



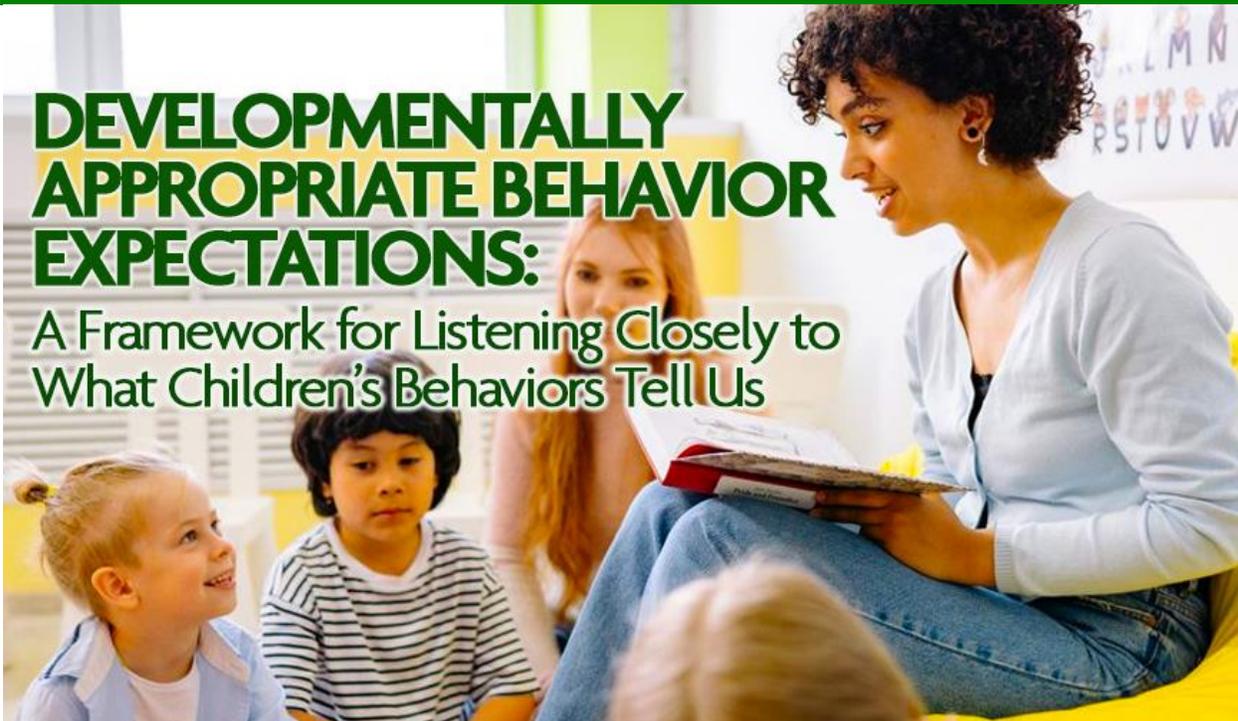
# Ready, Set, Go

*Success for All*

An e-Newsletter linking people and resources to support quality practices in the education of all students

## DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS:

### A Framework for Listening Closely to What Children's Behaviors Tell Us



Imagine a busy early childhood classroom abuzz with energy and activity. During choice time, a visitor might see children negotiating an imaginative play scenario with blocks, a child using an alternative communication device to request a new material, and a small group of children exploring gooey soil in the sensory table. As they play, children are learning to develop meaningful relationships, encounter and navigate challenges, and advocate for their own needs. Teachers simultaneously observe, interpret, and respond to the behaviors they notice. It is no surprise then that teachers rank interpreting children's behaviors, specifically responding to behaviors that are challenging, among the most difficult parts of their jobs. Furthermore, many teachers do not feel prepared to support behavior with proactive strategies which are shown to be the most effective (Hancock & Carter, 2016). The resources below are intended to guide teachers to first listen closely to what children communicate through their behaviors, and then to create developmentally appropriate behavior expectations that celebrate children's diverse needs.

Get **Ready**: to understand all behavior as communication.

Long before children have words to share their thoughts and ideas, their behaviors communicate what they need (Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, 2022). Decoding behavior is not always straightforward, as the same behavior could have multiple meanings depending on the circumstance or the child. In its position statement on Challenging Behavior, the Division for Early Childhood (DEC, 2017) noted that young children's behavior is influenced by development, temperament, environment, and culture. Tools like the Virginia Early Learning and Development Standards may help teachers understand children's behavior in the context of their development. For example, teachers may note that some common prosocial behaviors, like turn-taking and resolving social conflicts, do not typically emerge until later in preschool. Until then, children may express their need for autonomy, space, or change in sensory input by engaging in challenging, but developmentally appropriate behaviors like hitting, hiding, or grabbing. When adults respond to children's underlying needs rather than seeking to stop a behavior, children learn that their needs are valid.

- [Virginia Early Learning Development Standards](#)
- [Behavior Has Meaning](#) video and in-service suite

Get **Set** your own expectations about behaviors based on what you know about your classroom community.

Research has shown that adults' interpretations of children's behavior play an important role in determining whether that behavior will be viewed as challenging (DEC, 2017). Prior to addressing a child's behavior, teachers should consider setting aside time to reflect on their own needs, beliefs, and ideas about behaviors. Teachers should also take inventory of their students' temperaments and needs, keeping in mind that children are impacted by their environments, and their needs may change from day to day. The tools below guide teachers to reflect on classroom practices that honor children's diverse needs, setting the stage for them to grow and thrive.

- [Infant Toddler Temperament Tool: Supporting a Goodness of Fit](#) reflection tool
- [Building Environments That Encourage Positive Behavior](#) self-assessment
- [Preventing Challenging Behavior in Young Children: Effective Practices](#) by Peter J. Alter and Maureen A. Conroy
- Blended Practices for Promoting Social-Emotional Development in Young Children, found in [Blended Practices for Teaching Young Children in Inclusive Settings \(2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2017\)](#) by Jennifer Grisham and Mary Louise Hemmeter

**Go** support children by creating behavior expectations and rules that value the unique needs in your classroom community.

When implemented consistently, a few clearly stated behavior expectations and logical rules help children know what is expected, maximize learning time, contribute to a sense of community, and prevent challenging behavior before it occurs (Alter & Conroy, n.d.; Hancock & Carter, 2016; Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, 2021; The IRIS Center, 2014). Behavior expectations are overarching goals that describe how members of a community should treat one another, such as ‘We are kind, We are safe, We are responsible’ (IRIS Center 2014, Perspectives & Resources, p. 2). Rules, on the other hand, describe specific behaviors. When developing classroom rules, consider asking children what each behavior expectation looks, sounds, and feels like. Rules should be stated positively and written in child-friendly language (IRIS Center 2014, Perspectives & Resources, p. 2). Use the tools below to add visual supports and translation to ensure that all children understand (National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations, 2020). The IRIS Center modules (2014) offer suggestions to help all adults implement rules and expectations consistently, which is key for children's understanding.

- [Stating Behavioral Expectations](#) video and in-service suite
- [Early Childhood Behavior Management: Developing and Teaching Rules](#) IRIS Center online modules
- [Behavior Expectations Strategies](#) poster from NCPMI
- [Classroom Visuals and Supports](#) printables from ECLKC

## References

Alter, P. J., & Conroy, M. A. (n.d.). Preventing challenging behavior in young children: Effective practices. *Recommended Practices*. Retrieved from <https://challengingbehavior.org/document/recommended-practices-preventing-challenging-behavior-in-young-children-effective-practices/>

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