



FACT SHEET | U of M LEND Program

CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS SERIES

Request Assistance

What is request assistance?

- A request for assistance is a communicative act produced by the child in order to indicate the desire to have an individual provide him/her with help while engaged in a task without engaging in challenging behavior to receive help. For example, a child may require assistance in removing his/her clothing, manipulating materials (e.g., scissors, glue bottles, toys) or gaining access to food items (e.g., opening a wrapper, cabinet, or refrigerator) and may have learned to engage in challenging behavior to elicit the desired assistance from the adult.

Who would benefit from being taught to request assistance?

- The request for assistance response can be taught as a communicative alternative for a variety of functions of challenging behaviors, including —

- » Access-motivated: Situations in which a child requires assistance in order to gain access to a preferred item or activity. For example, a young child may tantrum to obtain help from an adult when trying to loosen the lid of a peanut jar or when trying to activate a favorite toy. This child can be taught to request assistance by saying help, please, signing help, or pointing to a graphic symbol.
- » Escape-motivated, difficult task: Situations in which a child is unable to complete a task without assistance may lead to challenging behavior. Consider Jimmy, who tends to stop working when he reaches a step in an activity that he finds difficult. He may begin to pinch or push those around him to escape the task. Jimmy instead can be taught to request assistance when he reaches this point in an activity.

How can I teach a child to request assistance?

- First you will need to get ready to teach this strategy. There are five steps in the preparation phase —
 - » Determine the function served by the challenging behavior by conducting a functional behavior assessment.
 - » If the motivation of the behavior is determined to be the need for assistance, identify the critical event that cues the child to engage in the challenging behavior. Ask yourself, “At what point does the child begin to need help and start to become frustrated or anxious?”
 - » Define the range of activities in which the child is likely to require assistance.
 - » Identify specific activities that can serve as teaching examples. These activities should not be the most difficult for the child because teaching this strategy must be completed when the child is not in an agitated state.

- » Determine the form of the communicative alternative based on the communication modality of the child. The communicative alternative must be as easy to use as the challenging behavior.
- » Determine the point in the activity when the child is likely to engage in the challenging behavior.
- Now you can begin to implement the strategy. There are four more steps involved in implementation —
 - » Reinforce the absence of challenging behavior during the activity.
 - » Prompt the child to engage in the request assistance response by saying “ask for help,” moving his/her hand onto a graphic symbol for help, or prompting the child through the sign for help. Remember to prompt the child before the onset of challenging behavior. The communicative alternative you choose will depend on the child’s usual system of communication.
 - » Over time, fade instructional prompts to request assistance. The goal is for the child to communicate his/her need for help independently and spontaneously across settings and activities.
 - » Begin to blend your teaching examples into naturally occurring activities throughout the day and arrange the materials to encourage the use of a request for assistance so that the child will have opportunities to practice his/her new communicative skill.

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

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