



Center for Early Education and Development

Tip Sheets

Relationship-Based Teaching with Young Children

Challenging Behavior and Children's Mental Health

Early childhood teachers need both a short-term and long-term focus when intervening with children with challenging behaviors. The short-term focus of intervention includes anxiety reduction, classroom modifications, peer coaching, and containing dangerous behaviors. The long-term focus of intervention involves supporting social and emotional development and children's mental health.

Mental health is a state of successful performance of mental function resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity. Mental health is indispensable to personal well being, family and interpersonal relationships, and contribution to community or society. Mental health is the springboard of thinking and communication skills, learning, emotional growth, resilience and self-esteem (Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health, 1999).

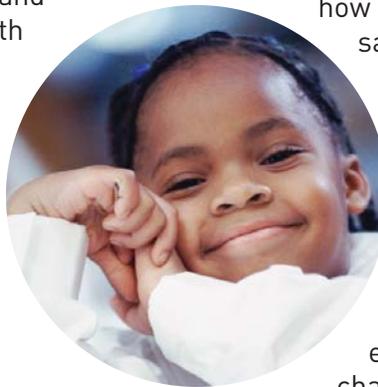
Both the short-term and long-term interventions for children engaging in challenging behaviors recognize the centrality of relationships to classroom dynamics, social/emotional development, and the mental health of the young child.

A very aggressive four-year-old who has been physically abused and witnessed domestic violence joins an early childhood class. If the child and family begin therapy immediately, the family violence ends and the teacher supports social/emotional healing and growth, how long will it take for the child's emotional, behavioral, and mental health issues related to abuse and trauma to be resolved? How long does the teacher have to make her classroom safe?

Addressing the emotional behavior problems of children takes time. Teachers may see little or no change right away. Classrooms need to be safe immediately and remain physically and emotionally safe always!

Teachers and caregivers have an important role.

Children's lives may be difficult, with ongoing stress and trauma. They may return home to a caregiver who is depressed, chemically dependent, violent, mentally ill, or highly stressed. Teachers must understand how to create a physically and emotionally safe classroom quickly so the long-term work of supporting social and emotional development and children's mental health will be successful. Intervention will be successful when it addresses not only the surface behavior but the emotions and beliefs that underlie the behavior. Children experience the classroom through these underlying emotions and beliefs. It takes time to change these underlying elements.



For additional information on this topic, please visit CEED's web site at

<http://cehd.umn.edu/ceed>.

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