

# Responding to Challenging Behaviors

## Policy:

Umatilla Morrow Head Start, Inc. 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 achieve positive social-emotional skills and social competence and the issues are not a result of the classroom environment. The development of an Individualized Prosocial Guidance Plan is a partnership between Head Start staff, the parents, and other specialists who are involved with the child and family and the Plan 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. If there are several behaviors of concern, the Child & Family Services Manager and the Mental Health Manager who works with the classroom needs to be involved in identifying the behaviors that will be targeted.
2. **Document the strategies** that have been used by classroom staff to respond to the behaviors and their impact. This includes both strategies to manage the behavior (e.g., redirection, etc.) 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 useful.
  1. Focused **Incident Observations.** This is a description of the child at the times and in the situations where the challenging behavior occurs. Incident observations need to cover all settings where the challenging behavior occurs and over a several day period. The *Behavior Concerns Observation Summary* form can be used to record these incident observations.
  2. **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, but not limited to, samples of the child's work and activities, anecdotal records, ASQ-SE, Portage, DECA P2 and any other assessments or screenings. This needs to be input from classroom staff, parents, and others that know the child.

3. **Other data** that would be useful in developing the plan. This can be information concerning documented disabilities, health issues, mental health issues, etc. This data can come from multiple sources, including but not limited to, samples of the child's work and activities, anecdotal records, Portage, health screenings, behavioral assessments and any other assessments and screenings.
4. **Partnership with parents.** Getting the parent's insights on the behavior should be occurring as we gather the information described above. Communication with the family begins prior to the beginning of the development of the Individualized Positive Guidance Plan. 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 child 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 may be used to guide the conversation.
  4. Does this behavior occur at home?
  5. What do you do when the behavior occurs?
  6. Have there been recent stresses in their life or in the child's life?
  7. Have there been recent changes in routine?
  8. What do they do to encourage positive behavior?
  9. What specific recommendations would they have for the teacher?
5. **Summarize the information** Classroom staff, in conjunction with the Child & Family Services Manager, will summarize the information about the identified behavior in the classroom. The *Assessment Checklist* can be used to summarize the information about the identified behavior.
6. **Establish Prosocial Guidance Team.** At a minimum the team should include the child's parents, classroom staff, Child & Family Services Manager, and Mental Health Professional. This team will begin by summarizing and analyzing the information needed to develop the Individualized Prosocial Guidance Plan for the child. The *Assessment Summary and Analysis* form can be used for summarizing the available information.
7. **Develop an Individualized Prosocial Guidance Plan.** After collecting and summarizing the information from all the sources, Head Start staff, parents, and others involved get together to analyze the information. Using this information an *Individualized Prosocial Guidance Plan* will be tailored 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 a means for communication with the parents.

8. **Implement Strategies.** Continued observation of the incidents of the challenging behavior needs to continue while the Individualized Prosocial Guidance Plan is implemented.
9. **Evaluate Effectiveness.** After allowing time for the child to begin responding Head Start staff and parents need to review the plan, discuss progress, determine the effectiveness of strategies, and make changes, as needed. The evaluation should focus on two questions.
  10. Have incidents of the child using the challenging behavior decreased?
  11. Has the child replaced the challenging behavior with an appropriate substitute?