

Using a Structured Behavior Plan

Teachers often do not have time to organize an entire behavior modification plan for their classroom. “Star Charts” are not especially effective in changing children’s classroom behavior. Instead, develop a plan that supports children and helps you build relationships.

Let the parents know that you are making a plan to help their child develop new skills and plan to include them in the process. Share the plan you develop, ask for their input and keep them informed about how things are going. Remember, young children cannot benefit from discipline that happens long after the problem behavior occurred so parents cannot effectively discipline their child at pick-up time. **The best thing parents can do is to have a loving, low stress and supportive home environment.**

- Choose one behavior you would like to see change. For example, if you are most concerned about a child’s aggression toward others, choose that behavior.
- Let the child know you are going to help them learn how to get along better with their friends. Tell them you will help them by reminding them every half hour about getting along without hitting friends.
- For every half hour they remember to use their hands for playing, not for hitting, you will give them a token (Poker chip, star). When they earn 3 tokens, they may choose from a list of rewards they design.
- The rewards list must have things that are relationship building and cannot include food or toy treats. Here are some examples of relationship building rewards: a game with the teacher and friend of choice, a special job, a visit to the director’s office or another classroom, choose a book at circle time, have increased outside time with a small group. You and the child develop the reward list together.
- Never take a token away. If the child hits, let the child know you can’t give them a token now but you can later when they remember the rule. Do try to have the child experience success. If you notice the child in a situation that sometimes ends in his aggressive behavior, give the child a token before any negative behavior occurs and thank the child for remembering the no hitting rule. Young children will not pay attention to the half hour limit. Use your judgment about timing to make sure children are successful and get rewards.
- After three tokens, allow the child to choose from their reward list. Rewards lists must be changed every week to be effective.
- Remember to work on some of the problems that underlie the child’s behavior. For example, if the child has poor social skills, be sure to spend time playing with the child and helping him play with others.
- If other children question the reward plan, let them know you are helping their friend remember the “no hitting” rule. Tell them you would be glad to help them if they need some special help.

- Keep observation records so you can have an objective measure of the frequency of the child's behavior. Are the number of aggressive incidents decreasing? Hopefully, the combination of this plan with attention to teaching better social skills will have a positive impact.
- Consistency and follow through is very important for the success of the plan. Before you implement a plan, make sure all teachers are in agreement and understand the plan.

Try the behavior plan for several weeks. If you do not see a change in the child's behavior or an increase in their ability to play and get along with peers, then it is time to ask for consultation. If the child's behavior improves, you can let the child know that they have learned the rule and you are proud of them. You can end the formal behavior plan; however, it is a good idea to continue checking in with the child and rewarding them from time to time because of learning the rule.

When beginning a referral conversation with families about your observations:

- Set up a quiet time to meet away from the classroom.
- Come prepared with past observation sheets, child of concern check lists, and behavior plans.
- Ask the parents for their observations and feelings about how things are progressing. Incorporate their suggestions into your recommendations. Make sure the family understands your concern and that you are offering to be a "partner" with them.
- Set a definite time to meet again.
- Be prepared. Find local resources that might be available to serve the family. Your Mental Health Consultant can help by suggesting resources and connecting the family to those resources.

Choosing a Referral Pathway

Many referrals can be made directly to the appropriate health care provider. You may want to call ahead to the referral agency or provider to find out their appointment procedure. You can then provide the family with the necessary forms or information in preparation for their visit. Some parents may feel more comfortable consulting the child's health care provider directly, who can then provide information and referrals.

Referrals can generally be made directly to:

- A child's health care provider for concerns about a child's general health, developmental level, or behavioral concerns.
- A speech and hearing center or audiologist for language and speech concerns.
- A mental health provider or clinic for behavior and social-emotional concerns.
- Early Intervention or Child Find for academic or developmental concerns.
- Often problems overlap and the best referral is the one most trusted by parents.