

INTRODUCING IT: Behavior Has Meaning



WATCH IT (3:57 minutes)

[Behavior Has Meaning](#) (Head Start, Updated April 2020)

This video is part of a Head Start 15 Minute In-Service Suite. It introduces us to the concept that children use their behavior as communication. Their behavior can let us know how they feel and what they need or want.



READ IT (12 minutes)

[Behavior Has Meaning](#) (Head Start, Updated April 2020)

The companion presentation (you may view it as a Power Point or as a PDF file) looks more deeply at the idea that behavior is a form of communication. The responses we give to children are a big part of what creates a solid foundation for their healthy development!

Extend your learning in TRY IT! through OPRE's overview video on self-regulation and go deeper with the companion tip sheets to this In-service Learning Suite!



KNOW IT

Here are the **important ideas** this resource offers:

- Behavior stretches across three areas, or domains, of development. It shows up in the domains of Approaches to Learning, Social and Emotional Development, and in Language and Literacy.

- Nurturing, responsive, and effective interactions, along with engaging environments, are foundational to supporting children’s development. These will positively impact each of the three developmental domains mentioned here.
- Behavior is communication. Children use behavior to show their wants and needs - even before they can talk.
- Behavior has *form* and *function*. *Form* is the behavior used to communicate – what **is** the behavior? *Function* is the reason or purpose for which the behavior is being used – why **that** particular behavior?
- Behavior takes many forms, such as crying, cooing, reaching, pointing, biting, tantrums, gaze aversion (looking away), smiling, clapping, kicking legs, squealing, jumping, and saying words.
- Children use these forms of behavior to get or seek out something, someone, an interaction, some help, and/or some type of sensory stimulation or information. They also use it to escape or avoid someone or something like an activity, sensory stimulation, or to express an emotion, feeling, or illness.
- A child may use one behavior for many reasons - like crying, for example. The child may use many behaviors to communicate one reason, such as a baby smiling, kicking legs and squealing all at the same time to show delight.
- It’s important to children that we adults understand their behavior. This makes children feel important and valued; they become confident in making themselves understood, and they learn to communicate their feelings, needs, and wants.
- It’s important for us to understand children’s behaviors because this is how we build caring relationships with children. It also helps us to learn to pause *before* reacting to behaviors so that we may respond appropriately. Finally, pausing and recognizing the “why” of a behavior helps us learn what skills children need - and what we can help them to learn.

Here are some **terms** in the resource that may not be familiar to you:

ELOF is the acronym for the Head Start **E**arly **L**earning **O**utcomes **F**ramework: Ages Birth to Five. It presents five broad areas of early learning, referred to as **central domains, or major areas of development**. The framework is designed to show the

continuum of learning for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. The five domains are: Approaches to Learning, Social and Emotional Development, Language and Literacy; Cognition, and Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development.

Self-Regulation is a person's internal mechanism that helps to use behavior that is mindful and deliberate. Self-regulation in children is when they learn to manage their behaviors and emotions in appropriate ways, given the demands of the situation. This set of skills will help children as they grow and mature to direct their own behavior towards a goal, despite the unpredictability of the world and their own feelings.

RECALL IT

Let's see what you learned from this resource! The answers are provided at the end of the guide.

1. **True or false:** Only children use behavior as a way to communicate.
2. **True or false:** Healthy development in children is influenced by the supportive interactions they have with their caregiving adults.
3. **True or false:** Approaches to Learning and Social and Emotional Development are the domains in which behavior shows up.
4. **True or false:** The reason a behavior is used is known as behavior's *form*.

THINK ABOUT IT

Take a few minutes to consider these questions. If you want to, write your thoughts down.

1. Think about one child that has been in your care for a while. What forms of behavior does that child use to communicate with you? How did you learn what the child means when he or she uses those behaviors?

2. Was there anything in the video and the presentation that was new or surprising to you? If so, what was it? How does this new information change your thinking about a child's behavior?

TRY IT!

Here are some ideas to try:

1. Is self-regulation a new concept for you? Watch this very [short video](#) (1:41) from the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation that provides an overview on self-regulation.
2. Babies and young children need our help - and our good example - when it comes to expressing feelings and interacting with others in appropriate ways. By doing this, we are giving children important life skills and supporting young children's social and emotional development.
 - With all ages of children, use your words to name their feeling or emotion, even if they are too young to speak.
"You have a wet diaper – that doesn't feel good."
"It's hard to come inside when you are having so much fun."
"It's OK to feel sad – you miss Mommy."
 - Offer your support through physical actions. You can hug them, rub their back, hold them, gaze into their eyes and smile. Help them to become calm by offering your calm.
 - Show children different ways to recognize their feelings and find their calm. For example, you can teach them to take deep breaths, or, have a "take-a-break" corner they can retreat to when they are feeling upset or overwhelmed by big feelings.
3. Head Start developed companion tip sheets to help you go deeper. Take a look at Handouts 1 – 4 to discover additional ideas and practices you can try!

RECALL IT! Answers: 1. F 2. T 3. F 4. T