

15-minute In-service Suite: Behavior Has Meaning

Narrator: Welcome to this presentation of the 15-minute In-service Suite on "Behavior Has Meaning." This presentation highlights the importance of understanding that all behavior is a form of communication and has meaning.

The framework for effective practice, or House Framework, helps us think about the elements needed to support children's preparation and readiness for school. The elements are the foundation, the pillars, and the roof. When connected to one another, they form a single structure that surrounds the family in the center because, as we implement each component of the house, in partnership with parents and families, we foster children's learning and development.

Understanding that behavior has meaning is an essential part of the foundation of the house. The foundation encompasses nurturing, responsive, and effective interactions and engaging environments. When we understand the meaning of children's behaviors, we're able to better provide nurturing and responsive care.

This presentation on behavior and its meanings is one in a series of modules designed to help adults support young children as they learn positive behaviors, develop skills in STEAM, math, and writing, and engage in dramatic play.

Everyone communicates through behavior during every moment of every day. Young children let us know what they want and need through their behavior long before they have words. They give us cues to help us understand what they're trying to communicate.

Think about what this infant might be trying to tell us. Maybe, "I'm tired." "I'm hungry." "I'm wet." "I don't know how to settle myself;" "It's too noisy in here." "I want someone to hold me." Or, she might even be trying to tell us that she doesn't know what's on her head, but she doesn't like it.

We help young children when we interpret their cues to meet their wants or needs. When we respond to their efforts to tell us what they want or need, they feel valued and important. They learn that we will stay close and try to understand their behavior. Let's watch this teacher interpret the meaning of this baby's behavior.

Teacher: The babies! You see the babies?

Yeah? Oh, my gosh. The babies. Yeah, it's so exciting.

Baby: [Babbles]

Teacher: Yeah, the baby. Oh, my gosh! Yeah. Yeah. Isn't that amazing? You want to see them. Yeah, you want to get up close. You want to stand up with the babies? Yeah, go for it. Yeah, I got you.

Narrator: This teacher shows that she understands what the child is trying to communicate. Instead of continuing to turn the pages and read the book, she stops and allows the child to point to the pictures and take a closer look. She is helping the child learn to communicate her intentions, feelings, and emotions.

Become a "behavior has meaning" detective as you try to understand the purpose of a child's behavior. Understanding the purpose behind the behavior helps you respond in the moment and gives you information that will help you support the child moving forward. When we respond to children's behavior, we pause to try to guess what the child is communicating instead of just reacting to the behavior. It also helps us think about what skills we need to teach children so they can continue to develop their communication skills. How we recognize and then respond to the meaning of children's behavior is very important for early development and school readiness.

We hope you have new ideas for understanding the meaning of infant, toddler, and preschoolers' behaviors. For more information and more ideas, see the complete 15-minute suite, "Behavior Has Meaning," and take a look at our tips and tools, and helpful resources.