



## FACT SHEET | U of M LEND Program

# CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS SERIES

## Rejecting Response

### What is a rejecting response?

- A rejecting response is a communicative alternative for challenging behavior that can involve spoken, sign, or graphic language that is used to escape or avoid a person, object, or activity.
- This response is taught when caregivers can honor (reinforce) that child's desire to escape or avoid certain people, objects, or activities. To determine whether the function of the challenging behavior can be honored, the interventionist should determine: (1) whether or not it is important that the child interact with the item or engage in an activity, and (2) whether the child be permitted to avoid the item/activity at least temporarily. Sometimes, those responsible for the child may determine that it is reasonable to allow him/her to escape after producing a socially acceptable alternative to challenging behavior if, in the longer term, steps are taken to reintroduce

activity engagement after challenging behavior has significantly decreased.

### Who would benefit from being taught a rejecting response?

- A rejecting response can be taught as a replacement for escape-motivated and tangible-motivated challenging behaviors. These examples follow —
  - » Escape or avoid items/events. Children who engage in challenging behavior to prevent the onset of an event would benefit from being taught to reject the presentation of the item or activity. For example, Bob tantrums each time he is presented with food items he dislikes. Bob would benefit from being taught to reject the food he dislikes in a more socially appropriate manner.
  - » Avoid attention. Other children engage in challenging behaviors to avoid the attention of others. For example, Mary will play quietly by

herself during free play time but yells or throws toys when approached by her teacher or peers. Mary would benefit from being taught to reject the attention of others.

- » Obtain alternative items/events. Children may want to avoid an item or activity in order to gain access to desired items or events not being offered. For example, Connie is offered fruit for dessert but she would much rather have pudding. She may tantrum at the sight of the fruit hoping to gain access to the pudding. Connie would benefit from being taught to reject the fruit and ask for the pudding.

### How can I teach a child a socially appropriate response to escape or avoid?

- A child can be taught to reject, to escape, or to avoid an item or activity in three ways; verbally, using a graphic symbol, and using a gestural symbol.

- » For example, a child may verbally say No to eating his/her salad or point to a graphic symbol for No when asked if he/she wants to play with friends or sign Stop if he/she does not wish to help clean up after snack.
- While the child may be allowed to temporarily escape or avoid, there may come a time when they need to begin to participate in these activities. To reestablish participation in an activity, a condition can be put in place before the child is allowed to avoid or escape the activity altogether. For example, Cassandra has been asked to put away the materials she has been using in an art activity. She has been taught to point to a graphic symbol representing No to reject the cleanup. To reestablish participation in the activity, Cassandra's teacher may say Just put one more marker away and then we'll go. Over time, Cassandra will be required to clean up more and more of the art materials before being allowed to go.
- Clearly, in some situations it may not be possible to allow a child to escape or avoid certain tasks or activities. If the child's health, safety, or well being is at stake, alternative strategies need to be used to address his/her challenging behavior. Some examples may include taking medication, holding hands to cross the street, staying seated in a car seat, staying within an appropriate proximity to the care provider, etc. In these instances, interventions that are designed to make engagement more desirable to enhance self-regulatory skills may be more appropriate. Only if it is possible to honor the escape/avoidance function of the child's challenging behavior is teaching a rejecting communicative replacement a reasonable intervention strategy.

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