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Table of Contents

Introduction

The early childhood years are full of new experiences, expectations, and opportunities to develop developmentally appropriate relationships.

Early childhood educators play a significant role in supporting the development of self-regulation skills with intentional instruction, support, and scaffolding.

Prekindergarten children are learning how to express their emotions, interact with others, and calm themselves. Helping children learn to manage their behavior, while still expressing their emotions and getting their needs met, is one of the more formidable responsibilities of early educators.

Most young children do not enter prekindergarten knowing what is expected of them and early educators may not be aware of their cultural and behavioral expectations at home. But each child brings his or her own set of culturally based scripts, skills, talents, and values into the classroom.
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Before We Begin...
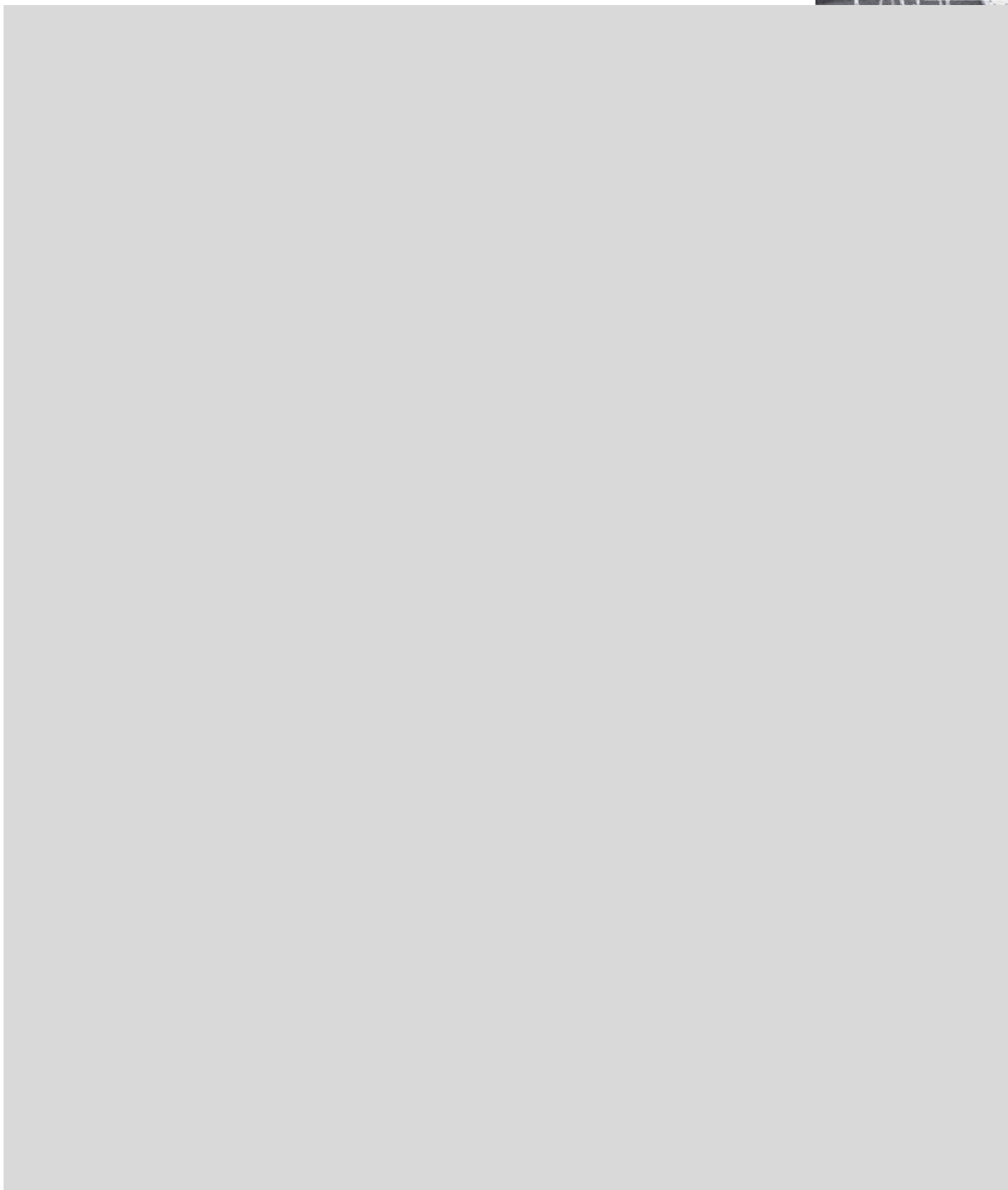
Defining Behavior

Behavior refers to how an individual conducts themselves in response to a situation or environment. From the time a child is born, they rapidly develop the ability to express a variety of emotions and learn to cope with and manage feelings. These emotions or feelings may be expressed through visual or verbal cues, or behaviors. The foundations of social competence in the first five years of a child's life have been linked to the ability to form positive relationships and later success in school.

What is Developmentally Appropriate Behavior?
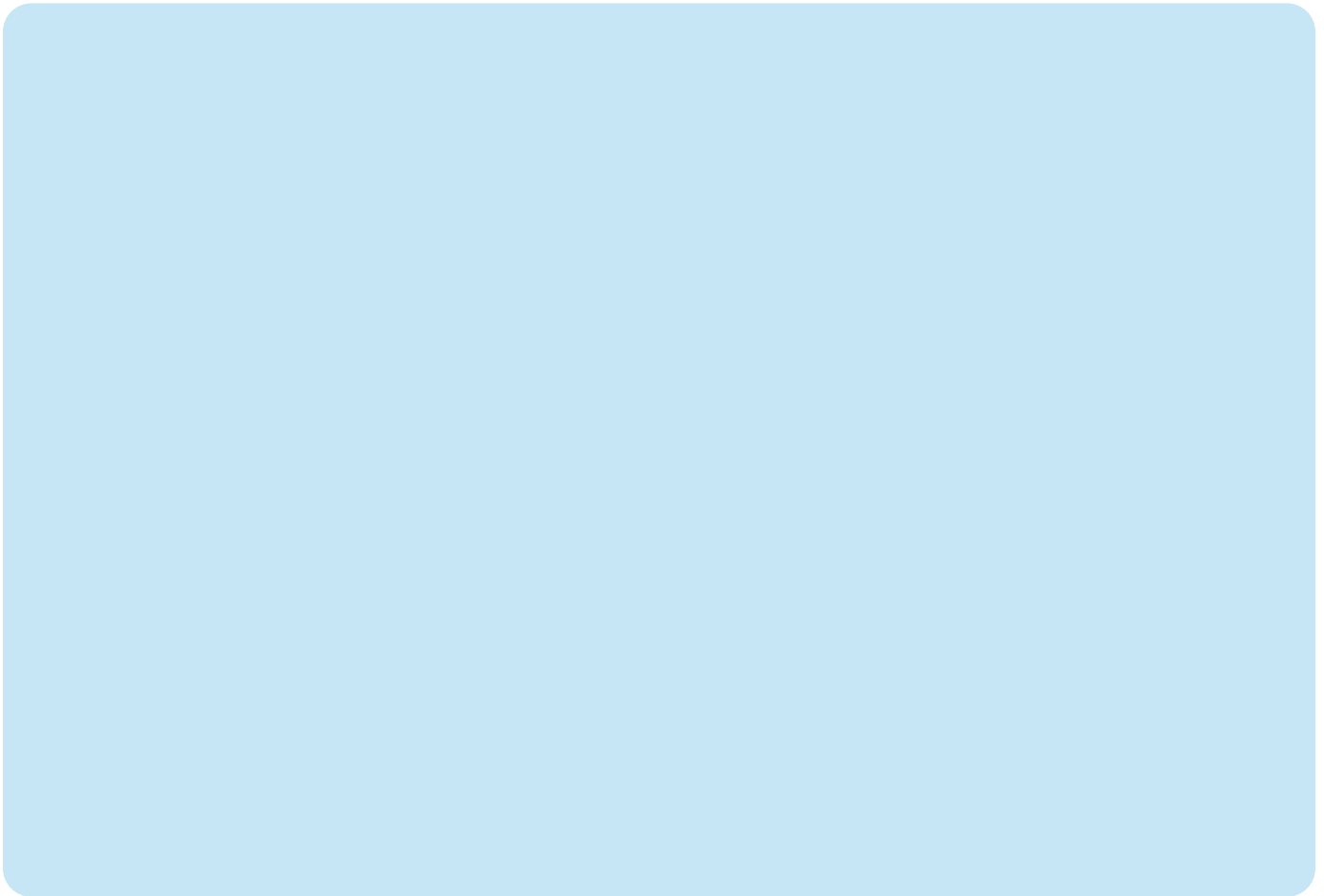
What is Challenging Behavior?

All young children engage in challenging behavior at some point. An educator's knowledge of child development, culture, and beliefs affect how one defines and perceives a behavior as challenging. Some behaviors may feel challenging to some caregivers, despite being a normal part of development.

List the behaviors that you find most challenging in your classroom.

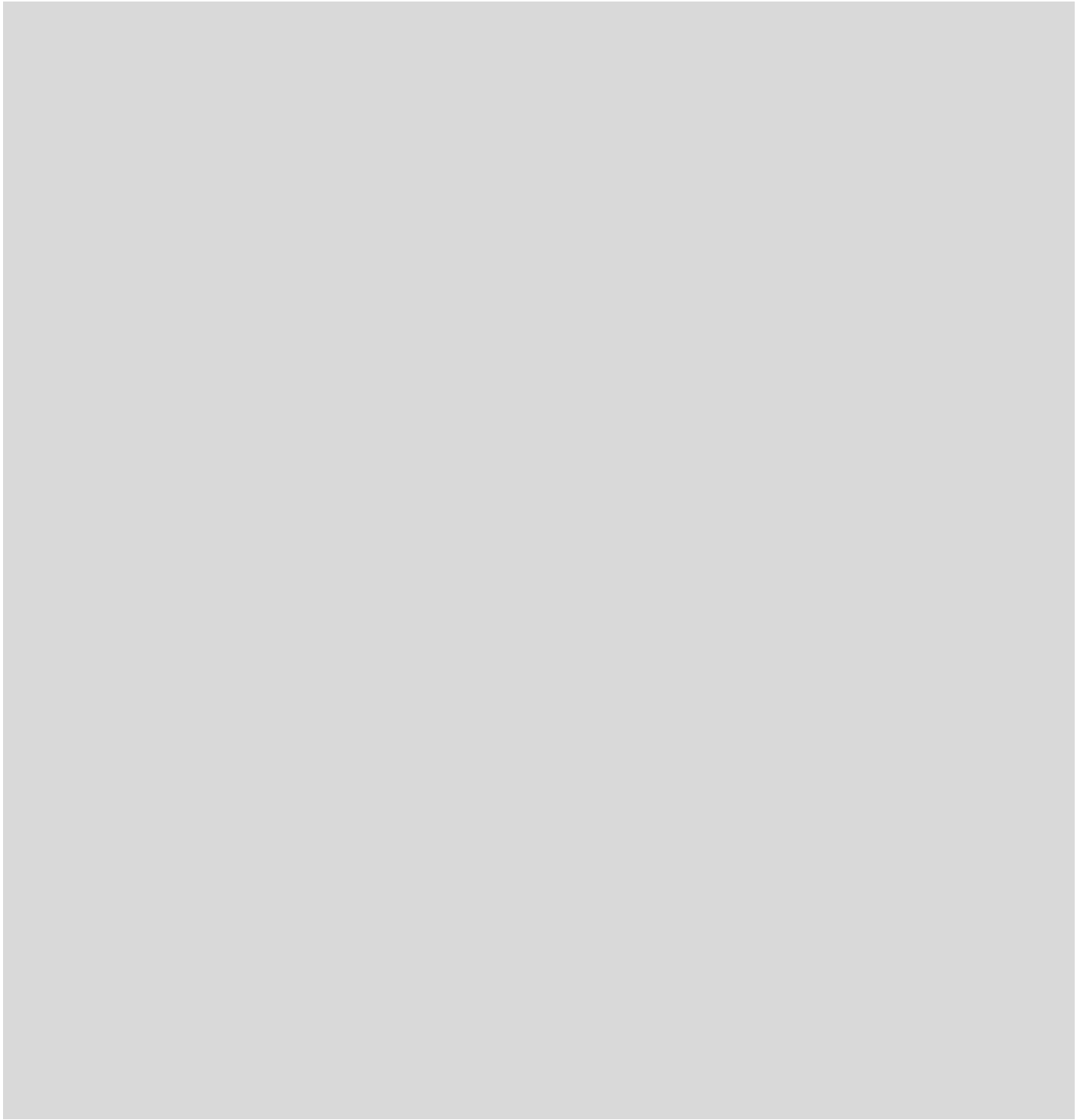Star the behavior that is currently the most challenging in your classroom.

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Adult Responsibilities

The key to teaching children social and emotional skills is creating a classroom culture built on community. Strong communities have members who have shared goals and experiences, who feel empowered to contribute, who trust in one another, and who feel understood and capable as individuals.

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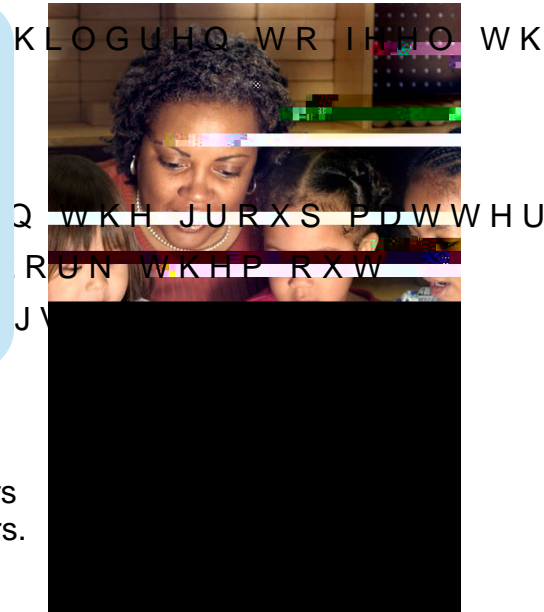
Fostering positive relationships with young children is a fundamental aspect of high-quality prekindergarten programming. Children flourish and learn to manage their emotions and behaviors better when they feel a positive connection with teachers and peers. A sense of community is created in the prekindergarten classroom thanks to these relationships, which sets the stage for open communication in case any challenges arise.

Tips for Building Relationships

With Students:
- Greet each child by name
- Listen and learn about their interests
- Provide praise and encouragement
- Provide opportunities for students to share about their culture and home language
- Display children's authentically created work
- Follow children's lead during play
- Let absent children

Relationships

List the ways you currently connect and build relationships with students.

List ways you currently connect and build relationships with families.

What is one new strategy you can try to further connect and build relationships with students and families?

"A child whose behavior pushes you away is a child who needs connection before anything else." - Kelly Bartlett

The use of exclusionary discipline practices in prekindergarten classrooms can have profound and far-reaching effects on children, their families, and the educational system as a whole. When children are excluded from the classroom due to disciplinary actions, they miss out on valuable learning opportunities which can lead to gaps in their educational and social-emotional development, while impacting their perception of themselves and their view of school.

The use of exclusionary discipline practices can also cause stress for families. Parents and caregivers may feel frustrated, helpless, and concerned about the well-being of their children. This added stress can have a ripple effect on the family's overall well-being. Research has shown that exclusionary discipline techniques tend to disproportionately impact children and families who are most in need of early intervention and support (Zinsser, K. M., et al, (2022). This can exacerbate educational disparities and create a cycle of disadvantage for already vulnerable students.

Strategies to Reduce Exclusionary Discipline

Before challenging behaviors can be addressed, educators must:
- Explicitly teach and model expected behaviors across different learning environments (e.g., classroom, playground, library, bathroom).
- The teaching of behavior should be taught and reviewed throughout the school year to encourage mastery (e.g., first day of school, after a break, etc.).
- Acknowledge when students are seen behaving in the expected ways.
- Carefully observe the child to identify triggers for their behavior and any patterns that emerge. Are there specific situations, times of day, or individuals that seem to trigger the behavior?

Communication: Encourage open communication w ith the child to help them express their feelings and needs. Sometimes, young children lack the vocabulary to express themselves effectively, leading to frustration.

Positive B ehavior Support: Implement strategies that focus on reinforcing positive behaviors rather than punishing negative ones. Positive reinforcement and praise can be powerful tools in shaping a child's behavior.

Collaboration: Involve parents or guardians in the process. They can provide valuable insights into the child's behavior at home, which can help in creating a consistent approach to addressing it.

Professional S upport: If t he behavior persists and becomes unmanageable, it may be necessary to seek guidance from a child psychologist or counselor who specializes in early childhood development. For preschool students with disabilities seuidance

Cultural Identity

According to the NYSED Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (CR-S) Education Framework, culture is defined as, "the multiple components of one's identity, including but not limited to: race, economic background, gender, language, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, and ability. At birth, infants begin to absorb their family's culture and form a cultural identity within the context of their family. This includes the family's language, patterns of communication and the tone of voice used to express love, comfort, anger, displeasure, and other emotions. Culture identity is central to how people live, speak, and interact in the world. Family culture also includes mannerisms such as touching/hugging (or not), making eye-contact, rules of behavior and sleeping and eating patterns (Derman-Sparks, Edwards & Goins, 2020).

When children attend preschool, they bring these learned practices with them to the program. These practices are the tools the children have to interact, understand, and navigate the world around them (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2019). They begin to sort out which practices are flexible, and which are absolutes. For example, they begin to recognize when noisy play is okay and that hitting someone is never okay. Preschool children must learn what message is acceptable and not acceptable. When the preschool child enters a classroom, they feel that the way their family does things is normal. (Derman-Sparks, Edwards & Goins, 2020).

As a teacher of young children, it is important to recognize that children come to the classroom with varying family experiences and these experiences may not be like yours. As teachers, we can support the child's developing cultural identity and provide opportunities for them to learn about cultural diversity and fairness. Sometimes something that we perceive as a teacher as a challenging behavior may be a result of the child's family norms.

PAUSE & REFLECT

How were you required to behave when you were a child?

What were the adult-child relationships like in your family?

What behavior was expected in your school?

How has your upbringing influenced your view of children's behavior and your connection with their families?

Supporting Emergent Multilingual Learners

Emergent multilingual learners (EMLs) come to the classroom with many lived experiences, family relationships, home language(s), and practices that may or may not carry over to the early childhood setting. Teachers of EMLs integrate children's home languages strategically to support comprehension, engagement, scaffolding, practice, assessment, and extending. From the physical environment to the daily schedule, the teacher models the usefulness of the home language for learning and promotes a positive perspective of multilingualism and multiculturalism.

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Supporting Students with Disabilities

Preschool students with disabilities should have access to inclusive high-quality early childhood programs where they receive individualized and appropriate support to meet their needs. School districts are responsible for ensuring that a free appropriate public education is provided to preschool students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

It is important for teachers of preschool students to ensure all learners can access and meaningfully participate in classroom activities. For preschool students with disabilities, this can be accomplished by making instru

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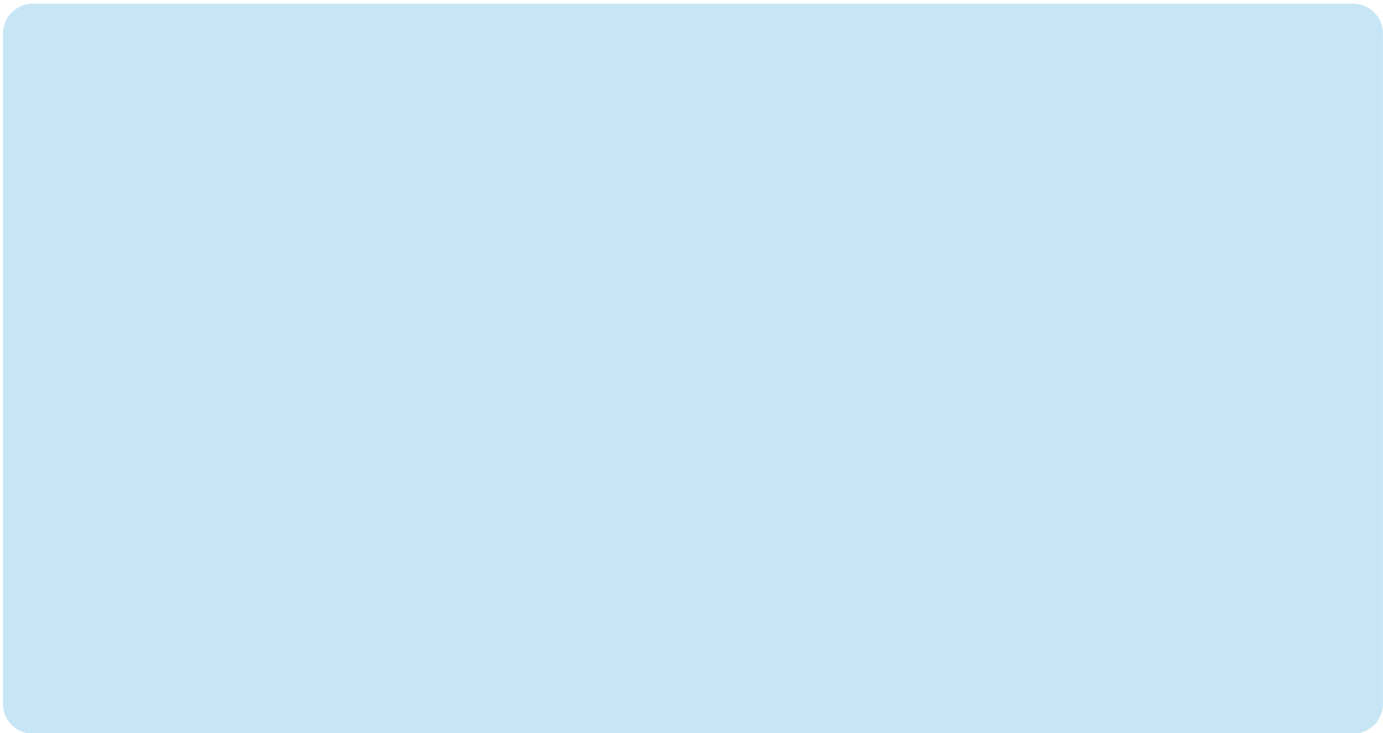
What is Implicit Bias?

Even the most experienced teachers may not be aware of how their unconscious attitudes influence their interactions with children, shaping their expectations and perceptions of the children's skills.

Learning Environment

Teachers design classrooms so that they serve as extensions of their responsibility to shape and foster learning. The spaces or learning centers in the room should invite children to explore, converse, inquire, build, and create individually, and as part of the classroom community.

Teachers provide materials and props in clearly defined learning centers, to capture and sustain children's interest. Blocks of time and flexibility in scheduling allow children to explore the learning environment and make choices among the wealth of materials and activities provided in the classroom. The daily schedule is adjusted to accommodate a specific theme or project. Teachers should be flexible in changing the learning environment when situations require them to make on the spot decisions to redirect behavior.
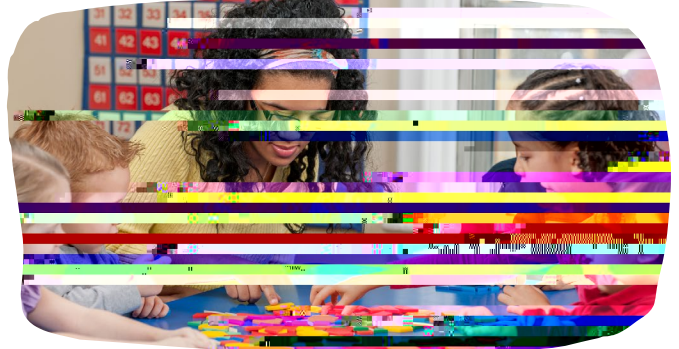
For example, a teacher noticed the students were running in the classroom. After observing the behaviors, the teacher noticed that the wide open spaces in the classroom promote running. In addition to lessons on how to move safely around the room, the teacher also arranged furniture to prevent the opportunities to run.

When designing learning centers, teachers should:

- Be mindful of and accommodate/plan for the varying strengths, skills and abilities, cultures, languages, experienc

Play to Support Behaviors

Play is crucial in supporting the development of children's skills during the critical period of early childhood between the ages of birth and eight. Play provides children with a vehicle for discovery, creativity, joy, and practice. Play is a natural part of a child's discovery, creativity, joy, and practice.

Play provides a foundation for children to develop their social emotional, cognitive, language literacy and physical skills. Play is often referred to as children's work as it provides children with an opportunity for learning and reinforcing skills through discovery, creativity, and practice.

During the early childhood years, children follow a general sequence of developmental social play. These stages of play involve exploring, problem solving, and having fun. As children develop

Try it Out! - List all of the students in your classroom. Identify what stage of play each is currently in. What are the implications for classroom instructional practices?

Stage of Play	Student Name	Classroom Instructional Practices
Onlooker Play		
Parallel Play		
Associative Play		
Social and Cooperative Play		

"Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood." - Fred Rogers

Play allows children to develop self-regulation and social skills. Educators should build time throughout the day to allow children to engage in several types of play experiences that are open-ended, encourage exploration, spark imagination, encourage risk taking and provide opportunities to interact with peers and adults.

For children with challenging behaviors, teachers may need to guide play. Using the chart created in the Try it Out section on page 20, put an asterisk next to any child that exhibits a challenging behavior in the classroom. Add next to the child's name what learning areas and materials they are drawn to in the classroom.

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Educators may need to enter the learning area with the student and assist in guiding play. Sometimes, the source of the challenging behavior may be that the student needs support in developing fundamental skills that make them a successful play partner. During play, children's

Function-Based Thinking

Early childhood educators sometimes need to take a step back and observe the child within the classroom environment to determine the cause of the challenging behavior. Function-based thinking is a strategy that can be used to help determine the reason behind the behavior. The function of the behavior is the reason people behave in a certain way (Hershfeldt, Rosenberg, & Bradshaw, 2010). The following pages contain an example of an Antecedent, Behavior and Consequence (ABC) chart to help the identify the function of a child's behavior.

Each day, a person engages in millions of behaviors. These behaviors fall into four main categories:

Escape/Avoidance : The individual behaves in order to get out of a situation, avoid a task or an activity he/she does not want to do. Some avoidance behaviors might include:
- refusing to come to the table for small group;
- continuing to play when it is clean up time;
- running away on the playground when it is time to line up to go inside; and/or
- leaving the large group area.

Attention Seeking : The individual behaves to get focused attention from parents, teachers, siblings, peers, or other people that are around them. Some attention seeking behaviors might include:
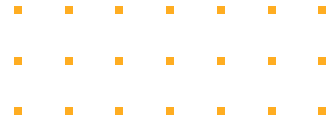- throwing a tantrum/toys;
- whining, talking out of

Create a chart using the prompts below to develop your plan!

Partnering with Families

Video Resources

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Social Justice, Equity and Anti -Bias Early Childhood Education Video Series
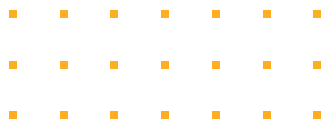
These professional development videos feature dynamic presenters as they discuss topics on anti-bias education, social justice education, trauma and systemic racism, and culturally reflective practices.

Video Series: No Small Jo Sm

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