

Policy Number: MH 005	Title: Responding to Challenging Behaviors
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Responding To Challenging Behaviors

McPherson/Marion County Head Start (MMCHS) uses an intentional planning process to address challenging behaviors, both internalizing and externalizing. This process is used only when there is documentation that the child is not responding to the typical ways of assisting young children to achieve positive social-emotional skills and social competence and the issues are not a result of the classroom environment. The development of a General Education Intervention (GEI) is a partnership between Head Start staff, the parents, the Disability/Mental Health (D/MH) Coordinator, Mental Health Consultant, and other specialists who are involved with the child and family. The GEI is tailored to the unique needs, characteristics, and skills of the child. The goal is to implement specific strategies and supports to assist the child in learning the skills needed to appropriately respond in situations where the challenging behaviors typically occur.

Procedure:

1. Define the behavior. It is critical that the behavior be described using objective and observable terms and in a way that it can be understood by everyone, including those who do not know the child. If there are several behaviors of concern, each needs to be described and rated as distracting, disruptive or dangerous. If there are multiple behaviors of concern, one or two need to be identified at this step for the focus of the observations and plan.

2. Document the strategies that have been used by the classroom staff to respond to the behaviors and the impact. This includes both strategies to manage the behavior and strategies to teach appropriate behaviors for responding in the situation.

3. Gather information about the behaviors, the child's strengths and other data that would be helpful such as

Focused Incident Observation and Antecedent Behavior Consequences data (ABC). This is a description of the child at the times and in the situations where the challenging behavior occurs. This needs to cover all settings where the challenging behavior occurs and over a period of several days.

Child's strengths. This is a description of the specific strengths, social skills, and abilities of the child. This needs to come from multiple sources, including samples of the child's work and activities, anecdotal records, Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA), DIAL, Creative Curriculum checklist, and any other assessments. This needs to be input from classroom staff and parents.

Other data that would be useful in developing the plan. This can be information concerning documented disabilities, health issues, mental health issues, etc.

4. Partnership with parents. Getting the parent's insights on the behavior should be happening as the staff gather information described above. Communication with the family begins prior to the beginning of the development of the GIP. At this point we are reviewing with the family the successes and challenges we have had with the child. It is an opportunity to obtain the parent's input about the

challenging behavior and invites them to be active participants in helping their children become successful in the classroom. This is the opportunity for us to develop a partnership with the parents with the goal of helping their child be successful. The following are some questions that can be used to guide the conversation.

1. Does this behavior occur at home?
2. What do you do when the behavior occurs?
3. Have there been recent stresses in their life or in the child's life?
4. Have there been recent changes in routine?
5. What do they do to encourage positive behavior?
6. What specific recommendations would they have for the classroom staff?

5. Summarize in information classroom staff will summarize the information about the identified behavior in the classroom.

6. Establish the GIP team The team should include the child's parents, classroom staff, D/MH Coordinator, possibly the Family Advocate or Education Coordinator. The team will begin by summarizing and analyzing the information needed to develop the GIP.

7. Develop a GEI. After collecting and summarizing the information from all the sources, the classroom staff, parents, D/MH Coordinator, and the Mental Health Consultant, if involved, will get together to analyze the information. Using this information a GEI will be written that responds to the child's unique characteristics, needs and skills. The plan will describe the planned changes to reduce the use of the challenging behavior and what specific strategies the adults will use to assist the child to learn appropriate behaviors to replace the challenging behavior. The plan will describe the specific social skills to be addressed and how they will be taught to the child. The plan will specify how information will be gathered about the child's progress and how communication with the parents will take place.

8. Implement strategies. Continued observation of the incidents of the challenging behavior needs to continue while the GIP is implemented.

9. Evaluate effectiveness. After allowing time for the child to begin responding to the classroom staff, parents, D/MH Coordinator, and Mental Health Consultant will meet to review the plan, discuss progress, determine the effectiveness of strategies, and make changes, as needed. The evaluation should focus on two questions.

1. Have incidents of the child using the challenging behavior decreased?
2. Has the child replaced the challenging behavior with an appropriate substitute?

10. In some circumstances there may be need for a direct intervention if children lose control and potentially harm themselves or others:

1. Acknowledge the child's feelings.
2. Use natural and logical consequences.
3. Direct child away from the activity or event to allow them time to calm down.
4. Discuss what happened.
5. Problem solve with the child about how to handle the situation differently.
6. Assist the child to re-enter play.