



FACT SHEET | U of M LEND Program

CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS SERIES

Choice-Making

What is choice-making?

- Choice-making occurs when a child selects an item or activity from among two or more options. Choice-making offers control and may be particularly important for some children who engage in socially motivated challenging behaviors. Choices can be positive reinforcers or actual tasks to be performed.

For whom is choice-making useful?

- Having opportunities to make choices is beneficial for most children. Among children who are motivated to escape activities or have a need to demonstrate control over conditions of engagement in activities, some children choose between two options because they are reinforced by being allowed to choose. If so, allowing the child to choose which option he or she would like to do first may reduce escape-motivated challenging behavior. For example,

every day the nurse comes to Adrian's preschool to administer his seizure medications. Adrian hates to take the medications. He cries when they are offered. When offered a choice of which pill is taken first, the white one or the red one, Adrian readily chooses, ingests the pill chosen, and then takes the remaining pill with no crying.

How can choice-making be offered?

- Offering choices throughout the day honors children's individual differences.
 - » Example: Ms. Hansen regularly offers a choice of juice or milk at snack. With some activities, a choice of when a child will engage in a nonpreferred task can be offered.
 - » Example: Asia dislikes art and she hits the teacher when told to transition from free play to art. However, when given the option to participate now or when the bell rings in ten minutes,

Asia willingly participates in art before the end of free play.

- Some children choose between two nonpreferred options because one of the choices may be slightly more palatable than the other. By choosing the option which is most acceptable of the two, he or she is able to avoid the least preferred option.
 - » Example: Art is particularly problematic for Brett since he dislikes fine motor activities. When required to participate, he frequently slaps himself or the teacher until he is released from the activity. However, when offered a choice among materials that he can use, he is more likely to participate. For instance, he is offered a choice between markers and crayons. Brett prefers markers to crayons and when given this choice, he willingly participates in the drawing activity. When a nonpreferred task can be broken down into smaller steps to

completion, the child may be offered which step he or she prefers to complete. If one step requires more effort from the child than another, he or she will choose the least nonpreferred option in order to avoid the more nonpreferred option.

- » Example: Jacob screams and cries when asked to help with clean-up after free play. However, if given a choice of putting the three books on the shelf or putting the many building blocks in the box, Jacob will readily choose to put the books away since this requires less effort than picking up the many blocks. Once Jacob is participating in clean-up without engaging in challenging behavior, the interventionist may gradually increase the amount of work that Jacob is required to do during clean-up until he is contributing as much effort as the other children.
- Limiting the number of choices available may help children who have a difficult time choosing from a large array of options or children who are withdrawn.
 - » Example: Lexi does not engage in any of the activities set about the room during free play, but aimlessly follows after her teacher. When the teacher provides a more limited choice of giving the dolls a bath or sliding in a pool of leaves, Lexi happily chooses to slide into the leaves with the other children.

This Fact Sheet of the Challenging Behaviors Series has been developed to assist teachers and parents in providing the best possible educational opportunities to children with autism spectrum disorders in their home and classroom. This Fact Sheet was originally titled Positive Approaches to Young Children who Engage in Challenging Behavior and was published by the Center for Early Education and Development at the University of Minnesota. Funding provided via IDEA Part B, sec. 619, Preschool, by a grant to the University of Minnesota from the Minnesota Department of Education. Co-authored by Joe Reichle, Ph.D., Carol Davis, Ph.D., Shelley Neilsen, Ph.D., and Lillian Duran. These materials have been further edited by Joe Reichle, Ph.D. and LeAnne Johnson Ph.D. for use by the University of Minnesota LEND Program (Leadership Training and Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities). The information contained does not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education or the Minnesota Department of Education.

Center for Early Education and Development (CEED): cehd.umn.edu/ceed

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