

CHILD CARE

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WINTER 1999

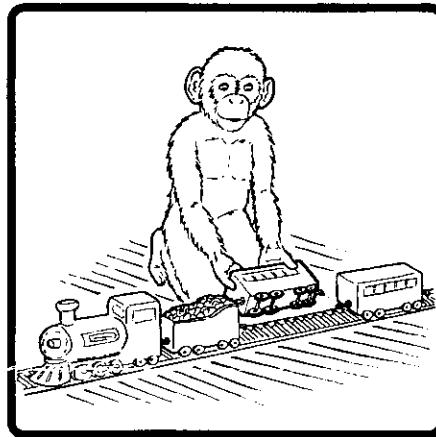
Supporting Inclusion in Early Childhood Settings

Vol. 9, No. 2

+ Helping A Child Get Back On Track

Get back on track is a unique behavior guidance strategy specifically designed for use when a child's behavior disrupts a group activity. Unlike strategies which take time away from group activities, this strategy helps child care providers continue to give the group of children undivided attention. The key to this strategy is you—what you say and what you do as well as what you do NOT say and do. Helping a child get back on track has five vital steps:

1. **Tell the child simply and immediately what you have observed.** When a child's behavior disrupts a group activity, establish eye contact with the child, lean closer, or touch him or her, and in a calm, matter-of-fact voice provide a short statement telling the child the behavior is unacceptable. Do this at the first sign of disruption, before it seriously interferes with other children's participation.
2. **Tell the child to take a break.** Use whatever words the child understands (*take a break, chill out, take some time, get some space, deja*) to let him or her know that you expect a pause in his or her behavior. By telling the child to take a break, you create a distinction between children who have chosen to participate in the group and the child who has chosen not to participate.
3. **Allow the child to take a break.** Once you ask a child to take a break, you must consciously and absolutely focus your attention on the group activity. Be sure to recognize the contributions each child makes. Avoid using any energy on the child whose behavior was disruptive (until he or she chooses to rejoin the activity). The child directs the break. It does not matter what kind of break the child chooses, the length of the break, or even if he or she takes an obvious break. Your brief comment will effectively stop or pause the disruptive behavior so it is unnecessary for you to spend time or energy trying to make a child leave the group.



4. **Look for signs that the child wants to rejoin the activity.** The whole purpose of this strategy is to get the child back on track with the rest of the group.

Immediately accept even the smallest sign that the child is ready to participate. The child may establish eye contact with you, ask to participate, pick up a paint brush, or simply join in the activity.

5. **Welcome the child back to the group.** Instantly acknowledge ANY attempt the child makes to participate or show interest in the group activity. This is perhaps the most important step in getting the child back on track. Just as you told the child in step 1

what was not working, you need to let the child know what is acceptable. Welcome him or her back as quietly and privately as possible, with a thumbs up, a wink, a smile, or whatever way lets him or her know that you notice appropriate behavior as quickly as you notice inappropriate behavior. The more effectively you welcome the child into the group, the more likely it is that he or she will get back on track, and you can maintain the focus of the entire group of children.

Get back on track keeps your attention focused on children who are participating and avoids giving extra attention to any child who engages in inappropriate behavior. It demonstrates to the other children that nothing will interfere with the fun of the group activity and emphasizes appropriate behavior. + SAM

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+ FROM THE SOURCE

When Strategies Differ

When children with disabilities have challenging behaviors, strategies and techniques for helping them make appropriate behavior choices are designed by specialists—with parents' input—and included in the IFSP or IEP. Those techniques may not always fit with the behavior guidance strategies you use to meet the needs of children in your early childhood program.

Stickers, stars, and other reward-based systems, for example, may not work if this is a strategy you are unwilling to use with all of the children in your program. Time-out may not work because it takes your energy away from group activities. Strategies used in the home or in a one-to-one therapy setting may not be effective in a group care situation. It is up to you, as a member of the team, to be sure that all team members understand your approach, the specific strategies you use, and your commitment to a positive approach to guiding behavior.

When you ask for input from a parent, therapist, teacher, or psychologist, let them know that the ideas you generate together must fit into your program philosophy. That means that you may have to tell them, show them, and sometimes prove to them that an approach that teaches children appropriate behavior is more effective over time than one that simply stops a challenging behavior. + SAM

+ MAKING IT WORK

Developing an Action Plan

When children engage in challenging behavior that does not respond to your guidance strategies, you may need to develop an action plan to look at the child, the behavior, and your responses in more detail. The elements of an action plan* include:

- Define the target behavior in detail.
- Talk to parents about your perspective and theirs.
- Get input from other people.
- Define why this behavior is a problem
- Identify what happens BEFORE the behavior occurs.
- Identify what happens AFTER the behavior occurs.
- Pinpoint clues as to why this behavior occurs.
- Describe the strategies you have already tried to a) build a solid foundation for learning, b) structure the environment for success, c) help child learn acceptable behavior, and d) resolve problems when they occur.
- Develop a positive approach to try.
- Identify who is going to implement the approach.
- Evaluate the impact of the approach. Is it working?
- Make changes and modifications when necessary. + SAM

* These elements have been used to develop the Child Care plus+ Behavior Action Plan, available for \$2.00 from Child Care plus+ at the address on page four.

+ NOTES FROM HOME: Teacher's Training Benefits My Child

My Andie Lou is no easy child. She is easily distracted and is just beginning to learn how to behave in groups of children playing together. She had not done well in day care because she frequently played alone and wandered away from group activities. She would start out singing or watching with the rest of the children, but the slightest pause or delay in the activity would send her off track and the other children would be marching around to the music while she stared out the window or drifted to the water table.

All this changed when the preschool teacher, Laie, participated in an early childhood course. After several weeks of implementing what she had learned, I was there observing Andie Lou again during group time. Laie was leading songs, her arms waving to the beat of the music. In the midst of the singing, a little boy pushed his neighbor. Without missing a beat, Laie paused for only a moment, looked him straight in the eye, and in a low voice said his name and something like, "you may not push other children; you need a break." Then she continued singing with the other children, her complete attention on the group activity. The boy stared at the ceiling a bit and then looked at Laie. She gave him a smile and a quick nod, and he was singing again. Andie Lou—and the rest of the children—their eyes on Laie's waving hands and moving body never even knew there had been a disruption! I was so impressed that Laie was able to keep the attention of all of those kids. She didn't even have to interrupt the singing when one little boy got unruly. Which was nice, because I was afraid that if she had stopped the song to talk to him, Andie Lou would run off to another area! +

+ SPOTLIGHT: Most Frequently Asked Questions* About Get Back On Track

Following are some of the most frequently asked questions about successfully using get back on track as a positive behavior guidance strategy.

How do you teach children how to take a break?

You don't. The way in which a child takes a break after you make a clear statement that the behavior is not acceptable is unimportant. That may seem hard to believe, but remember that the goal is to get the child to stop the disruptive behavior and involved in the activity as soon as possible. The benefit of this step is that the child almost always remains with the group during the break. Using this strategy avoids the "power struggle" that may occur when you try to get the child to leave the group, express sorrow for the behavior, or feel guilty for disrupting the activity.

What if the child does not return to the group activity?

If you miss the cue that tells you the child is ready to return to the group, *Get Back on Track* will not work. A child who looks up at you, taps his foot to the beat of the music, or starts singing moments after you have requested that he take a break has told you that he is ready to rejoin the activity. If you ignore this message and wait for a more direct statement from the child or try to "make" the child take a longer break, you may lose the child's attention and willingness to participate. Remember that the child tells you when he or she is ready to rejoin the group. You do not make that decision for the child.

What if the child continues to disrupt the activity?

This is highly possible. Some children are so used to a negative consequence or punishment for their disruptive behavior that they may think they are "getting away with something." If the child again repeats the disruptive behavior (or tries some other way to distract the group), repeat the strategy starting at step one, only this time, you know that you need to really capture the attention of the rest of the group and send a more explicit message that one child cannot spoil the group activity. To do this, put extra energy into the group activity after you tell the child to take a break, and try to make what the group is doing almost irresistible. For example, during circle

time, introduce the children's favorite marching song, bring out the musical instruments, or initiate a favorite and active game. As soon as you see that the child wants to participate, send a clear message of welcome.

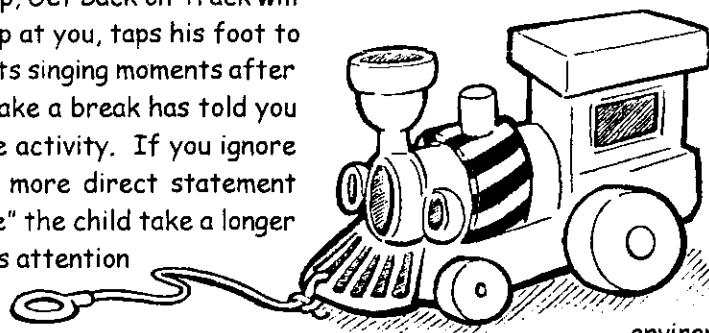
What if the rest of the children become distracted? In most cases, get back on track occurs without any of the children (or other adults) being aware of what is happening. If the persistent disruptive behavior of one child means that you can no longer maintain the group, it may mean that the group activity itself is not appropriate or that it has gone on too long. If children are really interested in what is happening, they are less likely to be distracted by one child's behavior. On the other hand, if the activity is losing some of its magic or has not fully captured the group's attention, it is time to change to a different activity. Children's behavior is the best indicator of whether a group activity is or is not working.

When children are having a difficult time focusing on the activity you had planned, take the initiative and move on to another activity.

Obviously, strategies that build a solid foundation for learning, create an environment that is set up for

success, and provide opportunities for children to learn about guidelines for acceptable behavior are the most effective for preventing a child's behavior from disrupting the group. However, when a group activity is interrupted by a child's behavior, get back on track offers an efficient way to maintain your focus on the entire group. This strategy works because it allows you to focus primarily on positive behavior and deal only briefly with troublesome behavior. The power of this strategy is that it quickly provides an opportunity for the child to get feedback on specific behavior and not miss out on valuable opportunities to participate in—and learn from—group activities. + SAM

*If you have questions or need more information about using this strategy, call Sarah Mulligan at Child Care plus+ 1-800-235-4122.



+ What do I do when . . . ?

QUESTION: What if the child physically leaves the group when I try to get her back on track?

ANSWER: Disruptive behavior is a form of communication some children use to let you know that being in a group is difficult. A child may not have the skills required to participate in a group activity for the same amount of time as other children. Being part of a group is hard work, and spending all day with a group of children may be too difficult for children who have a greater sense of wanting to play alone. It is a good idea to offer alternative activities that allow children to play alone or in a quiet area when they choose not to participate in a group activity.

Disruptive behavior is the way some children tell you that they have different interests from other children or that they are not interested in what you are doing. Requiring children to participate in a group activity that is not interesting to them sets everyone up for failure. The child is unlikely to benefit from the activity, and the other children will very likely be distracted as he or she tries to communicate this discontent.

When you know something about children's individual skills and interests, you can plan activities that intrigue each child. Do not ever direct a child to leave the group. Instead, provide one or two other activities, and let the child choose one of them rather than disrupt the group activity. While this may be easier when other staff is available to supervise this play, when you are the only adult present, you can still plan an alternate activity that takes place in the same room. + SAM

Child Care plus+ staff are available to answer questions, brainstorm, problem-solve, and provide resources and information about guiding behavior in young children.

Call 1-800-235-4122

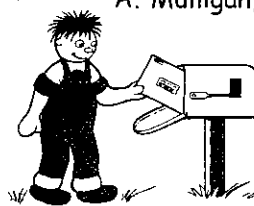
+ RESOURCE REVIEW

If you are searching for new ideas and solutions for challenging behaviors, have a child in your program who has especially difficult behavior, or feel like your skills in guiding behavior need to be expanded, the *Child Care plus+ Course on Behavior*—a five-week self-study course—is for you. Through materials to read, assignments to complete, activities to try, and personal consultation, you can discover new—and build on old—strategies for guiding young children's behavior.

The course costs \$150. Sessions start in March 1999 and continue through August. Course work is completed in your own program in about three hours per week. Montana residents have course fees paid by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services as part of a specialized training grant.

For information, call 1-800-235-4122 or write Sarah

A. Mulligan, *Child Care plus+ Course on Behavior*, MUARID, The University of Montana, 634 Eddy Avenue, Missoula, MT 59812. Academic credit is available for an additional cost.



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.

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