

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
- Be attuned to (or in sync with) the child's individualized needs
- Help the child achieve the understood intention
- Be developmentally appropriate

Example Strategies:

Systematic strategies

- Observe to understand the meaning of the behavior
- 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
- Attempt to understand and empathize with the child's experience
- Monitor progress of social emotional skill development and concerning behavior reduction

Strategies to soothe

- Shush (e.g. saying, "shhhhhhhhhh, shhhhhhhh"), white noise (e.g. running a vacuum cleaner, white noise machine, or hair dryer)
- Rock
- Hold, carry, use slings or carriers to keep child close to one's body
- Hold baby on side or stomach
- Outside time, fresh air
- Sing
- Encourage sucking (pacifier, fingers)
- Swaddle
- Encourage transitional objects of comfort (e.g. blankets, dolls, stuffed toy, etc.)
- Stay calm
- Stay physically close

Modify Environment and Interactions

- Reduce and/or minimize number of caregivers
- Make adjustments based on child's temperament (e.g. offer more time for a slow-to-warm up child; offer more physical activity for a active child)
- Make appropriate environmental changes (e.g. reduce stimulation, increase stimulation)
- Shadow child (e.g. for a limited time provide as much one-on-one attention and monitoring as possible)
- Provide extra time and attention including touch

Provide increased predictability and consistency

- Stick to consistent 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
- Set limited clear consistent limits (e.g. "No biting"; "gentle touch")

Model, coach, teach appropriate behavior (e.g. "This is a gentle touch"; "Feel the gentle touch")

- Teach sign language or gesture for common words
- 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")
- Recognize positive behavior ("That's nice touching"; "You're so calm now." "You pointed to the toy")
- Label child's and others' emotional experience ("You look sad."; "Tyrus looks so angry")
- Use books to illustrate emotions and social skills (e.g. Hands are Not for Hitting; Teeth Are Not for Biting; etc.)

Use distraction ("Let's play with this toy instead")

- Offer substitute behavior ("you can bite this apple" "you can bite this teething ring";)