

- **Have a plan to address behavior and know there's no one answer:** Have a “toolbox” of strategies for approaching problematic behaviors, Garen says.

“If you suddenly find yourself faced with a child destroying the classroom in a fit of rage, what are some of the strategies you could apply?” Garen asks. Think these strategies out ahead of time and collaborate with other adults in your classroom to help plan ahead, she advises.

Think about techniques or responses that have worked for you in the past, and ask colleagues what works for them, Barmore advises. You might find that what works well for another teacher just doesn't work for you. You'll also likely discover that every technique or response doesn't work with every child, she adds.

Keep a notebook handy to jot down things you try that work, techniques that colleagues mention to you, or approaches that you've read about, Barmore says. “When you have moments of frustration and feel like nothing is working, refer back to your notes for ideas,” she says.

- **Act, don't react:** If a child is being disruptive during group time, have available a basket of toys, such as a squeeze ball or tangle toy, to hand him, Garen advises.

“You can continue to speak to the entire group and interact with everyone as you offer the child something to engage him,” she says. “The child [exhibiting disruptive behavior] is still part of the group. You are not drawing attention to the negative behavior but rather offering a more appropriate way for the child to stay engaged while meeting his need.”

- **Pick your battles:** When you see a challenging behavior, stop and ask yourself: “Is this a big problem or a little problem?” Garen advises.

“You will have more credibility with a child if you are not confronting her about every little thing that happens,” she says.

Save the discipline for the big problems that occur and let go of the little things, she adds.

- **Modify the learning environment to support positive behavior:** Closely study your classroom environment, focusing on factors with an impact on behavior, such as lighting, smells, and sounds, Garen says.

“Does the noise or activity level in the classroom seem to be elevated? Do you find yourself constantly reminding the children: ‘No running?’” she asks.

Determine how you can create a place in the classroom where children can climb or jump so they use their large motor skills in a positive way.

- **Take care of yourself:** Children can't learn when their basic needs aren't met and it's the same for teachers, Garen says. “When you come to work tired or stressed out, you are not functioning at your best,” she says.

Know that it's all right to ask for help or “tag team” with another adult in the classroom, Garen says. Sometimes switching adults helps to diffuse a tense situation.

Also, try to be patient with yourself throughout the school year and put challenging classroom behaviors into perspective, Barmore advises.

Garen and Barmore presented on this topic in the workshop, *What's a Teacher to Do? Working With Children of All Ages Who Have Emotional/Behavioral Issues That Interfere With Classroom Learning*, at the National Association for the Education of Young Children's annual conference.