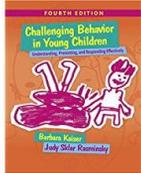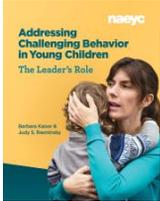## Reducing Challenging Behavior: Administrators as Agents of Change

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"Pre-school expulsion is NOT a child's behavior.

It IS an adult decision."

Walter Gilliam

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States and school districts are increasingly prohibiting the suspension and expulsion of young children

This can happen only when:

• The people in charge believe in this goal and have the skills to develop and lead a team that supports it

• The educators have the skills to understand, prevent, and respond effectively to a child's inappropriate behavior

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It starts with the administration

Leaders must create an environment where:

• All children and families are welcome

• The entire staff believes that every child has the capacity to learn and behave appropriately

• The educators understand:
  • why children behave inappropriately
  • why they themselves respond to children's challenging behavior in the way they do

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Challenging behavior as the teacher's problem

Their Personal and Professional Boundaries

Makes it impossible to achieve their goals & interferes with learning opportunities

Child's Behaviors

Not a diagnostic term
There may be no diagnosis
Need to survive period before diagnosis

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Challenging behavior has consequences

• **Interferes with children's learning, development, and success at play**

• **Is harmful to the child, other children, or adults**

• **Puts a child at high risk for later social problems or school failure**

  • **Timid and withdrawn behaviors also qualify as challenging**

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Why should he stay?

- Moral obligation – can't give up on a child
- If you know what to do it's possible to make it work
- Tells the teachers that they are competent
- The other children are positive role models
- **Will make teachers better teachers**
- Gives the child a bad message:
  - he's un-teachable
  - you don't want him
- Where should he go?

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It is not about power over others, but about empowerment

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Promote a philosophy of staff ownership of the solution as well as the problem

- The staff believes you are there to support them
- You accept each teacher for who he/she is
- You provide opportunities for success
- Acknowledge each person's unique contribution and personal/professional knowledge
- You help them meet their goals!
- Make sure that the staff is given opportunities to develop the skills they need
- Acknowledge the importance of everyone's work and ideas and create a team that works together

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Building a team

- **Develop:**
  - A common approach to discipline that the team has helped to shape and can support
  - Goals and procedures based on the this approach
  - Rules and procedures that will encourage appropriate behavior and discourage inappropriate behavior
- **Identify:**
  - Individual strengths/skills that will help the team reach their goals
  - Concerns that may make it difficult to obtain their goals
- **Ensure** mutual accountability, trust, support and commitment

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What teachers need to know

- They need to understand themselves

- They need to understand the child

- How to create an environment that prevents challenging behavior

- How to respond effectively when challenging behavior occurs

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Think about why children behave inappropriately

BECAUSE IT WORKS

- To obtain an object or attention
- To escape a task
- To change the level of stimulation

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Prevention is the best intervention

It is the <u>DIRECTOR'S</u> role to help teachers redesign learning & teaching environments that create opportunites for all children to succeed and to increase appropriate behavior

- Changing the social climate
  - Changing levels of interactions with the children
  - Utilizing preventative pro-social skills curricula
- Changing the physical environment
- Changing the program

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The need to create a caring culture

- A positive, caring, welcoming social climate facilitates belonging and learning
- The social climate tells everyone in the program which attitudes and behaviors are expected, accepted, and valued

The backbone of a caring social climate is the teacher's warm, nurturing relationship with each child and their family

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Being Positive!!!

Are the teachers:
- Giving children attention when they are engaged in appropriate behaviors?
- Do they:
  - Tell children what **to do** instead of what not to do?
  - Use goal-oriented language?
  - Appreciate what each child can do, not what they cannot do?
  - Recognize close approximations?
  - Ignore some behaviors?
- Are they aware of what they are saying (content) and how they are saying it (non-verbal cues)?

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Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Does the program
Adapt for learning styles?
Offer a variety of materials?
Ensure there are there many ways to participate?
Offer choices?

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- Do the areas and centers have enough space and entry and exit?
- Are there areas to accommodate small group activities?
- Are play materials arranged so that the children can choose their own activities and supplies?
- Is there a place in the classroom where children can go for a break?

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Reasons why educators resist change

- Decisions or requests that are sprung on teachers without notice
- Not knowing enough about the change
- Feeling that changes are being done to, rather than done by them
- Concerns that change will require them to question familiar (and comfortable) routines and habits
- Change implies that the former way of doing things was wrong
- Educators question their ability: Can I do it? How will I do it?
- Change in one area can disrupt other projects or activities, even ones outside of work
- Change often increases workloads
- Lack of information

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Introducing change

- Start at a staff meeting
- Give everyone a chance to speak
- Meet individually with every staff member
- Ask open-ended questions
- Talk with your staff about:
  - Why change is necessary
  - Who is affected by the change
  - What skills are required to implement the change
  - What are the available resources
  - What modifications need to be made
  - The time frame
  - How the effectiveness of the change will be evaluated
  - what the center or school will look and feel like when you reach your goal

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A fine balance

- Timing is important
- Determine whether your staff is ready for change
- Collect data to support the need for change
- The need must be real
- You need to:
  - Listen
  - Reassure
  - Be sure that everyone is involved in figuring out what exactly the change will be
  - Support
  - Do not micro-manage

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Implementing the change

- Introduce changes in small steps
- Focus first on what is already working well
- Start with the changes with the biggest buy-in
- Identify skills, support, and resources
- Together, create an action plan
- Determine the long-term goal
- Follow up with several short-term goals
- Clarify each staff member's role
- Find appropriate opportunities for professional learning

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Professional development is important

- What do the teachers feel they need to learn?
- Know what is available in your area
- What are your options?
- What are the staff's responsibilities after attending a professional development opportunity?
- What are your responsibilities?

You need to attend the workshops as well

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Your role after PD

- Your ongoing support is essential
- Discus with your staff how they can implement their newly found knowledge
- Help each of educator to develop her own action plan
- Provide opportunities for them to practice their new skills
- Monitor their progress

Attending a conference or a full-day training is the beginning, not the end, of their learning

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Being There

- How much time do you spend with the children?
- Does the staff feel that you know what's happening?
- Find a role in the classroom
  - The more you're there the more naturally people will act
  - Observe unobtrusively
  - Help the teacher notice, pay attention and reinforce when the child is behaving appropriately
- How does the educator respond when the child's behavior becomes disruptive or aggressive?

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The director's role

Help the teachers to:

• Believe in the child's ability to succeed

• Trust, respect, and care for the child

• Find the child's strengths

Combating the child's negative view of himself
takes commitment, patience, and
perseverance

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Keep in mind

• All teachers do not have the same behavioral
expectations

• All programs do not require the same social and
behavioral skills

• Consistency in feedback about behavior is often
inconsistent because expectations differ from teacher
to teacher

• The behavioral requirements of classrooms are quite
different from those in the everyday world

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Teacher responses vary widely in the degree of teacher control

• Low-control methods - Guidance

• Medium control methods - Discipline

• High-control methods - Punishment

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Let them know when they are on the right track

Effective encouragement is:

- Accurate
- Specific/descriptive
- Formative
- Meaningful
- Honest
- Delivered in a way that fits your style

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Getting some extra help

- Adding a part time staff member
  - What would they want the person's role to be
  - Are there any special times of the day when additional support would be most helpful

- Request a mental health or behavioral consultation or coach
  - To partner with teachers to build the their capacity to support children's social and emotional development and prevent and reduce challenging behavior
  - check the regulations regarding the need to inform or request permission from the family
  - Should this be part of your registration policy?

- Is there a way to give the educator a break?

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Engaging a mental health consultant

- Reduces challenging behavior
- Prevents suspension and expulsion
- Improves classroom climate
- Strengthens teacher-child interactions
- Enhances children's social and emotional skills and positive behavior
- Boosts teachers' confidence in their ability to address children's needs and behavior
- Reduces staff stress, burnout, and turnover
- Improves communication between parents and teachers

Help the teacher understand the advice she is given and support her efforts to make some of the suggested changes
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When you work with young children, you work with their families as well.... (Koralek, Nemeth, & Kelly, 2019, p. 1)

- Decide who should request and attend the meeting
- Learn more about the child's behavior at home
- Be specific
- If the family doesn't speak English, ask them to bring an interpreter or allow you to find one

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Getting the family on board

- Try to see things from their point of view
  - They may be afraid there is something wrong with their child
- Promote a philosophy of family ownership of the solution
- Look for their strengths, competencies, and resources
  - What information do they have – is there a diagnosis
- Invite them to share their thoughts and concerns and past successes with their child
- Don't judge or blame them

  - Check your feelings at the door
  - Define the behavior objectively
- Listen carefully

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What if the family doesn't agree?

- They may not be ready
- If the child is an only child, there may **not** be a lot of challenging behavior at home
- They may blame the teacher or another child
- They may feel that the teacher doesn't recognize their efforts or understand their lives
- They may be afraid there's something wrong with their child

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What about asking the family to get outside help?

• Your best hope of enlisting their support and cooperation is to be specific

• Be prepared with a list of options
    • local community clinics,
    • urgent care facilities,
    • low-cost mental health clinics, and
    • psychiatric emergency rooms

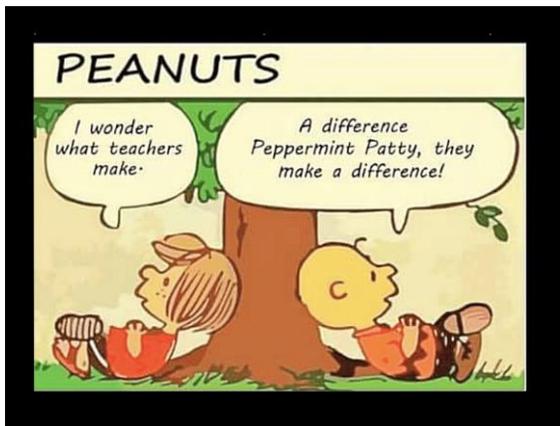barbarak@challengingbehavior.com

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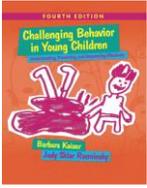
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Summary

Effective leaders:
• Inspire a shared vision
• Enable others to act
• Provide their staff with the tools and methods they need to solve the problem
• Empower others and encourage them to be creative and to take initiative
• Serve as a positive role model

The people you work with need to trust you and have confidence in your skills and direction
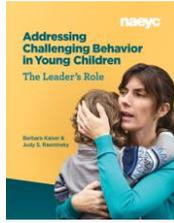
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THANK YOU

STAY SAFE

Challenging Behavior in Young Children:
Understanding, Preventing, and Responding Effectively

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