



FACT SHEET | U of M LEND Program

CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS SERIES

Preferred Item as a Distracter

What is using a preferred item as a distracter?

- Using a preferred item as a distracter is an intervention strategy that consists of presenting an activity or a preferred item to a child during an activity in which challenging behavior is apt to occur. The preferred item is intended to distract the child from conditions that provoke challenging behavior.

Who would benefit from using a preferred item as a distracter?

- A preferred item as a distracter is useful for children who engage in challenging behavior to escape or avoid a task, and obtain or maintain attention.
- This strategy should only be employed when the child does not actively need to be cognitively engaged during the entirety of the activity.

How do I implement using a preferred item as a distracter intervention strategy?

- First the interventionist needs to identify some preferred items or activities that can serve as distracters.
- Second, the time when the child is likely to engage in challenging behavior should be identified and an appropriate distracter should be matched to the setting.
- Third the preferred item or activity should be delivered before the onset of challenging behavior. The preferred item or activity should not be given after an episode of challenging behavior because the child may link his/her challenging behavior to the delivery of a preferred item or activity.
- Example: Escape a task Antecedent event: Each day the children in Thomas's kindergarten class must wait in line by the lunch counter until it is their turn to be served.

- » Behavior: To escape standing in line, Thomas hits and pokes other children.
- » Strategy: Thomas's teacher knows that he likes to be a helper so she has assigned him the job of holding her clipboard and checking to make sure that everyone has their jacket to go outside for recess during this time.
- » Implementation: Before leaving the classroom to go to lunch Thomas's teacher explains that he will be the helper today to make sure everyone has their jacket to go outside. She will explain that holding the clipboard is contingent upon Thomas waiting in line with the other children without hitting or pinching.
- » Adjustments and modifications: If Thomas completes checking off all of the names before lunch is ready to be served another distracter should be in place to be given before the onset of challenging behavior. In this example when the teacher sees that

Thomas is nearing completion of the task she could prompt him to hand out small stickers to each student for remembering their jacket or another small task could be assigned to distract Thomas from his challenging behavior.

- Example: Avoid a task Antecedent event: Maggie's teacher announces that it is circle time.
 - » Behavior: Maggie begins running around the room whenever it is circle time and refuses to join the group.
 - » Strategy: Maggie's teacher has allowed Maggie to bring her favorite stuffed animal to school to be her "circle time friend".
 - » Implementation: Maggie's teacher has explained that she is only allowed to have the stuffed animal out for circle time and the stuffed dog sits next to her as long as Maggie sits and participates in the circle time activities. The dog is in a special place in the classroom and when the teacher announces circle time it is Maggie's job to get her dog and bring him to the circle time area. A special chair is available for him.
 - » Adjustments and modifications: If Maggie becomes disinterested in the stuffed animal other distracters can be used. If Maggie enjoys being a helper she could also begin to have a special job during circle time to maintain her interest in the activity.

» Example: Obtain or maintain attention.

- *Antecedent event: During small group time Seth's teacher works with 3 or 4 preschoolers at one time and sometimes her attention is drawn away from Seth.*
- *Behavior: During this time whenever the teacher's attention is drawn away from Seth, by another student, Seth calls out, "Help me!" This behavior sometimes escalates to Seth throwing his materials on the floor and refusing to participate.*
- *Strategy: Seth loves stickers and has many books of stickers that he has collected. Seth has been allowed to bring a sticker book to small group time and when he reaches a place in an activity where he needs help and the teacher is busy helping another student Seth is allowed to place stickers in his book until the teacher is available to assist him.*
- *Implementation: Seth's teacher explained to him before small group time that he would be allowed to place stickers in his book whenever she needed to work with another student and Seth needed help. When she is able to shift attention back to him he puts the stickers away and refocuses on the activity.*
- *Adjustments and modifications: If Seth loses interest in stickers another distracter can be employed. Prompts should be delivered to Seth to work on his sticker book before the teacher diverts her attention to another student and before the challenging behavior occurs.*

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.

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