

77 - Managing Behaviors in the Classroom

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Purpose: The purpose of the transcripts is to provide readers and listeners with a written version of each episode of the UAGC Center for Early Childhood Education's Early Childhood Chatter Podcast so they can follow along with the audio content. www.uagc.edu/ece-center/chatter-podcast

Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Host Dr. Shipley: Hello everyone and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Heald. We will upload a new episode every other week on Wednesdays.

Host Dr. Heald: Twice a month, we come to you with a 10-minute professional development that you can quickly listen to for new ideas to use today. Don't forget to subscribe to this podcast to get notifications about future episodes.

Today we are so excited to have Norda Lewis with us. Norda has a master's degree in education with a concentration in special education and a graduate certificate in autism.

She is a licensed behavior specialist in Pennsylvania and serves on the board of directors for the Victim Services Center of Montgomery County. She is the director at the Innovation and Exploration STEM Early Learning Center. Norda, we are so excited to talk to you today, and I lived in Doylestown, so I am envisioning the fall weather and sights up near you.

Thank you for being here.

Norda Lewis: Thank you so much for having me. Yes, Norda, we're so excited to talk to you, especially about behaviors in the classroom today and to hear your thoughts and ideas, because we know that behavior management is one of the hardest and toughest things for new and even veteran teachers, right?

Norda Lewis: Yes.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: So, my question to you is, what, where do we start? If we're a new teacher, if we're a veteran teacher, we're having some issues, where do we start with our behavior management plan?

Norda Lewis: Well, behaviors, well, behaviors is really common in the classroom. It's sometimes it affects the child who's presenting the behavior, also the other children and the teachers, and it's always a struggle. But you want to start off with identifying the behavior itself, and some of the common behaviors that we see in the classrooms are hitting, tantrums, noncompliance, throwing toys, kicking, pinching, biting, eloping, and these behaviors can be, as I said before, they can be very disruptive in the classroom.

Before you start, too, I want to help, I want everybody to understand that having an attitude, being lazy or being disrespectful, they are not behaviors. So, when you want to identify these behaviors, you have to make sure that they're observable and they're measurable. And that gives you the opportunity to collect reliable data once you're measurable.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: In the early childhood classroom, we often do a lot of observation as our system of assessment, and I really like the fact that you said, that identifying a child or labeling a child as lazy or disrespectful is not something we want to do. We want to go back to the factual statement of, you know, did not participate in an activity or did not, you know, go to the group when everybody else did. So, I really appreciate the fact that you kept it to what we can observe and measure.

If we are seeing these behaviors, what do educators need to do to, I guess, is the first step in correcting them?

Norda Lewis: Well, the first thing we want to do is to identify why the behavior is happening. What is the function of the behavior? And there are four functions of a behavior. So, it's important to recognize them.

One, the functions are escape, attention, and a lot of times, we'll see this is more common, access to preferred activity, and sometimes sensory. But when you think about sensory, we always think about kids with special needs. And I want to talk, I want to further help everyone to understand these terms.

So, I'm going to give some examples of these behaviors, their functions, and also some interventions that they can use when they're identifying these behaviors and how to help children in the classroom. So, for example, I'm going to give an example first. So, little Johnny yells because he doesn't want to engage in non-preferred activity.

So, for this behavior, the behavior is yell, and the function of the behavior is to escape because Johnny wants to escape you so he can engage in what he wants to do. So, a good intervention for that is setting a timer or lessening the demand. A timer works really well for kids, for everyone, because it also sets expectations for them, and they love the idea of counting down.

But it really helps. Another example would be whenever the teacher is working with another child in the classroom, little Johnny looks at her and yells. So, the behavior, again, is yell, but this is a different function.

So, Johnny is trying to get the teacher's attention. So, the function of this behavior is for attention. So, a good intervention that you can use is to plan to ignore, and that works really well, just ignoring them.

Because if you give in, then you're reinforcing the behavior. Now, giving the attention becomes a reinforcer for the behavior. So, the third one I'm going to focus on is to get access to preferred activity.

And I'm going to give an example. Johnny kicks his friends whenever it's time to engage in circle time. So, that's a non-preferred activity for Johnny.

So, Johnny wants to play in a center. So, the function of this behavior is to gain access to a preferred activity. So, an intervention that teachers can use is using a behavior chart or a schedule.

You can use a visual schedule. They see what's going to happen next. And it's also like setting expectations for them.

So, it's important to use those visual schedules. And the final one is sensory. And sensory, as I mentioned before, a lot of times you'll see this with kids with special needs.

So, it's important to make sure that they're not over-stimulating. So, their behavior could be because it's too loud or maybe they need some sensory. They're touching something and it's too much for them.

So, it's important to make sure that they're not sensory overload. So, a good intervention for that is giving them sensory breaks. And that really helps them.

It helps to get that sensory stimulation in.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: So, I guess I have a question for you too. I'm sorry.

I don't want to butt in. So, after a teacher finds these behaviors, I know timeout is a lot of the research is talking about timeout and how timeouts not used anymore. And pulling cards aren't used anymore.

What do you do in your center? What did you do with your students after you found out what the behavior was to manage it? How did you redirect that behavior?

Norda Lewis: So, as I mentioned, some of the interventions that you can use, it all depends on the function of the behavior. And yes, we don't use timeout anymore. We redirect.

We redirect students. But to manage a behavior, before you can manage it, you have to find out what the function is. And the visual schedule, the behavior charts, using a reinforcer, redirecting the children and also helping them to understand choices and consequences.

And also, their emotions. You want to put that in there, like how the other child is feeling. And then you teach them what is good choices and what is poor choices.

But you have to set those expectations for them. And also, as you find out the function, it makes it so much easier to find the right intervention for them.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Norda, this is such a great conversation for our educators.

But it's also a great conversation for our parents, because there are times where we just don't understand where the behavior is coming from. So, can you speak to a little bit about how we can bridge the gap between having our educators and our families work together for the benefit of a child?

Norda Lewis: And before I go into that, I want to mention that the triggers is something that we want to look for. Because before we find out the function, we want to also know what the triggers are.

And triggers could be, it could be anything from the child didn't get any sleep, or the child did not have enough breakfast. So, we want to look at the triggers. And to answer your question, it's really important for educators to collect the right data.

Because this gives parents an idea of what's happening. Because I know, like from based on my experience, just telling a parent that, you know, your child hit someone today, that's not enough information for them.

And it's important to collect the right data for them. And an easy way to do that is to use the ABC chart. Because when we're in the classroom, we're so busy.

And the ABC chart is so easy to use. It focuses on the antecedent behavior and consequences. And the consequence.

So, this is simply used to help identify and correct. This is simply used to identify and record information. So, what happened before the behavior happened? What is the behavior? And what happened after? So, this is a great way to communicate with parents and work together on the behavior.

Because they see the facts. They see more concrete information. So, it's important for teachers to use that so they can communicate with parents.

And help them so they can work together as a partner and help in the behavior.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Right. Okay.

This is just all such great information. Because, again, sometimes we struggle with these kinds of things. And there's so many other things going on in the classroom at the same time.

So, as we wrap up, what are three takeaways that you want our listeners to really remember from your session that can help them move forward with managing behaviors?

Norda Lewis: So, three takeaways. I want to talk a little bit about teach, prevent, and reinforce. So, it's important that you teach desired behavior.

You prevent situations that cause negative behaviors. And you also want to set appropriate expectations for kids. You want to reinforce behavior.

If you're using a reinforcer, give the reinforcer immediately after the desired behavior. And if you're going to use a reward chart. Also, it has to work well.

So, it's important to teach, prevent, and reinforce behavior. This will really help you in the classroom. And also, try and use those ABC charts.

Because that's the best way you're going to collect the right information so you can share with parents. And also, so you can work together for the best interest of the children.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: I love that.

I think that we have so many takeaways that we can start to really utilize best practices to increase these desired behaviors that we're looking to get. Norda, can you give our listeners one challenge that they can take forward into their environments?

Norda Lewis: Yes. I want to challenge the listeners to really start.

And again, start using those ABC charts in the classroom. It really gives you a better understanding of the behavior. And also, it aligns.

It helps you to understand how to teach, to prevent, and reinforce. Because that's what it basically is showing you once you collect those information.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Yeah.

I'm challenging everyone to start using it. You can find it online. You can create it yourself.

It's easy to create. Just start using them.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: I love that.

Because when we're in the moment, we might not have the skills or the practices in that moment to get what we are trying to promote with the child, which is that desired behavior. So that is just a great starting point for us. Norda, thank you so much for taking the time with us today.

Listeners, we'll see you again in two weeks.

Norda Lewis: Thank you so much for having me.