heflin & Alberto, 2001; Iwata et al., 1994).

Teachers should consider behavior by its function rather than what it looks like (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007). While behaviors may be similar in appearance, they may serve totally different purposes in their payoff for the child. Donny and Brenna may both throw crayons, but for Donny it may serve to gain attention, and for Brenna it may serve as an escape from a table task. When Donny shoves the bin of crayons off the table and is required to pick them up, Laura needs to examine the function of his behavior. Is it to gain attention of adults or peers, or is it to avoid an activity? What did he obtain after the behavior? What did the behavior achieve for him? What changes occurred after the behavior? Answers to these questions will help Laura identify the function of this behavior.

To identify the function of behavior, Laura will need to carefully and systematically observe the events that occur right before and right after the problem behavior. Based on these data, Laura can plan a strategy to teach an appropriate replacement behavior. If the behavior is to avoid the task of writing and Laura sees that this is a pattern of behavior for Donny, then she can teach him to ask for a break, either verbally, with a picture card, or with a sign or gesture. She can also present writing tasks in short time periods and work to increase his time spent on this task.

To determine the function of the problem behavior, teachers first need to define it objectively (Alberto & Troutman, 2009; Cooper et al., 2007). For example, if Donny shows aggression with peers and teachers, Laura will need to define exactly what he does. She notes that he hits peers, throws toys, or pushes items off the table. Next, Laura will need to examine what is happening in the setting prior to the behavior, the event that appears to trigger the behavior. Finally, Laura will need to observe to determine the likely payoff or consequence that follows the behavior. Laura can use an ABC chart to identify the function of Donny’s behaviors. To use an ABC chart, the teacher makes a chart with

three columns: the first column A (antecedent column) lists what is happening before the problem behavior occurs. The second column B (behavior column) precisely describes the behavior, and the third column C (consequence column) tells what the consequence or payoff was for this behavior (Alberto & Troutman, 2009; Cooper et al., 2007). For example, if Donny is aggressive with peers, Laura records “hit Jason on shoulder with block” in the B column. In the antecedent column Laura writes, “Donny playing in centers with blocks and trucks. Jason approaches.” Finally, Laura records the consequence for Donny’s behavior, “Jason comforted. Donny continues playing. Donny then asked to apologize.”

After completing the ABC chart, the teacher develops a hypothesis about the function of the problem behavior (Alberto & Troutman, 2009; Cooper et al., 2007). Did the behavior get attention for the child? Did the child avoid a task? Did the child get items that he wanted? By examining the ABC chart, Laura hypothesizes that the function of Donny’s behavior is to maintain access to the cars. Based on this hypothesis, she knows that she will

need to make sure that Donny does not have the opportunity to continue playing with cars if he hits classmates. She also realizes that she needs to teach him to share toys and that she will need to scaffold this behavior so that he can learn it. Laura notes that Donny’s tantrums occur when she asks him to work on table tasks involving writing. When examining the ABC chart, she sees that he is avoiding the task when she sends him to the “thinking chair” because his tantrum ends.

It may take several days of using the ABC chart to determine a pattern of association among antecedents and consequences relating to the observed behavior so that the teacher can determine the payoff and plan an effective intervention based on the behavior’s function. Sometimes, it is difficult to see a consistent pattern in the behavior, and sometimes the behavior serves more than one function for the child. If Donny begins throwing himself on the floor because he is unable to sit in the morning circle for the scheduled period, this behavior may initially function as an escape from the activity. However, if the classroom assistant lets him sit in her lap and rubs his shoulders after he throws himself on the floor, he may actually perform this behavior for attention from the assistant. It is important for teachers to collect data and analyze the behavior so that they develop a clearer idea of what is actually occurring in the classroom.

Table 2 provides an example of an ABC chart for Donny, along with the time, context, and reactions of Laura and his peers to his behavior. When addressing problem behavior based on its function, teachers need to make sure that the behavior is ineffective and does not result in the



Table 2
Sample of ABC Chart With Donny

	A (Antecedent)	B (Behavior)	C (Consequence)
9/02 8:00-8:30 Morning transition (MT)	Teacher redirected when playing with toys in the toy area without putting his belongings in his cubby	Threw toys he played with and yelled "no" to the teacher	Teacher took away the toys and nudged him toward the cubby Donny was aggravated
8:00-8:30 MT	Teacher redirected by physically guiding him to the cubby	Hit the teacher and yelled "no"	Teacher allowed him to go back to the toys Donny's stopped yelling
10:00-10:30 Independent work	Student received paper at table to trace name	Threw crayon bin on floor	Teacher directed him to pick up crayons Donny played on floor with crayons and did not trace name
10:00-10:30 Independent work	Teacher asks Donny to go back to his work	Donny screams, kicks, and throws crayons	Donny sent to "thinking chair"; tantrum ends

desired payoff. If the problem behavior serves to get attention, teachers must ensure that it does not result in attention of peers or teachers. Likewise, if the problem behavior functions to escape tasks, the teacher must ensure that the behavior does not result in the child avoiding the task or activity (Alberto & Troutman, 2009; Cooper et al., 2007). However, we need to teach the child what to do instead, by targeting a replacement behavior with the same function as the problem behavior.

If Laura sees that Donny is usually able to escape table tasks requiring writing or drawing when he throws the markers or crayons, then she can teach him to use a picture card or sign language for asking "break" as a replacement for the problem behavior and then she can guide Donny to complete his work following the break. As Donny gains the ability to work on tasks for a progressively longer period of time, Laura can use a delay cue, telling him that he is almost finished (Reichle, Johnson, Monn, & Harris, 2010).

Planned ignoring involves withholding any attention for specific problem behaviors and can be used successfully with attention-seeking behaviors (S. L. Carter, 2010). Based on the principle of extinction (Alberto & Troutman, 2009; Cooper et al., 2007), planned ignoring can help children to determine which behaviors are appropriate and which ones are not. If the function of the problem behavior is to get the attention of the teacher or caregivers, then attention is withheld for the inappropriate behavior. The staff do not establish eye contact with the child, they do not talk to the child, they do not physically touch the child, and they try not to socially interact with the child in any way. For example, if a child throws a temper tantrum and the staff knows that he does this to get individual adult attention, they do not give him eye contact and they limit their physical contact with him. Because the tantrum cannot be totally ignored, they must block any behaviors that would pose a danger to the child or others, but

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any physical contact should be brief, not comforting or pleasant. Then when the child calms down and asks to go play, the caregivers immediately respond positively and if possible let him go play with friends. When children communicate the need for adult attention with their behaviors, then the staff will need to make sure that they are attentive to their appropriate behaviors and conversation throughout the day. They will also want to make sure that these negative behaviors are not rewarded with caregiver attention.

Although planned ignoring is useful for behaviors that are attention-seeking in nature, teachers should not use this technique if the child's problem behavior is to avoid tasks or to get items or activities (S. L. Carter, 2010). If teachers ignore problem behaviors that have the function of escaping tasks, they can inadvertently reward the child because he escapes the task. For example, if Donny does not want to pick up blocks and throws a tantrum, this behavior, if ignored, allows him to continue to stay in the carpeted play area without putting away his toys. When children demonstrate problem behavior to escape tasks, the teacher can guide the child through the task without allowing him to avoid it.

When behaviors have the intent of getting items such as toys or activities, the caregiver should make sure that the child does not get the item or activity through the problem behavior. Also, the teacher needs to teach the child an appropriate replacement behavior with the same function as the problem behavior. Teachers can show children how to ask appropriately for the item or

activity, and the children also may need to learn when it is time to get the desired item or activity. Children often need to learn communication skills such as asking for help, asking for a break if they are getting frustrated, or asking for desired toys or items. Those with severe language delays can learn to use picture cards or sign language to communicate their needs. When children learn to use appropriate communication skills effectively and reliably, they are less likely to demonstrate problem behavior to get their needs met.

Using Reinforcers

Reinforcers are consequences that serve to strengthen a behavior and should be selected based on their effectiveness with the individual child (Alberto & Troutman, 2009; Cooper et al., 2007). Teachers can promote desired behaviors and teach children to acquire new skills by reinforcing them. To determine potential reinforcers, the teacher can ask the caregiver, observe the child's preferences during free play, or document what the child selects when offered choices (Cooper et al., 2007). For example, because Donny consistently goes to the cars and blocks during free play, Laura can use these items and activities as consequences to reinforce desired behaviors. She can also note what he chooses to play with when given choices and use these items as reinforcers. After finding potential reinforcers for Donny, Laura will need to observe their effect on desired behaviors to make sure that they in fact do increase the behavior that she is trying to teach him.

Some children with significant delays will need highly structured instruction and may need concrete reinforcers initially such as edibles or trinkets (Cooper et al., 2007). Young children with significant cognitive disabilities or autism may not respond to praise or acknowledgment that is verbal in nature (Greer & Ross, 2008; Rincover & Newsom, 1985). Due to language delays and lack of previous instruction, praise or verbal affirmation may not be meaningful to some children. As a result, the teacher should pair concrete reinforcers and verbal feedback (Vollmer & Hackenberg, 2001). The items selected for concrete reinforcers can be activities, small toys, or edibles (Heflin & Alberto, 2001). Because edibles are more intrusive and less naturalistic in the preschool classroom, teachers should use activities or toys rather than food reinforcers whenever possible. The teacher should always verbally acknowledge appropriate responses when giving the child concrete reinforcers (Cooper et al., 2007).

Instructors will need to fade out the reinforcers as the child makes



progress in learning the skill or concept (Alberto & Troutman, 2009). This principle of fading reinforcement is valid for concrete as well as social reinforcement. To fade reinforcers, the teacher uses them less frequently or requires more appropriate responding before reinforcing the behavior. For example, if Laura is giving Donny a small cracker for each letter of his name that he traces with her help, she can fade crackers by first giving him one for each time he traces one letter, then two letters, and then his entire name. If reinforcement is not faded, then the child is not likely to maintain the newly learned skills over time (S. L. Carter, 2010).

Offering Cues and Prompts

Throughout the school day, young children typically follow a plethora of cues in their environment. These natural cues can be teachers' directions during transition time or during instruction. For example, when children return from the playground, they know that they need to get ready for the next activity, such as art or music. As a result, completing one classroom routine provides the naturally occurring cue for beginning the next routine. Many children with delays need supports in addition to the natural cues so that they know what they need to do.

Depending on the severity of delay, teachers can systematically provide the cues that are more salient than the natural cues. For example, as the teacher in the inclusive classroom, Laura wants to teach Donny to play in the toy area independently for 5 min. First, Laura points to a picture of the toy area

that is posted on the schedule board saying, "It's time to go play in the toy area." Then Laura points to the toy area and physically guides him to go to the toy area. When Donny goes to the toy area with the prompts, Laura immediately provides him with his favorite toys. Soon Donny learns to go to the toy area with the additional cues such as physical guidance, visual gestures, and verbal directions. Laura now starts to remove the cues gradually and systematically: first, she removes the physical guidance, next the gestures, and then the verbal directions. Donny eventually learns to go to the toy area as part of his daily routine without additional cues. In this case, Laura is providing prompts by adding additional cues and fading them gradually (Cooper et al., 2007). Laura fades the prompt from the most intrusive cue (physical guidance) to the least intrusive cue (verbal direction; Alberto & Troutman, 2009). Teachers also can implement this procedure in an opposite way: least to most intrusive prompts (Alberto & Troutman, 2009). Laura can also work to increase the time span that Donny stays in the toy area. Her first goal is for Donny to stay in the toy area for a somewhat longer time period than he typically stays in the toy area. This enables Donny to be successful in achieving the goal, and Laura can then affirm him for playing in the toy area. Once Donny meets the first goal, Laura can gradually increase the length of time she expects him to stay in the toy area.

Conclusion

In summary, teachers of young children can plan proactively so that they avoid some of the serious problem behaviors in the classroom. The strategies presented in this article are part of a problem-solving approach to challenging behavior based on the principles of positive behavioral support. Although these methods presented here have research-based effectiveness, the classroom context is a changing and challenging environment that requires teachers to continue to work with children to determine the antecedents and the function of the behavior, and to develop instruction to teach children appropriate social skills. Important factors that we have discussed include opportunities for the child to respond with success, acknowledging children's appropriate behaviors, establishing a predictable classroom routine, planning for effective transitions, direct instruction in following directions, and identifying the function of the behavior for the child. In addition, children with ongoing behavior problems often need individualized reinforcement and systematic prompts and cues to be successful. When teachers such as Laura develop plans to preempt challenging behaviors and teach children behavioral alternatives, they are helping their children to learn appropriate responses and can avoid referrals for serious problem behavior in the future.

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