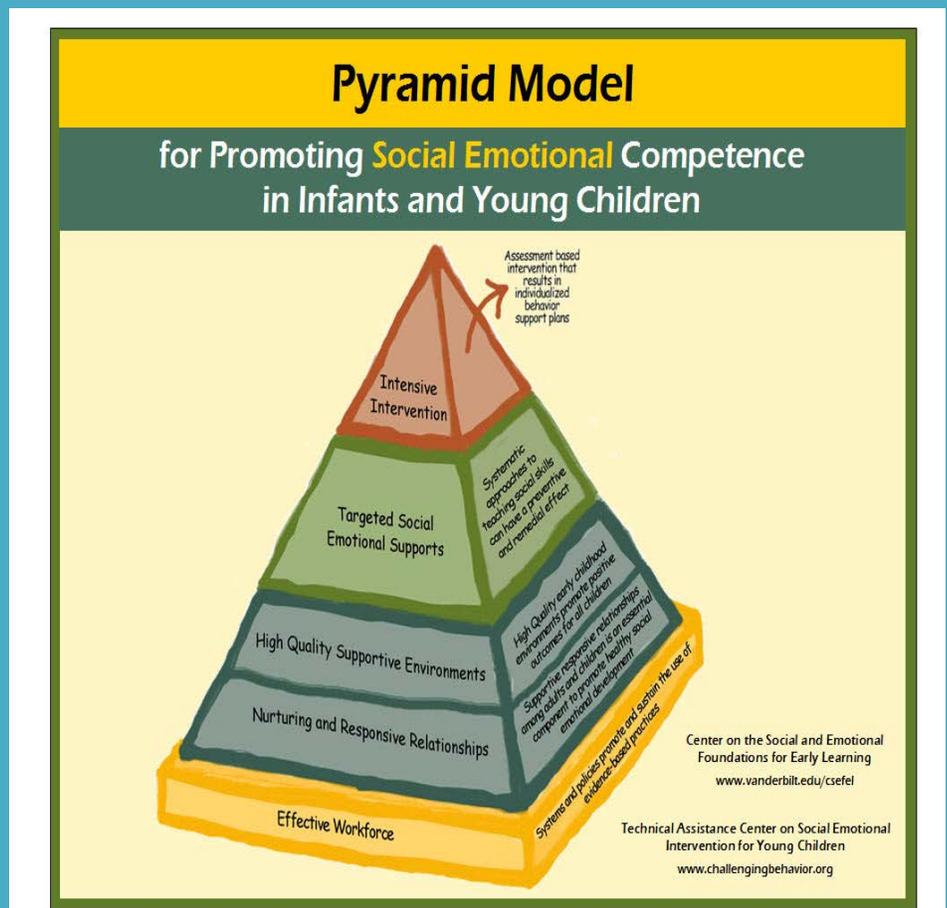


# Challenging Behavior

During your work as an SST provider, it's likely that you may encounter defiance, aggression and other challenging behavior from some of the children you see. Toddlerhood in particular is a time for children to learn acceptable, appropriate behavior. This can be challenging for early intervention providers because the criteria for what is acceptable vary across cultures and families. Even within a single family, it's common for caregivers to disagree about which behaviors are appropriate and to have different ideas about the best way to manage challenging behavior. As an EIS, you may be asked to help families deal with typical toddler behavior problems and other more challenging behaviors.

In some situations, you may recognize behavior challenges, such as frequent tantrums that are getting in the way of working on and meeting IFSP outcomes.

All children benefit from having their social-emotional development supported through positive and responsive relationships with their parents and primary caregivers. The foundation for all ECI services, including SST, is responsive and supportive caregiving practices. However, as illustrated in this graphic, some children need intervention that is beyond positive relationships and supportive environments to address their delayed or atypical social-emotional skills. This section offers



some strategies for working with parents and caregivers to address these challenging behaviors.

## Causes of Challenging Behavior and Strategies for Managing Them

Issue Related to Challenging Behavior	Why It May Lead to Behavior Problems	Behaviors You Might See	Strategies To Try While Coaching
Typical Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional and neurological response to learning new skills (“Touchpoints”)</li> <li>• Testing increased autonomy</li> <li>• Anxiety about new experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refusing to comply with instructions</li> <li>• Tantrums or crying for no apparent reason</li> <li>• Waking during the night (after sleep patterns have been established)</li> <li>• Saying “No” to every offer, even those he or she wants</li> <li>• Mild aggression toward other children and familiar adults</li> <li>• Inconsolable fear of situations or people that did not bother the child before</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help parents reframe challenging behavior as a typical response to new skill development</li> <li>• Help parents recognize positive behaviors to reward</li> <li>• Model and encourage parents to ignore tantrums</li> <li>• Help parents identify age-appropriate consequences for aggression</li> </ul>
Environmental Triggers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too many choices leading to overstimulation or distraction</li> <li>• Lack of opportunities for age-appropriate exploration</li> <li>• Sensitivity to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Noise levels</li> <li>○ Particular noises (e.g. vacuum cleaner)</li> <li>○ Temperature</li> <li>○ Crowds</li> <li>○ Itchy clothing</li> <li>○ Visually “busy” environments</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tantrums for no discernible reason</li> <li>• Screaming or crying for no apparent reason</li> <li>• Inattention to other people</li> <li>• Acting without regard to personal safety</li> <li>• Withdrawing to another environment</li> <li>• Hyperactivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help parents identify environmental factors that might cause discomfort by observing child</li> <li>• Introduce potential triggers gradually and pair with something the child enjoys</li> <li>• If problems are severe or persistent, consult with OT to see if sensory strategies might be appropriate</li> </ul>
Developmental Delays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frustration due to the child’s inability to use skills (such as words to indicate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tantrums</li> <li>• Aggression</li> <li>• Physical or emotional withdrawal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help parents understand the roots of the child’s frustration</li> </ul>

Issue Related to Challenging Behavior	Why It May Lead to Behavior Problems	Behaviors You Might See	Strategies To Try While Coaching
	<p>wants, or to move across the room to get a toy)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent’s inability to read the child’s nonverbal cues, which may differ from cues of typical children</li> <li>• Parental expectations for the child to have the skills of a typically-developing child</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excessive screaming or crying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help the parents teach the child compensatory skills (e.g. signs if the child’s words are unintelligible)</li> <li>• Identify and alert the parents to cues that the child is becoming frustrated, is hungry, etc. to prevent the undesirable behavior</li> </ul>
Trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overly sensitive neurological response to even minor stressors sets off “fight or flight” behavior</li> <li>• Heightened wariness of danger</li> <li>• Sense of uncertainty, helplessness and lack of control</li> <li>• Attachment problems, if abuse or neglect occurred</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tantrums</li> <li>• Aggression</li> <li>• Sleeplessness</li> <li>• Changes in appetite</li> <li>• Physical and emotional withdrawal</li> <li>• Nightmares</li> <li>• Overly friendly and affectionate to strangers</li> <li>• Ritualized self-calming behaviors</li> <li>• Anxiety or fearfulness</li> <li>• Hypervigilance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you suspect a child’s challenging behavior is a result of trauma, refer to a professional with social-emotional expertise (e.g. LMSW, LPC, Psychologist) with expertise in very young children</li> </ul>
Cognitive Abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced ability to connect consequences with behaviors</li> <li>• Difficulty focusing</li> <li>• Difficulty transitioning from one activity to another</li> <li>• Reduced ability to interpret social cues</li> <li>• Difficulty adapting to new environments or changes in familiar ones</li> <li>• Difficulty with delayed gratification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inattention</li> <li>• Doesn’t follow rules</li> <li>• Doesn’t seem to learn from consequences</li> <li>• Lack of awareness of safety issues</li> <li>• Aggression</li> <li>• Hyperactivity</li> <li>• Impulsivity</li> <li>• Difficulty socializing with other children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach caregivers to make sure they have the child’s attention before they speak to him</li> <li>• Help the family find outlets for the child’s high activity level</li> <li>• For older children, play games that reinforce paying attention and not acting on impulse (e.g. Mother May I, Simon Says, Red Light/Green Light, Ring Around the Rosey)</li> </ul>

Issue Related to Challenging Behavior	Why It May Lead to Behavior Problems	Behaviors You Might See	Strategies To Try While Coaching
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty with listening attention and processing auditory information</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pair spoken information or instructions with visual cues</li> <li>• Make sure consequences are immediate and of a short duration</li> <li>• Consult OT, SLP and/or licensed professional with expertise in social-emotional development (e.g. LPC, LMSW) if strategies are unsuccessful</li> </ul>
Medical/Physical Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical pain or discomfort decrease ability to focus and learn</li> <li>• Invasive or painful procedures may result in trauma</li> <li>• Side effects of medication can include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Increased activity level</li> <li>○ Gastric problems</li> <li>○ Increased aggression</li> <li>○ Drowsiness</li> <li>○ Sleeplessness</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inattention/lack of focus</li> <li>• Frequent, inconsolable crying or screaming</li> <li>• Withdrawal</li> <li>• Hyperactivity</li> <li>• Aggression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help parents find the best times of day for different activities</li> <li>• Teach parents to use activities the child finds calming or stimulating depending on what the child needs</li> <li>• Accompany parents to medical appointments to help them explain any problematic side effects</li> <li>• Help parents establish calming bed time routines if sleep is a problem</li> <li>• Consult RN, dietitian, OT or licensed professional with expertise in social-emotional development (e.g. LCSW, LPC) if strategies are unsuccessful</li> </ul>
Parenting Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of consistency</li> <li>• Expectations for the child to progress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tantrums</li> <li>• Aggression</li> <li>• Withdrawal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help parents develop age-appropriate</li> </ul>

Issue Related to Challenging Behavior	Why It May Lead to Behavior Problems	Behaviors You Might See	Strategies To Try While Coaching
	and learn like typically developing children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ineffective or overly harsh consequences</li> <li>• Lack of child development knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doesn't follow rules</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> </ul>	consequences for problem behaviors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide information on both typical and delayed child development</li> <li>• Help parents identify when they are not being consistent</li> <li>• If concerns persist, consult a licensed professional with expertise in family relationships (e.g. LPC, LCSW)</li> </ul>

### Activity

From the chart, think about two families you work with and the ways you can coach and support them and their child's development including the specific strategies you will implement and share with your supervisor.