

LISTENING GUIDE FOR CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR IN PRESCHOOLERS: PREVENTION IS THE BEST INTERVENTION

It can be frustrating when a child shows challenging behavior. But moments like these are teaching opportunities to help a child learn what to do in that situation.

On days when we see lots of challenging behavior, it's good to take a step back and look at several factors that can be adjusted to promote more positive behavior in your time together.

SCHEDULE

- The **sequence** of activities in your time with the group. In general, keeping the same sequence of activities from week to week helps children know what to expect. When they know what to expect, that helps them know and learn how to act.
- Try to have a **balance** by alternating activities: active/quiet, large group/small group, child-led/teacher-led.
- Be flexible: Don't get stuck on getting through all the things you were expecting to accomplish during your time together.
- Use and display a visual schedule—use it for transitions, for children who need to see when different activities happen.
You can download a free packet from LifeWay to help you create a visual schedule at:
<https://s7d9.scene7.com/is/content/LifeWayChristianResources/preschool20160323pdf.pdf>
- Story time: 5 minutes for age 3; 10 minutes for age 4. Simplify language to meet the needs of your group. Make sure it's not all listening: relate something in the story to something the children are familiar with and let them talk about that; have things to look at, touch, feel, smell that relate to the story.
- Extend the learning time through play activities that reinforce themes/events/people in the story.

PROCEDURES

- Teach the steps for activities that you often do as a group: clean up, story time, wash hands, line up, etc.
- Use visuals so that the child can follow the steps on their own once they've been taught.
- Re-teach the steps when needed.

TRANSITIONS

- Make sure there aren't too many
- Calculate transition times and make sure you allow time for these in your schedule
- Signal when a transition is coming up to allow the child time to mentally prepare for it; no one likes to suddenly "drop what they're doing" and quickly move on to something else
- Plan simple/quick activities to help guide behavior when waiting

ENVIRONMENT

- **Organization of furniture and materials:**
 - Are centers set up with sufficient materials to encourage different types of play?
 - Are there open spaces that seem to invite running in the classroom?
 - Is the space crowded? Can you easily get to children in different areas of the room?
 - Are there enough/too many/not enough toys and materials that can be related to story themes?
- **Overstimulation:**
 - Does the energy level of a number of children in the group “run on high”? You may need to adjust how many visuals are on the wall, if the lights are too bright, if the room is too loud.
 - Make sure to have a quiet space where children can go that’s calming—some will seek this out on their own; others will need to be guided to it and taught how to self-calm.

CLASSROOM RULES

- Keep them simple. Only have a few that can be used in a variety of situations.
- For example: “Be safe. Be kind. Take care of our things.”
- Refer to these and expand them when responding to a particular situation. For example: “Be safe. Keep your bottom on your chair when sitting.”

ATTENTION-GETTERS

- Avoid shouting—use other means of getting the children’s attention quickly and easily.
- Example: “Hands on Top” (teacher puts hands on head); (children respond by putting hands on head and saying:) “Everybody stop!”
- Practice this skill with the group—make it fun! Point out children who followed the direction and say specifically what they did well (“Evan, you did a good job of getting your hands on top right when you heard me!”)

SIMPLIFY DIRECTIONS

- Keep your sentences short!
- Only give 1 step at a time for age 3.
- Give 1-2 steps for age 4.
- If needed, ask a child to repeat the direction(s).

FINAL NOTE

In all that you do with the children, know that the tone of your voice is a great tool. A calm, matter-of-fact voice helps calm the child. A tone of voice on edge makes the group more on edge. Intonation with lots of variation can create interest. A “goofy voice” can lighten the mood.