

Suggested Curriculum Adaptations for Working with Children with Challenging Behaviors

Clearly Defined Work/Play Areas

One of the foundations of a successful preschool program is a safe, organized learning environment divided into meaningful play areas and stocked with interesting learning materials. Skillful classroom design minimizes distractions and behaviors while promoting purposeful play and social interaction. Ways to clearly define work and play areas include:

- non-movable furniture boundaries dividing the work areas of the room into well-defined interest areas for distinctive types of play
- floor plan set up in such a way as to prevent wide open spaces or straight running areas
- enclosed work areas to minimize wandering or running
- at least one quiet "safe place" in the classroom where any child can go to relax, calm down, or escape overwhelming stimulation
- materials available for a wide range of developmental abilities
- fluid materials (sand and water) are available each day

Consistent Daily Routine

As required by the Pre-K SPED program, each classroom must have a consistent daily routine and a visual schedule posted where all children can see it and interact with it. All children need to have a sense of routine and predictability to their day in order to feel safe and confident. Having a visual schedule and helping children to use it is the "front line" of defense against behavior problems in the classroom.



Visual schedules may use photographs of children actually involved in each part of the daily routine or color pictures or picture symbols.

Picture symbols for the classroom schedule can be downloaded from the Pre-K SPED website at <http://preskese.dadeschools.net>, click on Resources, then Boardmaker Downloads.

Transition Routines and Cues

Many children, whether typically developing or with special needs, have some trouble transitioning from a favored activity. A consistent routine with consistent adult expectations is essential. In addition, the following sensory cues of an upcoming change can help head off challenging behaviors at transition time: verbal warnings, visual schedules, transition songs, blinking lights, sound/music cues, etc.

Relaxation Techniques

Developed by Dr. Becky Bailey, these breathing techniques help students (and teachers) relax and feel more focused. They may be used during greeting time (for a fresh start of the school day), at transition times, or throughout the day, as needed. Relaxation techniques should be taught at times when children are not upset. Such techniques should also be practiced in the Safe Place in the classroom. Teachers may choose to make posters, key chains, or even a large cube labeled with the symbols.

- Pretzel
- Bunny Breathing
- Butterfly Breathing
- Be a STAR (Stop/Smile, Take a deep breath, And Relax)
- Draining
- Ballooning



For more information on Relaxation Techniques, Dr. Becky Bailey or Conscious Discipline, contact Maria de la Vega at the Pre-K SPED District Office.

Picture symbols for the Relaxation Techniques can be downloaded from the Pre-K SPED website at <http://preskese.dadeschools.net>, click on Resources, then Boardmaker Downloads.

Daily Commitments

As safekeepers, the adults commit to create an environment where children feel safe and confident to take risks that are essential for thinking and learning. The students in your class will help keep the classroom safe and supportive by making commitments and following them daily. The Daily Commitments symbols are designed to provide visual support and are accompanied by short poems to help teach these skills. Developed by Dr. Becky Bailey, the Daily Commitments include (1) gentle touches, (2) helpful words, (3) sharing toys, (4) listening to others, (5) keep it safe, and (6) help a friend. These commitments can be discussed during greeting circle and reviewed during other parts of the day.

For successful implementation, it is important that the adults notice and describe when children accomplish a commitment. For example, "Sofia, you gave your friend a marker so he could write, that was helpful."



Front and back of Daily Commitments cards

For more information on the Daily Commitments, Dr. Becky Bailey or Conscious Discipline, contact Maria de la Vega at the Pre-K SPED District Office.

Picture symbols for the Daily Commitments can be downloaded from the Pre-K SPED website at <http://preskese.dadeschools.net>, click on Resources, then Boardmaker Downloads.

Safe Place

The Safe Place is a small, yet vital area in the classroom. Students may come or be guided to the Safe Place to relax or regain composure during a difficult time. The Safe Place is filled with items that may help students relax including lotion, stuffed animals, or different sensory materials. The Safe Place may be housed in the book area or house area. Typically it is located in a quieter spot in the classroom. **The Safe Place is NOT a time out. A safe place provides access to positive reinforcement; a time out removes the child from access to positive reinforcement.**

Useful items for relaxation in the Safe Place may include:

- Visuals of Relaxation Techniques
- Pillows, bean bag, rocking chair
- Blankets
- Books/books on tape
- Water bottle with floaters
- Play dough/squishy, stress relief balls
- Stuffed animals
- Photo album of friends/family members
- Choice board with calming activities



For more information on the Safe Place, Dr. Becky Bailey or Conscious Discipline, contact Maria de la Vega at the Pre-K SPED District Office.

I Love You Rituals

Developed by Dr. Becky Bailey, I Love You Rituals are simple games with the sole purpose of interaction through acceptance. These delightful moments are shared between adult and child in order to strengthen a relationship, create trust, and develop a true sense of unconditional love.

An example of an I Love You Ritual:

**A wonderful woman lived in a shoe.
She had so many children
She knew exactly what to do
She held them,
She rocked them,
And tucked them in bed.
"I love you, I love you,"
Is what she said.**

These moments of interaction involve eye contact, touch and presence (being there). As a result, children become more cooperative with authority figures since they have created a trusting relationship.

For more information on I Love You Rituals, Dr. Beck Bailey or Conscious Discipline, contact Maria de la Vega at the Pre-K SPED District Office.

Picture symbols for the I Love You Rituals can be downloaded from the Pre-K SPED website at <http://preskese.dadeschools.net>, click on Resources, then Boardmaker Downloads.

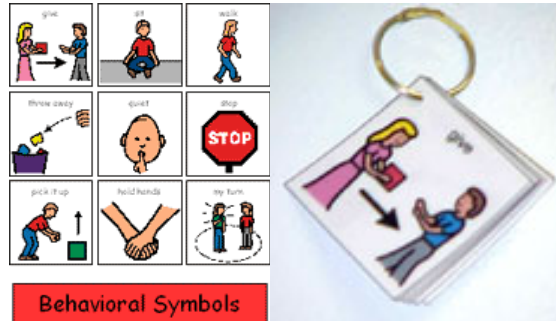
Communication Strategies

Sometimes, children may appear to act out or have behavior issues because they struggle to understand the language or are unable to verbally express themselves. If a student is cognitively young or has language concerns, you may want to explore the use of communication strategies and tools as a way to reduce the child's frustration and challenging behavior.

For more information, contact a member of the Tech Team at the Pre-K SPED District Office.

Behavior Cue Symbols

Behavior cue symbols are visual cues used by the teacher or paraprofessional to reinforce verbal directions and expectations of student behaviors.

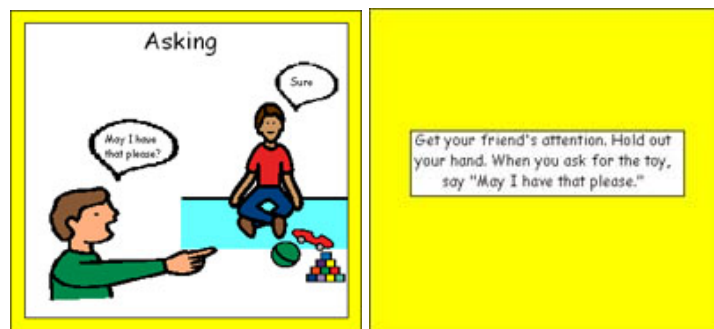


The behavioral cue symbols shown here are cut apart, laminated and carried on a ring or a string.

Behavior cue symbols can be downloaded from the Pre-K SPED website at <http://preskese.dadeschools.net>, click on Resources, then Boardmaker Downloads.

Social Skills Posters

These posters are designed to provide visual support and a verbal script for teaching social skills. These posters have been developed to be taught in a specific order (1) get your friend's attention, (2) giving, (3) asking, (4) give a play idea, and (5) give a compliment. These strategies should be discussed and reviewed during greeting circle and other parts of the day. Once teachers see the students practicing a skill naturally (without reminders), he/she should introduce the next skill in the series.



Front and back of the social skills posters

For more information about the social skills posters or social skills strategies, contact Paula Blair at the Pre-K SPED District Office.

Social skills posters can be downloaded from the Pre-K SPED website at <http://preskese.dadeschools.net>, click on Resources, then Boardmaker Downloads.

Clearly Defined Personal Space

Some children need a concrete sense of space when working with or near other children/adults. The following items help give children a sense of space and help with on-task behavior (and may need to be paired with teacher proximity):

- Placemats, plastic containers, trays to contain table top materials
- Carpet square or other floor markings to sit on in areas for group times
- Educube chair (with or without a tray), see below



Timer

Young children live in the present and are naturally active, curious and mobile. The time they spend at any one task increases as they mature. Some children have difficulty maintaining engagement/attention to a task for even an age-appropriate amount of time and this can seriously affect their learning. A kitchen timer (or other visual timer, see below) set at increasing increments of time paired with a reinforcer can help these children gradually increase the time they are able to stay on task.



Time Timer from www.timetimer.com

Individual Schedule

In addition to a classroom schedule, a teacher may have one or more individual schedules in the classroom for students who need more structure and assistance at transition times. The individual schedule may be made of photographs, picture symbols or even objects, depending on the needs of the student. An individual schedule is designed to be concrete and interactive, with the student manipulating the symbols for each transition. It may help the child know where he/she is supposed to be; guide him/her to an activity, and/or let the child know what is expected of him/ her.



For more information on setting up an individual schedule, contact the Autism Support Specialist at the Pre-K SPED District Office.

Picture symbols for an individual schedule can be downloaded from the Pre-K SPED website at <http://preskese.dadeschools.net>, click on Resources, then Boardmaker Downloads.

Mini Schedule

In addition to a classroom or an individualized visual schedule, a teacher may choose to use or create a mini schedule for a student for a particular part of the daily routine, for example, walking to the classroom or outside time. A mini visual schedule is a picture representation (often paired with a reinforcer) of:

- a segment of the daily routine
- steps to complete a task
- a number of tasks that must be completed in sequence
- an out-of-the-ordinary routine (field trip, etc.)
- behavioral expectations within a task or activity
- or any other series of events that are unique to the student

By using a mini schedule, the teacher breaks down a challenging part of the daily routine into smaller steps. The mini schedule may be made of photographs, pictures, or even objects, depending on the needs and developmental level of the student.



For more information on creating a mini schedule, contact the Autism Support Specialist at the Pre-K SPED District Office.

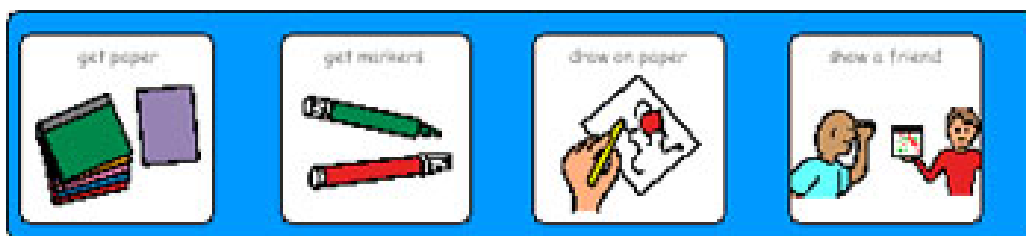
Task Cards

A teacher may choose to use or create a task card to provide visual support and break down an activity or task into smaller steps for example, washing the baby or drawing with markers (see below for examples). The task card is usually made of photographs or pictures depending on the needs and developmental level of the student.

Teachers may choose to laminate and place task cards in the corresponding areas of the classroom or on the shelf where the materials for that activity/task are stored. Teachers may also choose to utilize such visuals during small group time or when introducing a new activity.



An example task card for the steps to "washing the baby" with pull off symbols.



An example of a task card for drawing with markers.

Some task cards have been developed and can be downloaded from the Pre-K SPED website at <http://preskese.dadeschools.net>, click on Resources, then Boardmaker Downloads, but teachers are encouraged to create task cards customized to a student's interests, developmental level, and needs.

Work Basket Systems

Work basket systems are a visually discrete, systematic way for a child to receive and understand information regarding independent completion of a task.



Work basket systems:

- clarify the teacher's expectations of student performance
- organize a student's approach to work
- increase a student's motivation and productivity
- teach cause and effect
- enable the student to work independently

The system consists of three baskets, each labeled with a different color or a shape. A corresponding mini schedule with matching labels helps the student complete the baskets in order. The baskets/tasks are presented and completed from left to right, and placed in a finished box.

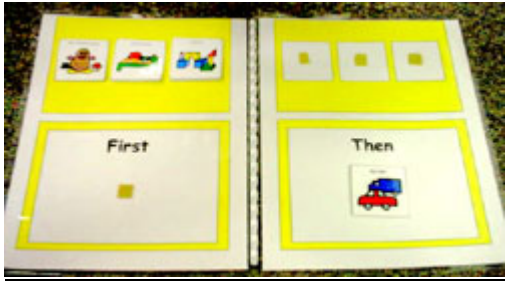


Things to remember about work basket systems:

- There should only be one task per basket!
- Materials in baskets must be tasks that the child can already do independently!
- You can start with one basket at a time and build up until the child can complete three baskets independently.

For more information on setting up a work basket system, contact the Autism Support Specialist at the Pre-K SPED District Office.

First/Then Board

A first/then board is a tool that provides a visual support to help a student understand or anticipate an expected behavior and reinforcer. The student or teacher may choose what reinforcer is used. Reinforcers may be changed when necessary for motivation. Teachers can use picture symbols, objects, or even stick figure drawings with a dry erase marker for representations on the boards. Suggestions for use include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers may choose to have the student first participate in a new activity (something a student would not choose on his or her own such as blocks, sand table or Mr. Potato Head) and then the student receives a reinforcer (something the student enjoys, such as playing with cars). Or first the student participates in a non-preferred activity and then gets a preferred activity. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers may choose to have the student first behave in a particular way and then receive a reinforcer. In this case, the board becomes a small behavior/reward system. For example, first the child sits on the floor, and then the child gets a hug. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers may choose to use the first/then board as a reminder at a particular time of the day. "First wash your hands, and then go to snack." Or, "First play in the sand, and then dump your shoes." 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers may use this as a turn taking strategy. First Jose is on the computer, and then Tanya uses the computer. 	

For more information on creating a first/then board, contact the Autism Support Specialist at the Pre-K SPED District Office.

Behavior/Reward System

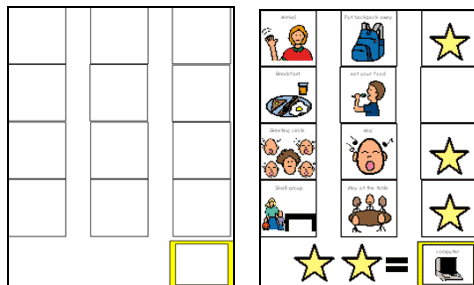
A behavior/reward system is a highly individualized system used to target the development of pro-social behavior(s) across parts of the daily routine. An interactive picture symbol display helps a student develop initiative in controlling his/her own behavior.

To set up a behavior/reward system:

1. Place daily routine pictures on the left side of paper.
2. Place a picture of each target behavior next to each part of daily routine.
3. Place a picture of the chosen reward/reinforcer (based on child's interests) next to the picture of each target behavior.
4. Make copies of each page and staple together a "day's worth" of pages
5. Keep in folder with child's name and symbol on cover of folder.

Implementation:

1. Review with child ahead of time using the pages to explain the behavior/reward system book
2. Make sure child knows before each part of the daily routine what behavior is expected of him/her and what the reward will be.
3. If child is successful with the behavior chosen, let him/her put a sticker on top of the "behavior" picture and give him/her the reinforcer.
4. At the bottom of the page, note how many stars/stickers/etc. will be need to be earned to receive the reinforcer. At the beginning, a child may earn only one star/sticker/etc. to get a reinforcer but later would need to earn 3 or 4.
5. Send home the days' pages at the end of each day, so the parent can see and reinforce at home.



A blank template and an example of a behavior/reward system page.

The blank template for the behavior/reward system can be downloaded from the Pre-K SPED website at <http://preskese.dadeschools.net>, click on Resources, then Boardmaker Downloads.

For more information on creating a behavior/reward system, contact the Autism Support Specialist at the Pre-K SPED District Office.

Social Story

A social story is a short story written in a specific style and format. It is written to help a child anticipate or understand social situations and the relevant cues and consequences associated with those situations. Common elements of a social story include:

- The situation is presented using positive, matter-of-fact language: "After snack time it is time to go outside."
- The situation is described in the third person but reflect the child's unique perspective: "Sometimes it is hard to go to outside."
- Relevant social/environmental cues are given as alternatives for challenging behaviors: "When it is time to go outside, one can hold a friend's hand or a teacher's hand."
- Relevant consequences are given to show causality: "Holding hands in the hall keeps us safe."
- Specific adult support is described and reinforced throughout the story: "My teacher will hold my hand to keep me safe."
- To make a social story developmentally appropriate for young children, simple language and predictable text should be used: "It's fun to go outside!" (repeated as appropriate for emphasis).

For more information on creating a social story, contact the Autism Support Specialist or a member of the Tech Team at the Pre-K SPED District Office.