

# Supporting Children Who Take Us to the Ends of Your Rope....

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Every Child is Looking for What  
There Good At

# Chris Is His Name

Chris is his name and Pushing is his game.  
You can catch him Pushing in the Sun and Rain.  
He is Pushing high, and Pushing low  
He is Pushing, Pushing, wherever he goes.  
So if you want some Pushing, and you don't  
know what to do.  
Just go ask Chris and he'll help you.

A bully believes that

“If you can’t be the  
best, I’ll be the  
worst”



# When Faced with Challenging Behaviors Adults often:

- Perceive the behavior as deliberate noncompliance
- Attempt to “control”
- Neglect to address the needs of the child
- Engage in power struggles

# What Challenging Behaviors bother YOU the most?

1

2

3

4

5

# Most Common Challenging Behaviors Reported by Teachers

- Biting
- Hitting or pinching
- Throwing objects
- Swearing
- Name calling
- Tattling
- Whining
- Refusing to share
- Disrupting circle time
- Running
- Throwing tantrums
- Non-participation

# What Are the Major Causes of Challenging Behaviors?

# Unclear Messages

**Saying What  
We Mean....**

# Most Common Unclear Messages:

- “use your inside voice”
- “use your walking feet”
- “be nice to your friends”
- “use kinder words”
- “in five more minutes, it will be time to clean up”

If the message is unclear to children, they will interpret it anyway they wish.

The interpretation maybe completely different than the message sent....

Too  
Many  
Rules



Rules should be set up  
as “Guardrails”

Setting up the  
environment so  
that children are  
guided with  
choices.

# Guardrails need to be:

- Simple
- Have consistent follow through
- Pertain to the child's stage of understanding
- Must be enforceable
- Individual not group

When we have group  
rules, egocentric  
children believe you are  
not talking to them.

Ex. “boys and girls no  
running”

# Rules that are often broken:

- “No running”
- “No hitting”
- “No taking toys from someone else”
- “No loud voices”

Why are we always asking  
children to use their “inside  
voices?”

It's not  
natural....

## Rules:

You may be under the spell from:

- Your family rules
- Your neighborhood rules
- Your school rules
- Your religion rules

What Are the Rules you had  
in your  
Childhood?

# To Follow Rules the following skills are needed:

- Skill 1 - sensitivity to the viewpoints of others
- Skill 2 - ability for mutual understanding
- Skill 3 - willingness to delay gratification
- Skill 4 - high degree of cooperation

Hughes (1991)



Children often cannot distinguish  
between right and wrong until  
their Frontal Lobe has fully  
developed.

# Frontal Lobe Statements:

- “Make a better choice”
- “How would you like it if someone hit you?”
- “You don’t want to hurt your friends do you?”
- “Use your words, not your hands”

Expectations  
that cause  
Failure:

# What Causes Failure?

- Competition
- Standing in lines
- Waiting my turn
- Asking children to share
- Expecting them to act like a little adult

# Failure:

When a child is placed in failure experiences  
he/she will do anything to avoid it.

Even if that means getting hurt or hurting.

Failure adds so much stress to the brain.

Leo Toupin

“I can’t be a good  
looser, until I have  
lots of experiences  
feeling successful”

Clare Cherry

# Attention

*You can never  
get enough....*

# I get lots of Attention when I

- I scream
- I run
- I hit
- I throw tantrums
- I smile when I have done something you don't like
- I say “make me, you are not my mom”
- I make enemies
- I make “all hell break loose”



Avoid  
Saying:  
“Use your  
words”

“I don’t have them yet”...

Sharing means...I understand  
that somebody else has the  
same needs as me.

I DON'T THINK SO!

# Choosing Friends

- If you are next to me, you are my friend.
- If you give me what I want, you are my friend.

# Developmental Issues vs. Moral Issues

# Typical Developmental Behaviors of Young Children

- Picking their nose
- Pushing/shoving
- Not listening
- Taking toys

Keep the strategy that you use  
with children at their  
developmental level.

Avoid a strategy that uses a  
moral implication. Their brains are  
not set up to receive it yet.

**You Assume I CARE!**

Adults must learn  
to be less  
egocentric than  
the child.

Bev Bos



# “I Bring What I Got”

- Rules?
- Values?
- Relationships?
- Communication patterns?
- Manners?
- Behavior patterns?

# What children bring to your environment

Might be different  
then what you  
bring.....

# Stages of Social Play

## Parten

- Solitary Play
- Parallel Play
- Onlooker Play
- Associative Play
- Cooperative Play

We must plan experiences  
that fit all stages of social  
play

Not all children are  
“ready” for a group  
experience.

Social skills for some  
children take a long  
time...Placing them in a  
group doesn't mean  
they will become part of  
it....

# Are there other options?

- One on One
- Small clusters
- Less distractions
- “Caves”

# Strategies for Success:

# Look at Transitions

These times are very difficult for  
the challenging child.....



Change is difficult for many  
children, but especially this  
child.....

# Transitions:

- Limit the number of times all children have to transition between one activity and another
- Minimize wait time
- Warn children in advance
- Avoid lines
- Provide children with something to do during transition times

# Avoid

- Frequent changes in the environment
- Parties
- Field Trips
- Staff Changes

# Avoid Activities that are not Relevant to Children

When they are bored they will create their own experiences. Some of which are not what teachers want.

What is not relevant to  
young children?

# STOP The CALENDAR

No reason to know the month, date  
and year, unless they are going to  
meetings.

Colors,  
Could I make it through LIFE without  
knowing my colors?

I think so

Shapes,  
what shapes are relevant to me?



Numbers:

What number is the only relevant  
number to me?

Manners:  
I only learn them through  
modeling....

If information is not relevant it will  
be pruned from the brain within  
five minutes....

Ken Horn

Teachers have been  
reported to spend 71% of  
the day teaching  
information that is not  
relevant.

David Elkind

# Most strategies for children will be forgotten within five minutes:

- “walk, walk”
- “flush the toilet”
- “stop your running, you will get hurt”

# Practices that fit what we know about children

- They like to run
- They sometimes like to use an “outside voice”
- They don’t share well
- They like to be physical

# Share Soothing Skills:

- Massage
- Sucking
- Music
- Rocking
- Water
- Others?

A Child who is in Distress, often  
doesn't recognize the feelings of  
others....

They will need  
“coaching”



# What is the Challenging Child Communicating to You?

- “You are asking me to do something that is too difficult?”
- “I cannot cope with being a part of the group right now?”
- “I want that toy, but don’t know how to ask for it?”
- “I’m bored, are you paying attention?”
- “I’m not comfortable sitting here so long?”
- “I cannot believe that you are asking me to share you with the other children?”

# Focus always on what you want them to do:

- NOT TO DO
  - “stop hitting your friends, they don’t like it when you do that”
  - “we don’t take toys away from others”
  - “what is the magic word?”
  - “stop running, you might fall and get hurt”
  - “it isn’t nice to call are friends names”
- DO

Adults actually need to think about *how* they are using their power over children. They actually need to think about if the way they're using power is causing children to flourish or to shrivel up inside.

# What “Real” Choices do children have?

- Do I have to come to circle time?
- Do I have to sit down to eat?
- Do I have to pick up toys by myself?
- Do I have to always do what you tell me?

Look at how much time during  
the day is child-choice

Vs.  
Adult Choice?

Children who wish to  
attain POWER are  
looking for you, to  
push your buttons....

Choose not to let that happen.

# What is Roughhousing?

- Voluntary
- Invited too
- Very Active
- Often non-verbal
- Includes others

# Roughhousing:

- Red Rover, Red Rover
- London Bridge
- Motor Boat
- Billy Goat Gruff
- Boxes for Kicking
- Capes
- Tug of War
- Arm Wrestling



*Remember that  
Roughhousing is  
not World Wide  
Wrestling...*

# Why Do Children Play Superhero Play?

- *Opportunities to Dominate*
- *Gives them opportunity to problem solve*
- *Demonstrate Physical Strength*
- *Speed*
- *Superhuman Traits*
- *Get to use Different Vocabulary*

There is no evidence that banning  
super hero play is useful or effective,  
and can simply cause children to  
hide this form of play from adults.

Dr. Sheila Degotardi

*Gun Play*  
*is POWER PLAY*  
*not Violence*

*Avoid statements like, “Guns are dangerous”, “Guns hurt people”*

**Instead**

*“looks like you are having fun, tell me what you are doing?” “You are using a pretend gun, to have fun”*

Exposure to violence  
on TV, etc. is more  
important to take on  
then “Gun Play”

***“Did you ask, if he wants to play  
dead?”***

***“Did you ask if he/she wants to play  
that game?”***

*Children play at what concerns and worries them. They play at what causes them anxiety.*

*Quite understandably most children will be anxious about the idea of particular types of gun-users in their world and consequently need to play at keeping safe and solving the problems that gun-use throws up.” ~ Diane*

*Rich*



*If you don't want superhero or  
gun play*

*What will you replace it with that is  
just as powerful?*

# Allow Risk Taking

- Non Risks

“Only build as high as your eyes”

“Go up the ladder and down the slide”

“Be careful”

“You can hurt someone”

- Risk

“Wow, look how high it is getting”

“Go up the slide and down the ladder”

“Hang on with both hands”

“Stand back everyone”

# Ask Yourself:

- Is it an unmet need?
- Is it a lack of skill?
- Is it a lack of fit?

# Jack and Carl

Jacob and Carl were pretending to “chain saw” tables, chairs, easels and children’s arms. They were running around the room making “chain saw” like noises. The teacher goes up to them and says, “boys you need to choose another game”. Jacob and Carl ran away and started to “chain saw” Sarah’s neck. Sarah yelled, “get out of here”. The boys laughed and said, “we are going to kill you with our “chain saw”. Sara screamed, “teacher they are trying to kill me”. The boys ran away and hid under the table.

**Always focus on the child that  
has the problem,**

Not the child who is causing the  
problem....

# Why Punishment Fails?

- It makes children mad
- It models the use of power
- It eventually loses its effectiveness
- It erodes our relationship with children
- It distracts children from the important issues
- It makes children more self-centered

Remember on Monday, you will  
only have control of yourself....

What Changes Will You Make?

# Climate of Trust:

- Somebody is listening to me
- Somebody is encouraging me
- Somebody accepts my uniqueness



When Children Leave your  
Program,

What Memories will  
they have?

# Further Readings:

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- Cherry, C. ***Please Don't Sit on the Kids***
- Chairk, J. ***Time In: When Time Out Doesn't Work***
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- Letts, N. ***Creating a Caring Environment***
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- Rice, J. A. ***The Kindness Curriculum***
- Smith, C. A. ***The Peaceful Classroom***