

TIP SHEET

De-escalating Challenging Behaviors



Working with young children, especially those exhibiting challenging behaviors, requires patience, empathy, and effective strategies for de-escalation. Here are some tips to help manage and de-escalate challenging behaviors.

Stay Calm and Maintain Composure

- Keep your own emotions in check and remain calm, even when faced with challenging behaviors.
- Children can pick up on your emotions, so staying calm can help prevent the situation from escalating further.
- When appropriate, get on the child's level to foster a safe environment.

Use Positive Reinforcement

- Acknowledge and praise positive behaviors promptly and specifically.
- Reinforce desired behaviors with positive attention and encouragement.

Provide Clear and Simple Instructions

- Keep instructions clear, simple, and age-appropriate.
- Break down tasks into smaller steps to make them more manageable and accessible for young children.

Redirect Attention

- Redirect the child's focus to a different activity or area if they are becoming agitated or upset.
- Offer alternative activities that are engaging and appealing to the child.

Offer Choices

- Provide the child with choices whenever possible to give them a sense of control.
- For example, offer choices between two activities or two toys to play with.

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Use Visual Support

- Utilize visual supports such as picture schedules or visual timers, chimes to help children understand routines and transitions.
- Visual supports can be especially helpful for children who have difficulty with verbal communication.

Validate Feelings

- Acknowledge and validate the child's feelings, even if you cannot meet their immediate request.
- Use phrases like, "I understand that you're feeling frustrated," to help the child feel heard and understood. This also helps to support them labeling their own feelings.

Provide a Safe Space

- Create a calm and safe environment where children can take a break if they need to.
- Designate a quiet corner or area with soft cushions or calming sensory items where children can go to regulate their emotions.

Use Proximity and Physical Contact

- Use your presence to provide comfort and support to the child.
- Sometimes a gentle touch or sitting close by can help a child feel secure and calm.

Seek Support from Supervisors or Professionals

- If a situation escalates or you feel unable to manage it effectively, don't hesitate to seek support from supervisors or professionals.
- Collaborate with other staff members to develop strategies for addressing challenging behaviors and supporting the child's development.

By implementing these strategies consistently and compassionately, volunteers can help create a supportive environment where young children can learn to regulate their emotions and behavior effectively. Thank you for your dedication to supporting the well-being and development of young learners.