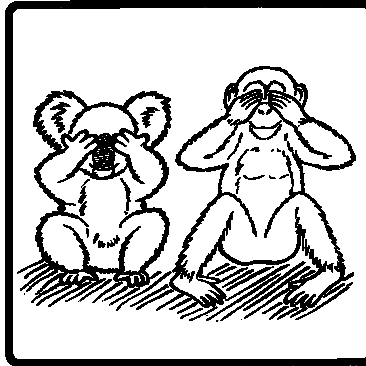


Child Care plus+

+ Ignore Some Behavior

Ignoring challenging—but minor—behavior is a useful strategy in a positive behavior guidance approach. Instead of intervening every time a child's actions do not quite fit your expectations, ignoring allows you to concentrate on positive behaviors and remain focused on situations that truly need your attention. Using this strategy also allows young children to make discoveries about their own behavior and supports their emerging self-regulation skills.



Two common child guidance mistakes often observed in early childhood settings include teachers/caregivers who: 1) attend to almost every inappropriate or disruptive behavior, regardless of the significance of the behavior and 2) attempt to reduce inappropriate behavior by focusing their time and attention on stepping in after a child uses a disruptive behavior. By learning to focus your attention, encouragement, and time on the child when he or she is using appropriate behavior—at the same time ignoring certain inappropriate behavior—you avoid these serious mistakes and enhance your effectiveness.

A To implement ignoring as a child guidance strategy, plan ahead; consider your program's culture and the individual strengths and needs of the child in question. Identify behavior that can be ignored in general and consider behavior of the individual child that you would like reduced. Ask yourself: Does this behavior pose a threat to other children, adults, or property? Does it break a program rule? Is there any urgent risk or concern if this behavior is repeated several times as you implement this strategy? When the answer is "no," ignoring the behavior can be effective and wise use of your limited time and energy. When the answer is "yes" to even one of these questions, use a different approach to stop the child's behavior and develop a plan for teaching the child a more appropriate way to interact.

B Think about how and when to encourage positive behavior. If you use ignoring, you must also deliberately increase your attention to the focus child and others when they engage in appropriate behavior. You will be most successful when your interactions with children are at least 90% positive.

C To effectively use ignoring, you may need to literally "sit on your hands!" Early childhood professionals who are especially vigilant about correcting behavior may have a hard time doing this at first. With planning and practice, it will relieve some of the stress of attending to every little thing a child does.

D It is important to observe carefully to determine if using this strategy is effectively reducing the frequency of the child's inappropriate behavior. Patience and consistency are key. In the beginning, expect to see a brief increase in the frequency of the behavior.

Completing a puzzle, cleaning up toys, passing crayons to a peer, or throwing a block are all behaviors children might use in an early childhood program. Ignoring any of these actions will decrease the likelihood that the child will repeat the behavior. On the other hand, paying attention to any of these actions will increase the likelihood that the child will repeat the behavior. For better or worse, you are constantly giving children feedback about behavior that should be repeated. It remains to ask yourself whether you are happy with the results! + CC+

+ In This Issue	
+ In Focus	+ Putting It Into Practice
+ Try It Out	+ Question
+ Connecting With Families	+ Resource Review

+ IN FOCUS

Planned ignoring is an effective strategy that can be used successfully in any early childhood setting. However, it is important to realize that it must be used with care and caution. It should not make a child feel insecure about his or her relationship with you, and it should not be used when the child's behavior gets in the way of the child's success in your program.

Behavior that interferes with a child's ability to interact, to learn from experiences, or be part of the group should not be ignored. For example, some children engage in self-absorbed behaviors such as rocking, repeatedly spinning objects, or waving their hands in front of their face. These behaviors can keep children from meaningfully exploring play materials and positively interacting with peers. Instead of ignoring self-absorbed behavior, work with parents and professionals to use strategies that help the child learn alternative behavior. These strategies will likely be different for each child.

Unsafe or dangerous behavior should never be ignored. Behavior that does not follow your program rules should also not be ignored, but used as a teaching opportunity. Sometimes, when an individual child cannot follow a rule, the rule may need to be assessed and perhaps modified for all the children. In these cases, use an effective response which respects children's need to learn while at the same time curbs disruptive behavior. + CC+



+ TRY IT OUT

Try out the strategy called "Ignore Some Behavior." Use the questions below to learn to use this strategy effectively and reflect on your experience.

- What do you know about the child that will help you?
- What specific behavior do you plan to ignore?
- When in the day does the child use this behavior?
- If someone were watching, what would your behavior have looked like when the situation occurred?
- What did the child do while you used this strategy?
- Did other children notice you were ignoring the behavior?
- Describe the result? Did the behavior stop/escalate?
- Did the child learn anything because you did not intervene?
- Did you learn anything by trying this strategy?
- Were you comfortable ignoring this behavior? Think about why/why not.
- Will you try "Ignore Some Behavior" with this situation or some other behavior in the future?

Learning a new strategy is not always easy. Trying it just once is seldom enough to become comfortable with it and is unlikely to impact a child's persistent behavior. So now take what you learned and try again! + CC+



+ CONNECTING WITH FAMILIES

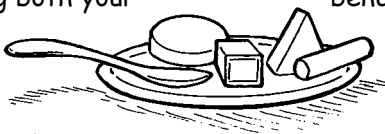
Write down your guidance approach and the positive strategies you use to help children learn appropriate behavior and make it readily available to parents. Parents need to know what strategies you use to teach children appropriate behavior, prevention strategies you use to support children in using positive behaviors, and how you will respond when disruptive or challenging behavior occurs. They will want to know your policy about when and how you will use these strategies. Parents also need to know what strategies you will not use, and why you have made this decision.

It will be of great benefit to both of you when parents understand why you have chosen a particular approach or strategy. If you have other staff working with you in your program, it will reassure parents to know that you are all on the same page—that they can count on everyone (even the cook) to use a similar positive approach to guide their child's behavior. Your guidance policy will form the foundation for many discussions as you develop your relationship with each family.

Guidance policies should be firmly grounded in current knowledge of child development, recommendations from early childhood experts, early childhood research, and recommendations from early childhood professional organizations, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org) and the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (www.sped-dec.org). Feel free to include quotes from professionals and references to the many resources available for developing and using quality guidance practices. + CC+

+ PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Guidance strategies should be chosen using both your knowledge of how children learn and grow in general and your awareness of each individual child. In group programs, knowing when not to step in is as important as knowing when to step in. Your guidance policies should include how you will make this decision and should include the strategy to "Ignore Some Behavior."



behavior ("Hey, we need those dishes for our dinner"). Appropriate social skills and peer interaction get naturally reinforced as children teach one another.

The child herself may tire and move on to more constructive play. If children are applying the growing problem-solving skills they are learning, let it happen; you may be pleasantly surprised by the results.

Take a thoughtful approach. Using the strategy to "Ignore Some Behavior" may seem spontaneous, but it should not be; you should be consciously thinking about each situation. You are the one who assesses what is taking place and chooses the best strategy to use according to your professional knowledge and awareness of children's individual strengths and needs. When the strategy of ignoring is selected, you then implement the process in a way that is respectful of the child and consistent each time you use it. It is best to ignore a child's behavior only when the child's behavior:

- does not pose a threat to other children, adults, or property.
- does not break a rule.
- could safely be repeated.

Following is an example to help you understand how to use the strategy "Ignore Some Behavior."

During play, a child took the plastic dishes one by one and hid them behind the piano. The toys were effectively taken out of play, and this little game would more than likely mean moving the piano to pick them up. The child care provider chose to ignore this situation for two reasons. First, the child was absorbed in the task and actively discovering and learning as she watched dishes disappear behind the piano. Second, although it may be annoying, having dishes behind the piano is not a serious disruption to the classroom or the routine.

In this case, the child care provider made a conscious decision not to focus her time and energy on correcting the behavior. Instead, she took a child-centered approach and allowed the child to do something even though it might end up being an inconvenience for her.

Natural interventions often occur. Often when you choose to ignore behavior, it gets corrected without your intervention. Other children may step in to change the

Ignore the behavior, not the child. It is important to remember to ignore the behavior, not the child. If a child starts spinning around while you are having a conversation, and this is a behavior you have chosen to ignore, just keep talking. The impulse to stop talking while the child is spinning or make the child stop so you can talk might need to be tempered as you focus on the conversation at hand.

Use ignoring as an intentional strategy. Planning is critical to being consistent, not only over time but among multiple staff members. A clear description of when to use this strategy and when not to use it should be included in your guidance policies. Policies should be open to scrutiny and modified as needed.

Work behind the scenes to enhance the child's learning and success. Ignoring a behavior is not the same as "doing nothing." You must constantly use observation and other measures to enhance your understanding of each child. If a behavior occurs more than once or a particular child frequently engages in minor disruptive behavior, your "behind the scenes" role as teacher and encourager needs to grow. Take data to make sure this child is getting your attention when engaging in appropriate behaviors. Carry an index card in your pocket and tally each time you have a positive interaction with the child and each time you respond to his/her disruptive behavior.

Help the child learn new skills to better fit classroom expectations. Set the child up for success by tweaking the environment or schedule. Give genuine feedback when the child is using the appropriate behavior.

Because you are trying to help children learn to be responsible for their own behavior, the best approach is sometimes simpler than you may think. When you ignore some behavior, you are free to put your energy where it matters most. +

CC+

+ QUESTION

QUESTION: *A child in my program constantly does things I ask him not to do. About half-way through circle time, he'll lay down on the floor instead of sitting up, sing along using nonsense words, or tap his feet on the floor in front of himself. If I ignore him, it's not fair to the other children who are working hard to do the right thing.*

ANSWER: As you look for a way to resolve this problem, try to re-frame your thinking a bit. Perhaps what is "not fair" to the other children is the loss of engagement as you turn your attention to the behavior of one child! This situation is an ideal opportunity to use planned ignoring. This sequence will help you use this approach effectively.

Provide genuine encouragement when the child uses appropriate behavior. Instruct the group about the circle-time activity and the behavior you expect, before this child acts up. You might smile and make eye contact with children who are sitting and say, "You are taking good care of yourself! When you sit on your mat, you can see the pictures." The challenge here is to "re-teach" and notice appropriate behavior without being coercive or creating competition. As you describe your expectations, keep your words specific, genuine, quick, and focused on the group rather than on individual children. Your words will be especially meaningful for the child in question. When a child uses appropriate behavior most of the time without any positive attention, he WILL find another way—like lying on the floor!

Ignore these minor behaviors. When you look at the criteria for ignoring behavior—does not pose a threat, does not break a rule, could safely be repeated—you see that these are the kinds of behavior that can likely be

ignored. In fact, by attending to these behaviors, you are actually teaching this child and the other children in the group how to get your attention!

Change the pace, activity level, or the activity itself to encourage the child to participate appropriately. Rather than changing your focus from the circle activity to one child, "step-up" the fun level of your activities. Start a song or fingerplay that this child enjoys. A lively activity half-way through might help this child meet a need for movement and make it more likely that he is able to continue using appropriate behavior during the rest of circle time. You want your circle activities to set this child up for success during the time he is learning to consistently use more appropriate circle-time behavior.

Be ready to give this child encouragement and attention immediately when he begins using appropriate behavior. Find positive attention that works for this child (a wink, thumbs up, "you're with us") and immediately use it when he uses appropriate behavior (sitting, singing, feet still). This helps the child see that teacher attention is linked to positive behavior. The best teachable moments are when the child is meeting your expectations NOT when he lays on the floor! + SHW

CHILD CARE plus+ is designed to support inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood settings by supporting child care providers, parents, and community service providers including social workers, therapists, physicians, teachers, and administrators.

CHILD CARE plus+ is published quarterly. Subscription price is \$10 per year (four issues). Contents may be reproduced without permission; please include reference.

CHILD CARE plus+: The Center on Inclusion in Early Childhood
The University of Montana Rural Institute, 634 Eddy Avenue
Missoula, MT 59812-6696

1-800-235-4122 (406) 243-6355
www.ccplus.org ccplus@ruralinstitute.umt.edu

EDITORIAL BOARD: Sandra Morris; Susan Harper-Whalen; Karen Martin; Sara Leishman

Child Care plus+

Rural Institute on Disabilities
The University of Montana
634 Eddy Avenue
Missoula, MT 59812-6696

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Missoula, MT
59812
PERMIT NO. 100