

Tips for Better Communication and Behavior Management

Some children and youth may have behavioral and/or communication challenges.



General Tips

- Focus on the child's strengths and what is working instead of on what is "wrong".
- Modify an activity to include the child; don't require the child to fit into what is being offered.
- Review the child's Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individual Education Program (IEP) to determine whether the child has any documented needs.
- Ask other members of the child's team about strategies for effective behavior management and/or communication in a classroom or program setting.
- Find out if the child's behavior poses any safety concerns, such as a risk of wandering off.
- Prepare the resources the child needs to communicate effectively (for example, visual aids, technology).

Tips for Behavior Management

- Clearly explain and post rules and expectations before an activity begins. Use pictures and words to explain.
- Allow the child to come up with their own solution to a problem. For example, if the child disrupts a game that is hard for them to play, ask the child how they would change the rules to make it easier.
- Provide choices. For example, if it is time to put away equipment and the child refuses to help, give the child a choice of clean-up tasks.

- Direct the child who needs a break to an individual activity. For example, give the child a few minutes to spend in a quiet, comfortable corner of the room close to the activity area before returning to the group activity.

Tips for Effective Communication

- Offer clear instructions. Say things like "Follow directions" and "Take turns." Do not assume a child will know to complete a step unless you tell them to.
- Allow wait time for the child to process instructions. For example, pause for at least 5 to 7 seconds before restating an instruction or giving a new one.
- Avoid using jargon or slang. Children can be very concrete in their interpretation of language. For example, if an instructor says "look up", during a game, a child may look up to the sky instead of in front of them.
- Do not ask the child if they want to do something when there is no real choice. For example, Instead of, "Do you want to do your warm-ups?" say "It's time for warm-ups."
- Give positive directions rather than negative directions. Say "Please walk." rather than "Don't run."

Learn more at ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/social-emotional-development/