

## Using the DEC Position Statement on Challenging Behavior: Month-by-Month Discussion Guide

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This tool is intended to help program leaders discuss practices, policies, and guidelines related to supporting the behavior of young children. It should be used alongside the Division for Early Childhood's Position Statement on Challenging Behavior and Young Children (2017): <https://www.decdocs.org/position-statement-challenging-beha>. These discussion questions are designed to spark short reflections, analyses, and action plans. Each discussion is designed to last 10 to 15 minutes and can be embedded within existing staff meetings or professional development.

The guide is organized according to common academic calendars, but you can adjust to meet your own needs.

Month	Discussion Question or Directions
<b>August</b>	<p><b>What Do You Expect?</b> Spend 15 minutes discussing adults' expectations for behavior. Spark discussion with these questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What child behaviors tend to push your buttons?</li> <li>• What behaviors would you like to see instead?</li> <li>• What words are we consistently using to describe positive behaviors?</li> <li>• What are our shared expectations for children's behavior? For adults' behavior? Are these reflected in our program-wide behavior expectations?</li> </ul>
<b>September</b>	<p><b>Screening and Assessment</b> As new school years begin, it is important to put in place a universal screening system. This helps you identify children who need more support. After screening is complete, share results with staff and teams. Spark discussion with these questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are our screening results telling us? What surprises you? What encourages you?</li> <li>• What areas of social-emotional development are you most concerned about right now?</li> <li>• What specific steps can we take to make sure each child gets what they need?</li> </ul>
<b>October</b>	<p><b>Building Relationships with Children and Families</b> As children and staff become more comfortable with one another, we can have deeper conversations about social-emotional development and behavior. Spark discussion with these questions:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What's one thing you know about a child that you did not know when the year began? What's one thing you know about a family that you did not know when the year began?</li> <li>• How has behavior changed over the first few months of school?</li> <li>• How are you using what you know about children and families to make changes?</li> <li>• Describe your strongest relationships with children, families. What can you do to strengthen relationships with the children and families you don't feel as connected to?</li> </ul>
<b>November</b>	<p><b>Healthy Identity Development for Adults and Children</b></p> <p>The position statement emphasizes culturally sustaining practices that promote healthy identity development. One of the first steps you can take is to reflect on your own identity and the role of bias in decision-making. Consider these self-reflection questions from the book <i>Leading Anti-Bias Early Childhood Programs</i> (Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan, &amp; Nimmo, 2014; Appendix B p. 9)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Am I aware of my own cultural identity and history? How comfortable am I about who I am?</li> <li>• Am I aware of biases I may hold?</li> <li>• Do I view diversity and exceptionalities as strengths? Do I believe that all children can succeed regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity, language, or physical disabilities?</li> <li>• Am I able to give accurate, honest answers to children's questions about differences and am I comfortable admitting when I do not know the answer to a question?</li> <li>• Am I able to intervene with ease when I hear comments that exclude someone, show bias, or are discriminatory? Do I know what to say and how to say it with ease? Do I model ways for responding to bias?</li> <li>• Do I have access to a colleague who can act as a trusted ally in my diversity and anti-bias work?</li> </ul>
<b>December</b>	<p><b>Checking on Program-Wide Expectations:</b></p> <p>A few months into the program year, it can be helpful to review how well your plans are working. Think about your program-wide expectations and other aspects of behavior support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is working well for us?</li> <li>• What data do we have and what is it telling us?</li> <li>• What expectations have children learned? How are we recognizing and encouraging children's learning?</li> <li>• What is not working well for staff, children, or families? What adjustments could we make, and who should we involve in those decisions?</li> </ul>

<b>January</b>	<p><b>Ring in the New Year</b> Professional development and technical assistance are essential to ensuring meaningful inclusion and implementation of evidence-based practices for children with challenging behavior. At this point in the year, take time to make plans for the months ahead and ensuring staff have the support they need. Consider the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your professional goals for the rest of this year related to children’s behavior and social-emotional development?</li> <li>• What professional resources do you need to reach those goals?</li> <li>• What specific steps can we as a program take to reach our collective goals?</li> <li>• What training, technical assistance, or coaching resources are available to support individual goals?</li> </ul>
<b>February</b>	<p><b>Collaborations and Transitions</b> Educators may be looking ahead to important transitions (preschool, kindergarten). Take time this month to reflect on the transition supports your program provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you know about the “receiving” setting or school?</li> <li>• What are we doing now to help the child be successful next year?</li> <li>• What specific behaviors or social skills would most help the child?</li> </ul>
<b>March</b>	<p><b>Tiers of Evidence-Based Practices</b> Reflect on the curriculum or programming your program offers children. Discuss how and whether it engages all children and how you can adjust:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is every child interested, engaged, and challenged in the classroom? What is going well? What is not going well?</li> <li>• How are we incorporating child choice and open-ended play?</li> <li>• How well is our curriculum working for promoting social-emotional development?</li> <li>• What do we do when the curriculum is not enough? What are our “tier two” supports for children who need extra social-emotional support?</li> <li>• What specific steps can we take to improve our curriculum?</li> </ul>
<b>April</b>	<p><b>Family-Focused Practices</b> Families are essential to promoting social-emotional competence and preventing challenging behavior. Discuss how your program collaborates with families:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are families first interactions with our program or agency? Are those first interactions successfully starting respectful and reciprocal relationships?</li> <li>• In what ways are we building upon families’ strengths?</li> <li>• How are families involved in designing and implementing interventions when there are concerns about a child’s behavior?</li> <li>• What kinds of information do we share with families about their child’s social-emotional development?</li> <li>• What kinds of information do we share about promoting healthy social-emotional development?</li> </ul>

<b>May</b>	<p><b>Mental Health Collaborations</b>          Consider inviting an early childhood mental health consultant to share about their role and resources. Be sure all adults know the answers to these questions in your program or community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What mental health resources are available to children and families?</li> <li>• What mental health resources are available to staff?</li> <li>• How do I help others or myself access those resources?</li> </ul>
<b>June</b>	<p><b>Reflect on the Past Year</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What have we learned about supporting children’s behavior this year?</li> <li>• What challenges did we overcome? What strengths did we discover?</li> <li>• What changes do we anticipate or want for the future?</li> <li>• What are our pride points and how are we recognizing our collective efforts and successes?</li> </ul>
<b>July</b>	<p><b>Adult Resilience and Capacity-Building</b>          Take time to celebrate success and take important steps to enhance staff well-being. As you plan for the coming year, consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is physical and emotional health built into our program for staff and families?</li> <li>• How do we take care of one another? What processes can staff and families use to ask for help? Are those processes working well? How can they be improved?</li> <li>• How are we preparing new staff for the year ahead? What specific professional development experiences will help seasoned staff start the year in a way that promotes children’s social-emotional development?</li> </ul>