

Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District
Northwest Michigan
Infant Mental Health Training Series

Challenging Behaviors and the
Importance of Self-Regulation

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Thanks to

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Overview

- The Meaning of Challenging Behaviors

- Understanding behavior and emotion in children
- The Language of Behavior: Illustrations and Response Strategies
- How Helping Relationships Make a Difference

THINK OF A CHILD!

Challenging Behaviors

Take a moment to reflect on behaviors a child exhibits that make life challenging.

- What does your child do?
- When do these behaviors occur?
- What do you do?

Challenging Behaviors

- Behaviors which disrupt social exchanges, including learning
- Inflict harm on others or destruction of property
- Often little remorse and poor impulse control
- Typical limit-setting strategies often ineffective
- Are not related to developmental processes

Con't

- Are not understood as normal responses to situational variables
- Are not related to illness or disability
- May be related to neurological, sensory and regulatory problems.
- May be related to real life events that challenge trust, security and control.

Or

*Any behavior that
adults don't like
and want to stop!*

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*Each child's story is different
and we must be like
detectives in seeking answers
and solutions!*



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*Each child's story is different and we must be like **detectives** in seeking answers and solutions!*

Underlying Assumptions About Problem Behaviors

Problem behavior is the result of **unmet needs.**

Problem behavior is a way to **communicate.**

All behavior has meaning not all meaning is readily apparent. "**Misbehavior is not always Misbehavior**"

Understanding Unmet Needs

An unmet need is seen when child is unable

to delay meeting that need

to express the need

to elicit a positive, helpful response from others

Addressing Unmet Needs

Identify behaviors that isolate a child and address them one by one.

Assume that the child does not know the right way and that the child is willing to or capable of change.

AND.....

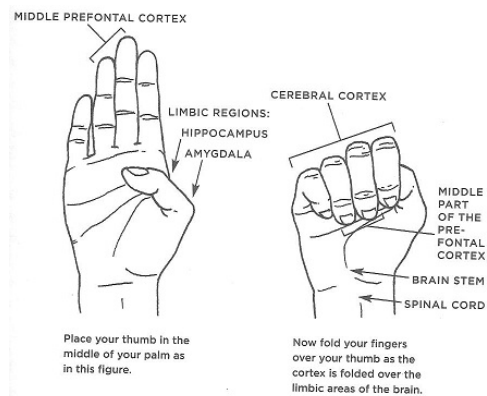
We must get in CAHOOTS with ourselves!

- What is happening in **YOUR mind** and BRAIN? (Mindsight)
- What is **YOUR amygdala** doing?
- What **MEMORIES** or history are being stirred up in **YOU**? (Transference- Resonance)
- What is happening and is being conveyed by **YOUR AFFECT, GESTURES, MOVEMENT, PACING, VOICE and WORDS?**

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Dan Siegel – “Hand Model of the Brain” (Mindsight, 2010)



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Checking in with your own amygdala!

When is the last time you flipped your lid?

- Turn to someone sitting next to you and discuss
 - The last time you felt really stressed or anxious.
 - What you did? Did you “flip your lid”?
 - How you calmed and regulated?
 - Did you do it yourself?
 - Did someone help you?
 - If so what did they do and was it really helpful???

So when you flip your lid what is going on in your autonomic nervous system?



Autonomic Nervous System

This system affects our biological self regulation.

It controls many organs and muscles within our body.

You are probably not even aware that this system is at work.

There are two major elements to this system.

Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS)

This system is for acceleration and results in quick action. This might be something like increased heart rate and rapid breathing.

Adrenaline is the hormone that is involved in acceleration.

When this system is activated for too long, a person becomes hyper-alert and experiences a depletion of energy.

A hyper-alert state often results in a hyper-sensitive response; **fight, flight or freeze**. This may be triggered in inappropriate situations.

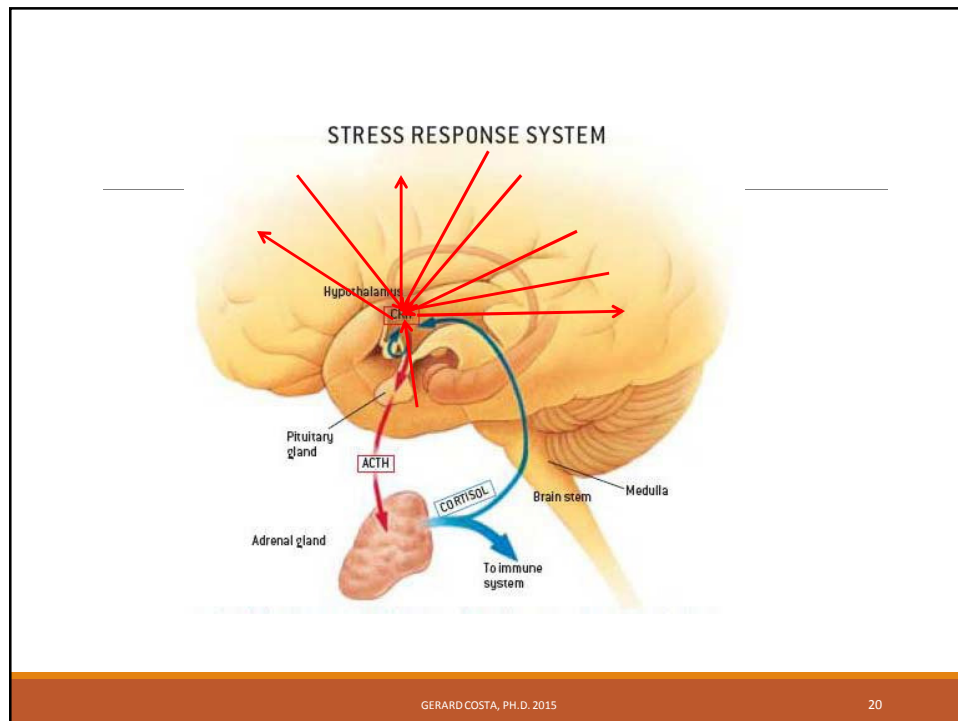
Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS)

This system is for recovery, slowing down to a condition of rest.

Cortisol is the hormone involved in recovery.

The need for too much de-acceleration can result in a hypo-active state; prolonged lethargy or withdrawal. Zoning-out.

Excessive activation of the SNS demands excessive activation of the PNS. This can result in a reduced ability to recover from fight, flight or freeze.



Now let's be a detective for a child you know.

For many children, challenging behaviors are related to how the child perceives the world.

They may have neurobiological vulnerabilities that transform typical experiences into ones which are experienced as powerful and dangerous stimuli and which overwhelm the child's capacity to regulate his or her emotions and behaviors

Regulation vs. Dis-Regulation

- ❖ Sensory systems in-sync = REGULATION/READY TO LEARN
- ❖ Sensory systems out of sync = DIS-REGULATION/DIFFICULTY ENGAGING, LEARNING
- ❖ Dis-regulation related to responses to sensory input, where the responses are not adjusted to the situation. Child may have difficulty maintaining an optimal level of arousal and adapting to changes in daily life.

Ultimately we want a child to be able to self-regulate

This means a child can:

- -Attain, maintain and change one's level of energy to match demands of a task or situation
- -Monitor, evaluate, and modify one's emotions
- -Sustain and shift one's attention when necessary and ignore distractions
- -Understand both the meaning of a variety of social interactions and how to engage in them in a sustained way
- -Connect with and care about what others are thinking and feeling – to empathize and act accordingly

Shanker 2013

What do we know about the development of self-regulation?

Children acquire the ability to self-regulate by first being regulated by others...co-regulation.

Adults around children need to be optimally regulated themselves

Regulating a child involves modulating the intensity of stimuli in order to engage and sustain the child's attention

The DIR Basic Model

Greenspan and Wieder

Considers

- The child's emotional developmental level
- The Individual differences in sensory, processing and motor planning.
- The nature of the child's relationships and affective interactions

For many children, challenging behaviors are related to how the child perceives the world.

One recent example of this appeared in a recent Journal of Neuroscience article, where it was reported that sight and sound do not appear integrated in children with ASD.

Another way of saying this...

They may have neurobiological vulnerabilities that transform typical experiences into ones which are experienced as powerful and dangerous stimuli and which overwhelm the child's capacity to regulate his or her emotions and behaviors

Understanding Behavior and Emotion in Children

What are the child's behavior and affect attempting to communicate?

What factors in the child's biology (sensory, regulatory, constitutions, state), psychology (history, experiences, developmental level), and social experiences (environment, family, culture) can we address to enhance the child's communication?

Six Organizing Principles

1. Consider the distinction between competence and performance.
2. Internal and external factors can moderate performance.
3. All behavior is meaningful and occurs within a context. Not all meaning is inherently clear.

4. Behavioral and affect regulation are enhanced through primary caring relationships.

5. Misbehavior is not always misbehavior.
6. Purposeful, organized and shared behavior requires the integration and cooperation of biological, psychological and social factors.

Considering the Whole Child

- Physical
- Mental
- Psychological
- Emotional
- Spiritual

Distinction between Reacting

Vs.

Responding

Your Child

Do any of these characteristics sound familiar?



Importance of Observation

*"You can observe a lot
by watching."*

-Yogi Berra

Function of Challenging Behaviors

Positive: ("I get what I want or need")

Obtain Objects

Obtain Activities

Obtain Attention

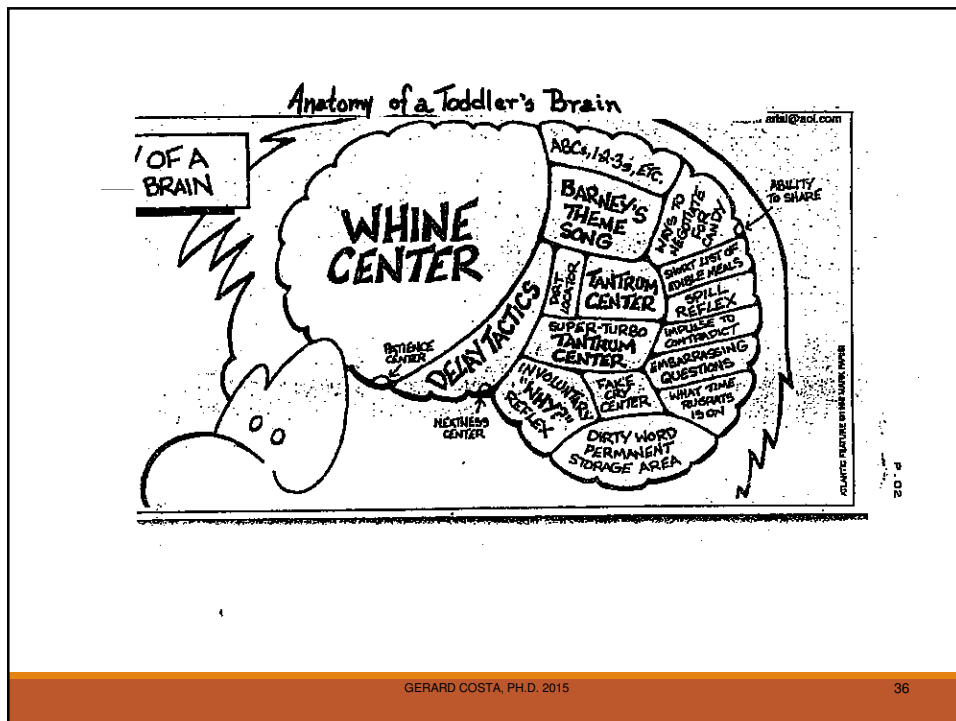
Obtain Sensory input

Negative Behaviors

Avoid/Escape:

- Objects
- Activities
- Attention
- Sensory Input
- Challenging
- Behaviors

From: DEC booklet: *Practical Ideas for Addressing*



Language of Behavior

The Language of Behaviors

He's aggressive you say...

“Perhaps. But imagine what it takes for a child to strike an adult-- his only source of survival. Imagine the depth of terror behind the bravado-- like a parachutist slashing at the very ropes that protect him. Imagine that depth of hurt...”

L. Tobin, What do You Do with A Child Like This? Inside the Lives of Troubled Children. 1991

The Language of Behaviors

The isolated child...

“I’ve never known a child to isolate himself by choice -- never-- maybe because of a lack of opportunities or a lack of skills. But never out of true choice-- never!”

L. Tobin, What do You Do with A Child Like This? Inside the Lives of Troubled Children. 1991

The Language of Behaviors

He’s just willful and oppositional...

“There is something to be admired about children who can stand up to you and tell you what they think of you. It is a raw courage that, when channeled and nurtured, will serve them well. They will do all right in life, eventually...”

L. Tobin, What do You Do with A Child Like This? Inside the Lives of Troubled Children. 1991

The Language of Behaviors

“Why do I steal? Why not? I’m not sure anybody cares what I do or what I want. So I take what I want, I want something from you that is a part of you...and you...and you...”

L. Tobin, What do You Do with A Child Like This? Inside the Lives of Troubled Children. 1991.

The Language of Behaviors

He is disrespectful, won’t even take his hat & coat off

...

“So many troubled children keep jackets or caps on during the day. They need the physical protection for a fragile psyche; or perhaps they simply don’t feel welcome and are keeping themselves ready to leave. The jacket will come off when the child feels a sense of purpose & belonging.

L. Tobin, What do You Do with A Child Like This? Inside the Lives of Troubled Children. 1991

When an Adult Says

*“There’s no reason
to be upset.”*

The Child May Feel

*“You are denying
what I feel.”*

When an Adult Says

“You poor thing.”

The Child May Feel

*“I don't like when you
feel pity for me.”*

When an Adult Says

*“I’ll tell you what
your problem is.”*

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The Child May Feel

*“Don’t be a
psychologist. Listen to
me first”*

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When an Adult Says

“Why did you do that?.”

The Child May Feel

“I am confused. I don't know why.”

When an Adult Says

*“That must have
been pretty hard for
you?”*

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The Child May Feel

*“Thanks for listening
to me.”*

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Steps for Dealing with Difficult Behaviors

Take action-don't just depend on words.

Validate feelings, not behavior. Accept the feelings, not the behavior. ("I know you are mad, but you can't throw blocks.")

Acknowledge the child's intent/desire. Use words to show you understand what he wants to do. ("You want to play with the water, but you can't splash it on Mary.")

Steps for Dealing with Difficult Behaviors

Teach alternatives. **Show and Tell** them what to do. Young children often don't know "what to do instead." Move to another spot and let play with water.

Re-direct. Help him do something in a more acceptable way. "You can't throw blocks, someone might get hurt. Let's throw the ball in the basket."

Use logical consequences: "We have to put the blocks away for a while. We can try them later. Want to play with the trucks?" Later offer the blocks again to allow him to practice appropriate play.

Steps for Dealing with Difficult Behaviors

Limit the use of Time-Out: Time-out does not teach correct behavior, it may help some children calm down.

Avoid any shame-based consequences

Important to know how each child can be soothed (being held, rocked, left alone).

Give age-appropriate chances to make choices.

Be clear and consistent about rules.

Help child learn to “wait”

Some additional Strategies

(Partly based on ideas from Alice Eberhardt-Wright)

- ▶ One-to-one shadowing – help to predict and prevent behavior by offering alternative expressions, and empathic support
- ▶ Wonder about the meaning and origins of the behavior and address the root causes

Con't

- ▶ Provide staff with mental health consultation and regular reflective supervision
- ▶ Set behavioral limits/controls- with clearly stated rules and reasonable, logical and fair consequences that promote self control and empathy for those affected

Con't

- ▶ Offer alternative expressive activities (e.g. gestures, play, words, drama, etc.)
- ▶ Offer quiet, regulating places and activities
- ▶ Plan thorough evaluations
- ▶ Communicate regularly with parents and caregivers

Con't

- ▶ Design and make changes in the environment that promote healthy behavior
- ▶ Always speak to children respectfully, firmly and clearly
- ▶ Offer negotiation and alternative behaviors
- ▶ Remain in control – don't escalate to match the child's level of arousal and excitement

Con't

- ▶ Refer child and family for mental health services and supports when needed
- ▶ Provide support, encouragement and cheerleading when all goes well!

Helping Children Speak a New Language!

- ▶ Give attention to positive behaviors and expressions of needs
- ▶ Humor and reframing! Indispensable in working with troubled kids!
- ▶ Give children power and remind them of their powerful moments.

Helping Children Speak a New Language!

- ▶ Have the courage to make a decision and stick to it

BUT.....

“A good intervention, whether simple or sophisticated must have heart. It must come from a place of caring. If it fails to honor the child or fails to honor you, apologize and let it go.”

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*Relationships
are the key!*

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