

# Discipline Strategies for Managing Challenging Behavior for Children Aged 3-8



**The following methods are consistently recommended in child development literature as appropriate disciplinary strategies for young children.**

**1. Setting Limits** *Setting limits helps children feel calm and safe and let them know what is expected of them. Attributes of successful limit setting include:*

- Reducing limits to only the most important things.
- Identifying one limit at a time. Keeping directions short and clear.
- Phrasing limits politely and respectfully.
- Giving warnings and reminders.
- Using “when” and “then” as reminders rather than threatening children. (When you throw gravel on the playground, then you must sit down.) This helps children learn that actions are tied to consequences.
- Following through with praise or consequences as soon as possible.

**2. Ignoring** *Some nondangerous behaviors that do not interfere with the activities of others can be ignored (pouting, whining, always having hand raised, asking absurd requests or questions). Attending to some undesirable behavior means you will constantly be intruding on classroom activities; you will also be rewarding a child who is exhibiting negative behavior with attention. Some guidelines to follow when ignoring a child are:*

- Choose which behaviors you can ignore.
- Avoid eye contact or dialogue with the child.
- Move away from the area of the room where the child is, if possible.
- Distract the child by engaging him or her in another task.
- Praise positive behavior when the child self-regulates to stop the annoying behavior.

**3. Using Time-Out** *Not all early childhood professionals agree that time-out is effective or good for children. Professionals who do include time-out as a recommended strategy, cite these guidelines for its use:*

- Choose a location in the room where a child can go to get under control and calm down.
- Discuss with your peers, and decide on, for which behaviors you will use time-out.
- Be selective in the use of time-out, or it loses its meaning.
- Forewarn all children about what time-out means and for what behaviors it will be used.
- Demonstrate to the children where they go for time-out and what to do there.
- When the child is calm, go to the time-out chair. Talk about why he or she was sent, how long the time-out is (several minutes), and how they must behave when they return to the group.
- For children who test the limits and won't remain in time-out, accompany time-out with the loss of a classroom or playground privilege.

**4. Taking Away a Privilege** *Discuss with your peers what privileges are fair to take away from young children for misbehavior (serving as line leader, eating with others during snack or lunch, playing with a favorite toy). It is not recommended that children be deprived of instruction in any subject including physical education, art, and music.*

**5. Relying on Natural and Logical Consequences** *Often discipline relies on the natural or logical consequences of a child's behavior. "If you throw paint while you are at the art center, you must leave the center and do something else" is an example of a natural consequence. If a child does not carry a permission slip home carefully, he or she will lose it and may miss going on the field trip as a natural consequence. Climbing up the slide the wrong way and getting knocked backward by a child sliding down is a logical consequence. Discipline should be related to the act if possible. Even having to say "I'm sorry" is a consequence of hurting someone's feelings.*

**6. Seeking Assistance** *When challenging behaviors become extreme and seem developmentally inappropriate, dangerous to the child or others, frequent, or intense, it is time for a teacher to seek help. Turn to the family, teaching peers, and school professionals to develop a plan for observation and behavior management. Think about who in your professional setting is available to help with a child who is frequently out of control.*

### **Next Steps:**

- 1. Form** a teacher support group to meet on a regular basis or communicate on-line to collectively discuss and recommend strategies that work for young children who present challenging behavior.
- 2. Ask** the director or principal of the school to form a discipline committee to look at the problems children are having and to recommend a plan that will be consistently implemented through out the school or child-care center.
- 3. Choose** classroom or schoolwide strategies that can be used to recognize students who demonstrate positive social skills. One example is to start a Kindness Trail that extends down the hallways or around the walls of individual classrooms. As children are observed doing some kind act, the teacher writes the name of the child, the date, and a short description of the act on a cutout of a large footprint. Each footprint is taped to the wall to become a class or school Kindness Trail publicly acknowledging positive behavior.
- 4. Ask** for time to observe peers who are effective in establishing a positive, effective climate that minimizes disruptive, aggressive behavior.
- 5. Ask** for a peer to observe you and offer constructive suggestions for how you can improve classroom management or an effective climate to minimize disciplinary intrusions.