



From the CA Teaching Pyramid



Strategies for Responding to Infant and Toddlers' Challenging Behavior and Supporting Infant and Toddlers' Social Emotional Development

Social Emotional Development Goal

Help Child to:

- Experience, regulate and express emotions
- Form close and secure interpersonal relationships
- Explore the environment and learn

All Strategies for Responding to Infant and Toddler Challenging Behavior Should Meet the Following Criteria:

- Acknowledge distress
- Offer comfort
- Use words to connect with the child
- Be attuned to (or in sync with) the child's individualized needs
- Help the child achieve the understood intention
- Be developmentally appropriate

Sample Strategies:

Systematic Strategies

- Attempt to understand and empathize with the child's experience
- Observe to understand the meaning of the behavior using the Behavior Observation Report
- Track and document frequency, duration, and intensity
- Chart time of day behavior occurs
- Use self-reflection to appropriately respond to behavior
- Share reflections/access thoughts and opinions of others
- Monitor progress of social emotional skill development and reduction in concerning behavior

Strategies to Soothe

- Stay calm
- Stay physically close
- For older toddlers, acknowledge their feelings verbally while physically soothing ("You are crying. I wonder if you are sad? You really wanted to play with that doll.")
- Make soothing noise (e.g. saying, "shhhhhhhhhh, shhhhhhhh"), or arrange white noise (e.g. running a vacuum cleaner, white noise machine, or hair dryer)
- Rock the child: try different ways and stay with what the child seems to respond to (*side to side, back and forth, up and down*)
- Hold, carry, use slings or carriers to keep infant close to one's body
- Outside time, fresh air
- Sing, either familiar songs, or a repetitive tune with the child's name in it
- Encourage sucking (pacifier, fingers)
- Encourage transitional objects of comfort (e.g. *blankets, dolls, stuffed toy, etc.*)

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Modify Environment and Interactions

- Reduce and/or minimize number of infant care teachers
- Make adjustments based on child's temperament (e.g. offer more time for a slow-to-warm up child; offer more physical activity for an active child)
- Make appropriate environmental changes (e.g. reduce stimulation, increase stimulation)
- Deepen the relationship with the child (e.g. for a limited time provide as much one-on-one attention and monitoring as possible, particularly when the child is not upset)
- Provide extra time and attention including touch

Provide Increased Predictability and Consistency

- Create consistency in routines (e.g. diaper the same way in the same place using the same language; read books before nap;)
- Use consistent simple words (e.g. "Food?"; "You want food?"; "Look with your eyes")
- Develop a plan of action/responses and stick to plan
- Tell children what TO do. Set limited clear consistent limits (e.g. "Gentle touch"; "We only bite food or teethers")
- Use simple visual schedules or "First...Then" visuals to support predictability ("What do we do next? After playtime we check diapers. There you are in the picture and I am checking your diaper!")

Model, Coach, Teach Appropriate Behavior

- Teach expectations (e.g. "This is a gentle touch"; "Feel the gentle touch")
- Teach sign language or gestures for common words (Many children can learn gestures before they can consistently use words. Try "more", "help", "want")
- Validate child's feelings and/or experience (use exaggerated facial expression, tone of voice and gestures to mirror the child's emotion)
- Phrase demands in the affirmative ("Bottom on the chair"; "Feet on the floor")
- Notice when child is engaging in desired behavior ("You gave Sam a turn with that toy")
- Acknowledge positive behavior ("That's gentle touching"; "You're so calm now." "You pointed to the toy")
- Suggest labels for the child's and others' emotional experience ("You look sad."; "Tyrus seems angry")
- Use books to illustrate emotions and social skills (e.g. "How Do I Feel?"; "No Biting")

Use Distraction

*NOTE: Distraction is most useful when a child is interested in a toy or activity that is not safe or not available. This technique is **not** to be used to distract from feelings. When a child is upset, that feeling is to be acknowledged and the adult can be physically present and supportive. See **Strategies to Soothe** above.*

- Offer alternate activities ("You really want to touch that light switch. Let's play with this pop-up toy instead.")
- Offer substitute behavior ("You want to bite? You can bite this teething ring")
- Play a favorite game or sing a song (I know you want to go outside. It is too cold. Let's sing Row Your Boat!")