

Share with staff these strategies to address challenging classroom behavior with fairness and consistency. Two essentials for dealing with chronic problem behavior are to remain calm and pick your battles.

Key points:

- Be consistent, calm when addressing behavioral challenges
- Have variety of strategies in ‘toolbox’ for responding to problematic behaviors
- Modify learning environment to support positive behavior

Develop ‘toolbox’ of strategies to address student behavior

One of the best ways to connect with children who have emotional or behavioral issues is to create a classroom environment where they know they’re accepted, says Kathleen Garen, head teacher at the Bernice M. Wright Child Development Lab School at Syracuse University.

Let children know they’re valued members of the class community and that it’s the problematic behavior that’s unacceptable, not them, Garen says.

“A teacher who is loving, but firm, communicates a positive message to the child,” Garen says. “As the adult, [the teacher is] there to provide support to the child as he develops the skills to manage behaviors that are not OK.”

To interact successfully with children with challenging behaviors, advise your staff to be consistent, remain calm, and cultivate a “toolbox” of strategies for addressing problematic behaviors. Also, suggest modifying the learning environment to support positive behavior. And remind teachers not to forget to take care of themselves.

Share the following strategies:

- **Be consistent when addressing behavioral issues:** Some behaviors, such as a child harming himself or another child, should be reacted to the same way every time: Address the behavior and redirect the child to a positive activity, Garen says.

For example, if a child pushes a peer out of the way as she tries to move to the front of the line for the slide, explain to the child that it’s someone else’s turn. If she pushes again, redirect her to another activity.

“This should happen every time pushing on the slide occurs until the behavior no longer exists,” Garen says.

“This is part of consistency,” adds Catherine Barmore, a faculty member at Walden University’s College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Through consistency, “the children in the classroom can expect kindness, fairness, and foremost, the maintenance of safety in the classroom.”

- **Remain calm:** This shows children that you’re in control and they’re safe, Barmore says.

Show calmness by maintaining attention to the task at hand, fairly addressing the behavior, and not giving children negative attention, Barmore says.

“This means, no yelling, no raising your voice, no speeding up your speech, and no condescending or frustrated tone of voice,” Barmore says. “Yelling does not demonstrate that a teacher is in control. It demonstrates that you are out of control and the rest of the children lose their sense of security.”