

Washington State Training & Registry System (STARS)

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**Study Guide & Workbook for:
STARS 10 Hour Course
Behavior Strategies**

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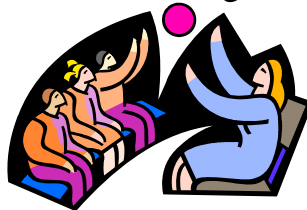
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Behavior Strategies

Throughout this workbook we have put together some basic strategies for changing the behavior of the children that you work with. Before you jump into a new plan or system please step back for a moment and objectively look at the behavior. Ask yourself a few questions:

- Is what you asking the child to do age appropriate?
- Does this child have any learning disabilities that he/she is masking with behavior?
- Is your classroom arrangement encouraging this behavior?
- Is your classroom management style encouraging this behavior?

Once you have gone through each of the above questions and have decided that it is the behavior, not the situation, the environment, or external factors that need to be “fixed”, you can learn strategies to help.



Simple Behavior Strategies:

What can I do to change a child's behavior?

Children tend to continue a behavior when it is rewarded and stop a behavior when it is ignored. Consistency in your reaction to a behavior is important because rewarding and punishing the same behavior at different times confuses the child. When the child's behavior is a problem, you have 3 choices:

- Decide that the behavior is not a problem because it's appropriate to the child's age and stage of development.
- Attempt to stop the behavior, either by ignoring it or by punishing it.
- Introduce a new behavior that you prefer and reinforce it by rewarding the child.



How do I use the time-out method?

Decide ahead of time the behaviors that will result in a time-out -- usually tantrums, or aggressive or dangerous behavior. Choose a time-out place that is uninteresting for the child and not frightening, such as a chair, corner or playpen.

When the unacceptable behavior occurs, tell the child the behavior is unacceptable and give a warning that you will put him or her in time-out if the behavior doesn't stop. Remain calm and don't look angry. If your child goes on misbehaving, calmly take him or her to the time-out area.

If possible, keep track of how long the child's been in time-out. Set a timer so the child will know when time-out is over. Time-out should be brief -- generally 1 minute for each year of age (and never before age 2) -- and should begin immediately after reaching the time-out place or after the child calms down. You should stay within sight or earshot of the child, but don't talk to him or her. If the child leaves the time-out area, gently return him or her to the area and consider resetting the timer. When the time-out is over, let the child leave the time-out place. Don't discuss the bad behavior, but look for ways to reward and reinforce good behavior later on.

How do I encourage a new, desired behavior?

One way to encourage good behavior is to use a reward system. This works best in children over 2 years of age. It can take up to 2 months to work. Being patient and keeping a diary of behavior can be helpful to care givers.

Choose 1 to 2 behaviors you would like to change (such as pushing or picking up toys). Choose a reward the child would enjoy. Examples of good rewards are being the helper for the day, first in line, a preferred snack or, for older children, earning points toward a special toy, or a.

Explain the desired behavior and the reward to the child. Request the behavior only one time. If the child does what you ask, give the reward. You can help the child if necessary but don't get too involved. Because any attention from care givers, even negative attention, is so rewarding to children, they may prefer to have attention instead of a reward at first. Transition statements, such as, "In 5 minutes, play time will be over," are helpful when you are teaching your child new behaviors.

This system helps you avoid power struggles with your child. However, the child is not punished if he or she chooses not to behave as you ask; he or she simply does not get the reward.

Developing Quiet Time (often useful when you're making lunch)

- Ask the child to play quietly alone or with others for a short time (maybe 30 minutes). Check on the children frequently (every 2 to 5 minutes, depending on the child's age) and give a reward or a token for each few minutes they were quiet or playing well. Gradually increase the intervals (go from checking the child's behavior every 2 to 5 minutes to checking every 30 minutes), but continue to give rewards for each time period this child was quiet or played well.



How can I change a child's problem behaviors?

- If there are lots of behaviors you want to change, start by focusing on one or two of the most bothersome or dangerous ones. Don't try to make too many changes all at once.
- Let the child make some decisions by giving them acceptable choices.
- Use natural and logical consequences for problem behavior. The purpose here is to get kids to make the right decision, not to bend them to your will. Be patient-it may take time for you to see results.
- Be firm and kind. Follow through on the natural and logical consequences.

- Have a few positively stated rules, and explain the reasons behind them.
- Make sure the child understands the results of breaking the rules.
- Praise the child for good behavior. Catch the child being good, and tell them you noticed.
- Redirect the child and help them find a better place, or safer way to do what they are trying to do.
- Remove the child from the cause of the problem behavior, or remove the cause of the problem from the child (for example by child proofing your house or classroom).



PROMOTE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR

Both parents and caregivers who use positive reinforcement find it a "self-fulfilling prophecy." Children become what we expect of them. Be very specific about the compliments and praise you give. This lets the child know exactly what behavior, actions, and words you liked. For example, "I really like the cooperation I saw between June, Steve, and Suzy in cleaning up the dress-ups." Or, "I really appreciate how well you listened to the directions for this activity. It helped things to run smoothly." Or, "I noticed how helpful you were to Terrence today outdoors. I know he appreciates that, and I do too." The child is then more likely to repeat the positive behavior.

Caregivers can build a child's self-esteem in many other small ways. Share hugs, smiles, and kisses. Tell a child s/he is important to you. Praise a child within the earshot of others. Give a child your undivided attention. For those children who seem to get your attention for their misbehavior only, try shifting the focus of your attention. Try writing down a list of the things you like or appreciate about that child. Give that child at least as much attention for his or her positive behavior as for misbehavior.

EXPECT CHILDREN TO OBEY

Be very clear about rules and expectations. Give children an option unless there is a question of personal safety or health, when there is destruction or aggression involved, or when, you as the adult, decide the situation calls for prompt action. Demonstrate your confidence by using short, clear, positive statements. Use a tone that says you expect compliance.

MAINTAIN FAIRNESS AND CONSISTENCY

Deal with challenges in a matter-of-fact, calm manner. Consider the child's age and "normal" behavior for this age range. Learn about developmental stages of children and their accompanying physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs. For example, it is unrealistic to expect a child who is 18-months-old to do much sharing, since toddlers, by their nature, are very self-centered.

Communicate rules and their consequences in words that children understand. When a child breaks a rule, follow through with a fair, appropriate, and meaningful consequence right away. When you are fair and consistent in your response to misbehavior, the child's sense of security and knowledge of right from wrong will be reinforced.

ALLOW THE EXPRESSION OF FEELINGS

Allowing a child to express his or her feelings does not mean allowing such inappropriate expressions as hitting or hurting others. Sometimes, providing quiet time along with a favorite toy or blanket will help a child to relax and calm down. Some children express anger, resentment, and frustration by pounding with a hammer on a pegboard, punching an old pillow, kicking a soccer ball in the backyard, creating a picture, or using self-talk with their stuffed animals. Offer to take a walk with the child or to read a story together. These activities may help diffuse strong feelings of anger or frustration. It is important to provide a range of acceptable avenues for children to release these very strong, yet natural emotions.

THINK AND PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

Look past today's difficult moments. Remember that your goal is for the child to achieve self-discipline. When problems do arise, step back from the scene if you can. Count to ten, or do whatever helps you maintain your composure and your perspective. Keep in mind the example you set through your own behavior. The way in which adults treat children and each other in your program serves as a model for children. For example, the use of phrases like, "Thank you," "Please," or "Can I help you?" should be a part of everyone's routine behavior.

Guiding children's behavior is a major commitment from caregivers. Progress may seem slow at times. Regression and setbacks are likely to occur. Through it all, keep your sense of humor, and remind yourself of your successes and of the important role you play in caring for children.

10 methods to change behavior:

- praise
- selective ignoring
- time-out
- consequences
- motivators
- reminders
- negotiation
- withdrawing privileges
- humor



Temper Tantrums and Childhood

Strong emotions are hard for a young child to hold inside. When children feel frustrated, angry, or disappointed, they often express themselves by crying, screaming, or stomping up and down. As a care giver, you may feel angry, or helpless. Temper tantrums are a normal part of a child's development as he learns self-control. In fact, almost all children have tantrums between the ages of 1 and 3. You've heard them called "the terrible twos." The good news is that by age 4, temper tantrums usually stop.

The young child is busy learning many things about her world. She is eager to take control. She wants to be independent and may try to do more than her skills will allow. She wants to make her own choices and often may not cope well with not getting her way. She is even less able to cope when she is tired, hungry, frustrated, or frightened. Controlling her temper may be one of the most difficult lessons to learn.

Temper tantrums are a way for the child to let off steam when she is upset. Following are some of the reasons a child may have a temper tantrum:

- The child may not fully understand what you are saying or asking, and may get confused.
- The child may become upset when others cannot understand what she is saying.
- The child may not have the words to describe her feelings and needs. After 3 years of age, most children can express their feelings, so temper tantrums taper off. Children who are not able to express their feelings very well with words are more likely to continue to have tantrums.
- The child has not yet learned to solve problems on her own and gets discouraged easily.
- The child may have an illness or other physical problem that keeps her from expressing how she feels.
- The child may be hungry, but may not recognize it.

- The child may be tired or not getting enough sleep.
- The child may be anxious or uncomfortable.
- The child may be reacting to stress or changes at home.
- The child may be jealous of a friend or sibling. Children often want what other children have or the attention they receive.
- The child may not yet be able to do the things she can imagine, such as walking or running, climbing down stairs or from furniture, drawing things, or making toys work.

Preventing temper tantrums

You should not be surprised if a child has tantrums only in front of his/her parent. This is one way of testing the rules and limits. Many children will not act out their feelings around others and are more cautious with strangers. Children feel safer showing their feelings to the people they trust.

Knowing this, you will still not be able to prevent all tantrums, but the following suggestions may help reduce the chances of a tantrum:

Encourage the child to use words to tell you how he is feeling, such as "I'm really mad." Try to understand how he is feeling and suggest words he can use to describe his feelings.

Set reasonable limits and don't expect the child to be perfect. Give simple reasons for the rules you set, and don't change the rules.

Keep a daily routine as much as possible, so the child knows what to expect.

Avoid situations that will frustrate the child, such as playing with children or toys that are too advanced for this child's abilities.

Avoid long outings or lessons where the child has to sit still or cannot play for long periods of time.

Be prepared with healthy snacks when the child gets hungry.

Make sure the child is well rested, especially before a busy day or stressful activity. Ask the parents to help out here, and be sure they get their sleep.

Distract the child from activities likely to lead to a tantrum. Suggest different activities. If possible, being silly, playful, or making a joke can help ease a tense situation. Sometimes, something as simple as changing locations can prevent a tantrum. For example, if you are indoors, try taking the child outside to distract his attention.

Be choosy about saying "no." When you say no to every demand or request the child makes, it will frustrate him. Listen carefully to requests. When a request is not too unreasonable or inconvenient, consider saying yes. When the child's safety is involved, do not change your decision because of a tantrum.

Let the child choose whenever possible. For example, if the child resists coming inside after play, make it clear that he will be coming in, but offer a simple decision he can make on his own. Instead of saying, "Do you want to come inside?" Try saying, "It's time to come inside. Would you like to walk upstairs or have me carry you?"

Set a good example. Avoid arguing or yelling in front of the child.

Managing temper tantrums

As a care giver, you can sometimes tell when tantrums are coming. The child may seem moody, cranky, or difficult. He may start to whine and whimper. It may seem as if nothing will make him happy. Finally, he may start to cry, kick, scream, fall to the ground, or hold his breath. Other times, a tantrum may come on suddenly for no obvious reason. When the child has a temper tantrum, the suggestions below can help you both get through it successfully:

1. Distract the child by calling his attention to something else, such as a new activity, book, or toy. Sometimes just touching or stroking a child will calm him. You may need to gently restrain or hold the child. Interrupt his behavior with a light comment like, "Did you see what the kitty is doing?" or "I think I heard the doorbell." Humor or something as simple as a funny face can also help.
2. Try to remain calm. If you shout or become angry, it is likely to make things worse. Remember, the more attention you give this behavior, the more likely it is to happen again.
3. Minor displays of anger such as crying, screaming, or kicking can usually be ignored. Stand nearby or hold the child without talking

until he calms down. This shows your support. If you cannot stay calm, leave the room.

4. Some temper tantrums cannot be ignored. The following behaviors should not be ignored and are *not* acceptable:
 - Hitting or kicking care givers or other children
 - Throwing things in a dangerous way
 - Prolonged screaming or yelling

Use a cooling-off period or a "time-out" to remove the child from the source of his anger. Take the child away from the situation and hold him or give him some time alone to calm down and regain control. For children old enough to understand, a good rule of thumb for a time-out is 1 minute of time for every year of your child's age. (For example, a 4-year old would get a 4-minute time-out.) But even 15 seconds will work. If you cannot stay calm, leave the room. Wait a minute or two, or until his crying stops, before returning. Then help him get interested in something else. If the child is old enough, talk about what happened and discuss other ways to deal with it next time.

You should never punish the child for temper tantrums. He may start to keep his anger or frustration inside, which can be unhealthy. Your response to tantrums should be calm and understanding. As the child grows, he will learn to deal with his strong emotions. Remember, it is normal for children to test the rules and limits.

As tempting as it can be, do not reward the child for stopping a tantrum. Rewards may teach the child that a temper tantrum will help her get her way. When tantrums do not accomplish anything for the child, they are less likely to continue.

Children should have fewer temper tantrums by the middle of his/her fourth year. Between tantrums, his behavior should seem normal and healthy. Children will grow and learn at his/her own pace. It may take time for him to learn how to control his temper. When the outbursts are severe or happen too often, they may be an early sign of emotional problems. Talk to Parent if your child causes harm to himself or others during tantrums, holds his breath and faints, or if the tantrums get worse after age 4.

It is important to realize that temper tantrums are a normal part of growing up. Tantrums are not easy to deal with, and they can be a little scary for you

and the children in your care. Using a loving, understanding and consistent approach will help the child through this part of his development



Biters: Why They Do It and What To Do About It

Although biting isn't "abnormal" in the sense that one out of ten toddlers and two-year-olds does it, it is a disturbing and potentially harmful behavior that parents and educators must discourage from the very first episode. If a child bites, remain calm and think about what the child experienced just before the incident. Understanding why young children bite can help you deter this aggressive behavior and teach them positive ways to handle their feelings.

Young children may bite for different reasons, and not all will respond to the same types of intervention. Identifying the kind of biter you're dealing with will help you develop an appropriate discipline technique.

1. **The experimental biter.** An infant or young child may take an experimental bite out of a mother's breast or a caregiver's shoulder. When this occurs, adults should use prompt, clear signals to communicate that children must not bite people. "No," said sharply, would be an appropriate response.

These experimental biters may simply want to touch, smell and taste other people in order to learn more about their world. Their muscles are developing, and they need to experiment. Provide them with a variety of surfaces to play on and a colorful selection of toys to stimulate children during this stage of exploration.

This type of biter may also be motivated by teething pain. Offer children appropriate things to chew on for relief: frozen bagels, very cold, large carrots, teething biscuits, or a safe teething ring.

2. **The frustrated biter.** Some biters lack the skills to cope with situations such as the desire for an adult's attention or another child's

toy. Even though the child may not have intended to harm another person, adults must react with disapproval. First, tend to the victim immediately. Then explain to the biter that biting hurts others and is not allowed -- the caregiver's job is to keep all children safe.

You may help frustrated biters by teaching them appropriate language to show their feelings or get what they need. Give positive reinforcement when children communicate effectively. Also, watch for signs of rising frustration. Spotting potential conflict may help you intercept a potentially harmful incident.

3. **The threatened biter.** Some children, feeling they are endangered, bite in self-defense. They may be overwhelmed by their surroundings, and bite as a means of regaining control. In this case, use the intervention techniques already mentioned, and assure the child that his rights and possessions are safe.

Children may become threatened by situations such as newly separated parents, the death of a grandparent, or a mother returning to the work force. The threatened biter may require additional nurturing, particularly if the danger is along the lines of physical violence at home or in the immediate neighborhood. In any case, the bond between child and caregiver should be as warm and reassuring as possible.

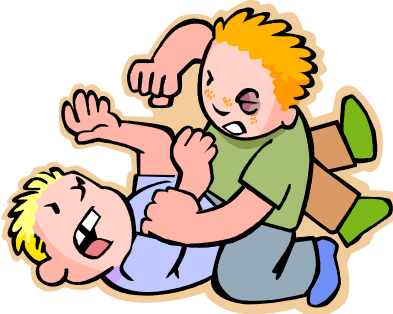
4. **The power biter.** Some children experience a strong need for autonomy and control. As soon as they see the response they get from biting, the behavior is strongly reinforced. Give the biter choices throughout the day and reinforce positive social behavior (like sharing and saying thanks). If the biter gets attention when she is not biting, she will not have to resort to aggressive behavior to feel a sense of personal power.

Never hit or "bite back" a child for biting. This communicates that violence is an appropriate way to handle emotion. The approach should be calm and educational. A child should not experience any reward for biting -- not even the "reward" of negative attention.

Parents and caregivers must cooperate to prevent children from biting. If children are permitted to demonstrate such behavior at home, there will be no chance of eliminating it in the center, program, or family child care

home. Working as a team, educators and parents may identify possible reasons for a child's biting and respond accordingly. While early childhood professionals may be more familiar with positive discipline techniques, parents are experts on their own children's behavior.

Take the time to look for patterns in the biter's environment and emotional state at each episode. Does the child always bite the same individual? Is the biter simply exhausted, or hungry? Be ready to intervene immediately, but carefully. Teaching children age-appropriate ways to control themselves encourages the development of confidence and self-esteem. We can guide children towards self-control and away from biting. The key is understanding -- for adults and children alike.



Violence & Violent Behavior

Children as young as preschoolers can show violent behavior. Parents and other adults who witness the behavior may be concerned, however, they often hope that the young child will "grow out of it." Violent behavior in a child at any age always needs to be taken seriously. It should not be quickly dismissed as "just a phase they're going through!"

Range of Violent Behavior

Violent behavior in children and adolescents can include a wide range of behaviors: explosive temper tantrums, physical aggression, fighting, threats or attempts to hurt others (including homicidal thoughts), use of weapons, cruelty toward animals, fire setting, intentional destruction of property and vandalism.

Factors Which Increase Risk of Violent Behavior

Numerous research studies have concluded that a complex interaction or

combination of factors leads to an increased risk of violent behavior in children and adolescents. These factors include:

- Previous aggressive or violent behavior
- Being the victim of physical abuse and/or sexual abuse
- Exposure to violence in the home and/or community
- Genetic (family heredity) factors
- Exposure to violence in media (TV, movies, etc.)
- Presence of firearms in home
- Combination of stressful family socioeconomic factors (poverty, severe deprivation, marital breakup, single parenting, unemployment, loss of support from extended family)
- Brain damage from head injury

What are the "warning signs" for violent behavior in children?

Children who have several risk factors and show the following behaviors should be carefully evaluated:

- Intense anger
- Frequent loss of temper or blow-ups
- Extreme irritability
- Extreme impulsiveness
- Becoming easily frustrated

What can be done if a child shows violent behavior?

Whenever a parent or other adult is concerned, they should immediately arrange for a comprehensive evaluation by a qualified mental health professional. Early treatment by a professional can often help. The goals of treatment typically focus on helping the child to: learn how to control his/her anger; express anger and frustrations in appropriate ways; be responsible for his/her actions; and accept consequences. In addition, family conflicts, school problems, and community issues must be addressed.

Can anything prevent violent behavior in children?

Research studies have shown that much violent behavior can be decreased or even prevented if the above risk factors are significantly reduced or eliminated. Most importantly, efforts should be directed at dramatically decreasing the exposure of children and adolescents to violence in the home, community, and through the media. Clearly, violence leads to violence.

In addition, the following strategies can lessen or prevent violent behavior:

- Prevention of child abuse (use of programs such as parent training, family support programs, etc.)
- Sex education and parenting programs for adolescents
- Early intervention programs for violent youngsters
- Monitoring child's viewing of violence on TV/videos/movies

One of the best ways to teach the child nonviolence is to control your own temper. If you express your anger in quiet, peaceful ways, he probably will follow your example. If you must punish him, do not feel guilty about it and certainly don't apologize. If he senses your mixed feelings, he may convince himself that he was in the right all along and you are the "bad" one. While punishing the child is never pleasant, it is a necessary part of growing up and there is no reason to feel guilty about it. The child needs to understand when he is in the wrong so that he will take responsibility for his actions and be willing to accept the consequences.