

Behavior Has Meaning: An Introduction to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health



Presented by: Lynn Floravit, M. Ed

Amanda Harrison, MA, LPC, NCC

Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program

The Pennsylvania Key



... 15-Minute ...
In-Service Suites

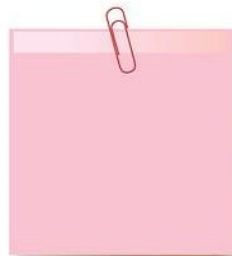
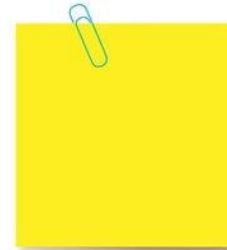
BEHAVIOR HAS MEANING



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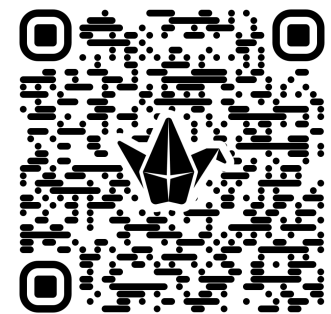
Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning

Keywords from Video Activity



Objectives

- Explain the importance of children's behavior as communication
- Analyze and interpret the meaning of children's behaviors
- Cover strategies that address children's behaviors and build a supportive environment



Behavior

- What is behavior?
- What do you believe about young children and their behavior?



How We Communicate



- All behavior is a form of communication and has meaning
- Children give us cues to help us understand what they want to communicate long before they have words

“I’m trying to tell you something!”



Behavior



Every communicative behavior can be described by its form and function.

Form (What) vs. Function (Why)

- **Form:** the behavior used to communicate. What **is** the behavior?
- **Function:** the reason behind the communicative behavior. What is the **purpose** of the behavior from the child's perspective?

15-Minute In-Service Slices **TIPS FOR FAMILIES**
BEHAVIOR HAS MEANING

FORM & FUNCTION

Children let us know their wants and needs through their behaviors long before they have words or verbally express their feelings. They give us cues to help us understand what they are trying to communicate.

Each behavior has a reason or purpose and it is up to adults to figure out what the child is trying to communicate.

Each behavior has a:

FORM = the behavior the child is using to communicate
AND A
FUNCTION = the meaning of the behavior

Here are some examples of common forms and functions.

- Your infant cries about 30 minutes after she has had her bottle. The **FORM** is crying and the **FUNCTION** could be that she is tired and ready for a nap or is wet and needs a new diaper.
- You announce that dinner is ready, but instead of coming to the table, your preschooler runs around the living room. The **FORM** in this example is running around the room and the **FUNCTION** could be that he is excited that you made his favorite meal.

As you interact with your child, look for different behaviors that your child shows you and try to figure out the meaning of the behavior. When you respond to your child's efforts to tell you what they want or need, they feel valued and important. They learn that you will "hang in there" and try to understand what they are communicating through their behavior.

Below is a list of common behaviors and their possible meanings to better help you figure out what your child is trying to communicate with their behaviors.

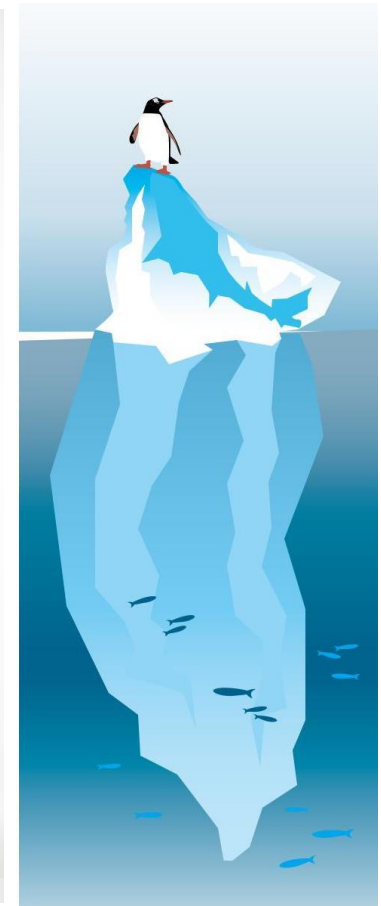
CHILD'S AGE	FORM	POSSIBLE FUNCTION
Infant	Crying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm hungry • I'm tired • I'm wet
Toddler	Biting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I want the toy another child has • I'm teething
Preschooler	Hitting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel mad or frustrated • I want you to stop talking on the phone and play with me

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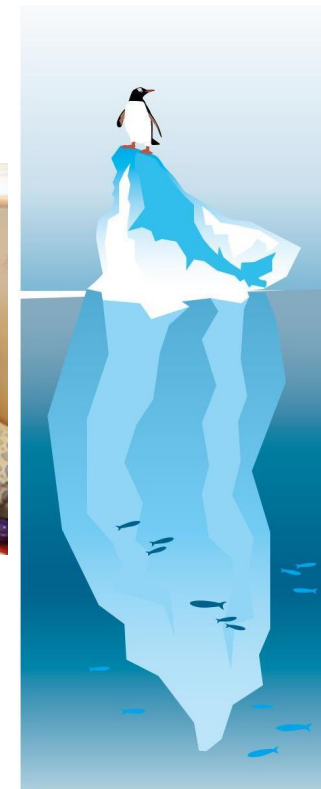
Forms of Communication

- Crying
- Cooing
- Reaching for caregiver
- Kicking their legs
- Gaze aversion (looking away)
- Squealing
- Biting
- Tantrums
- Pointing
- Smiling
- Pulling adult
- Clapping
- Words
- Jumping



Functions of Communication

- Obtain an object, activity, person
- Ask for help
- Initiate social interaction
- Request information
- Seek sensory stimulation
- Escape demands
- Escape activity
- Avoid a person
- Escape sensory stimulation
- Express emotion
- Express pain or illness

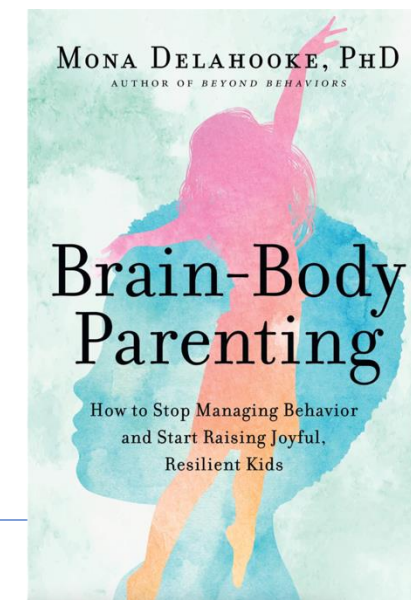
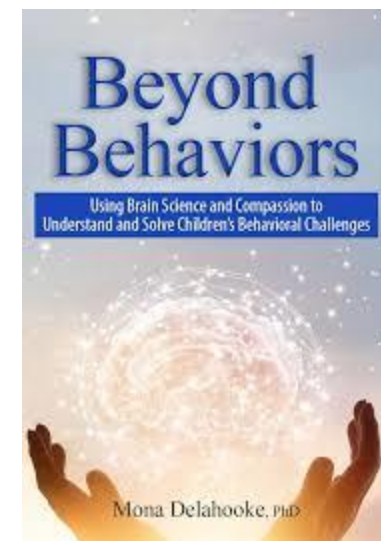
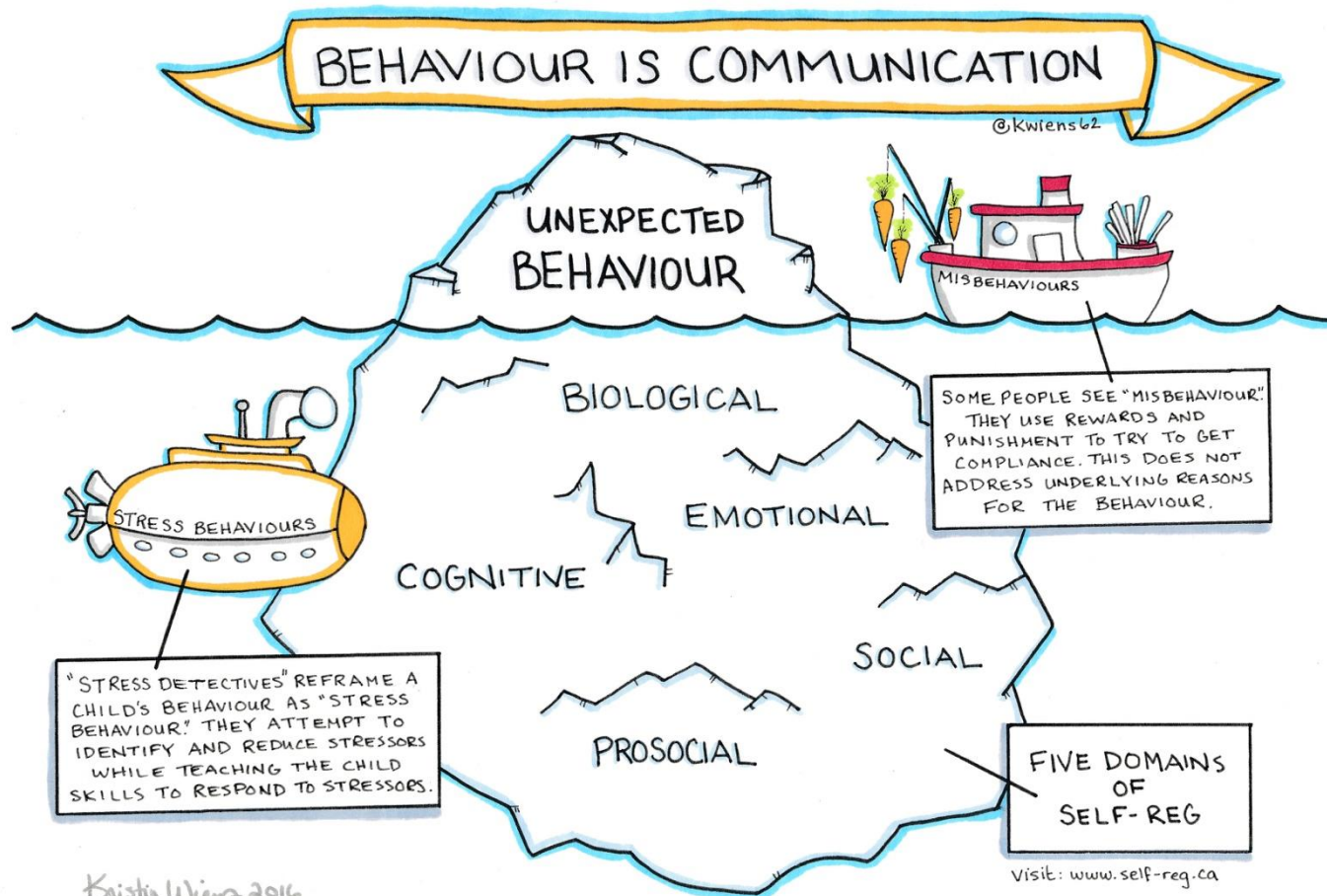


Form and Function: What and Why

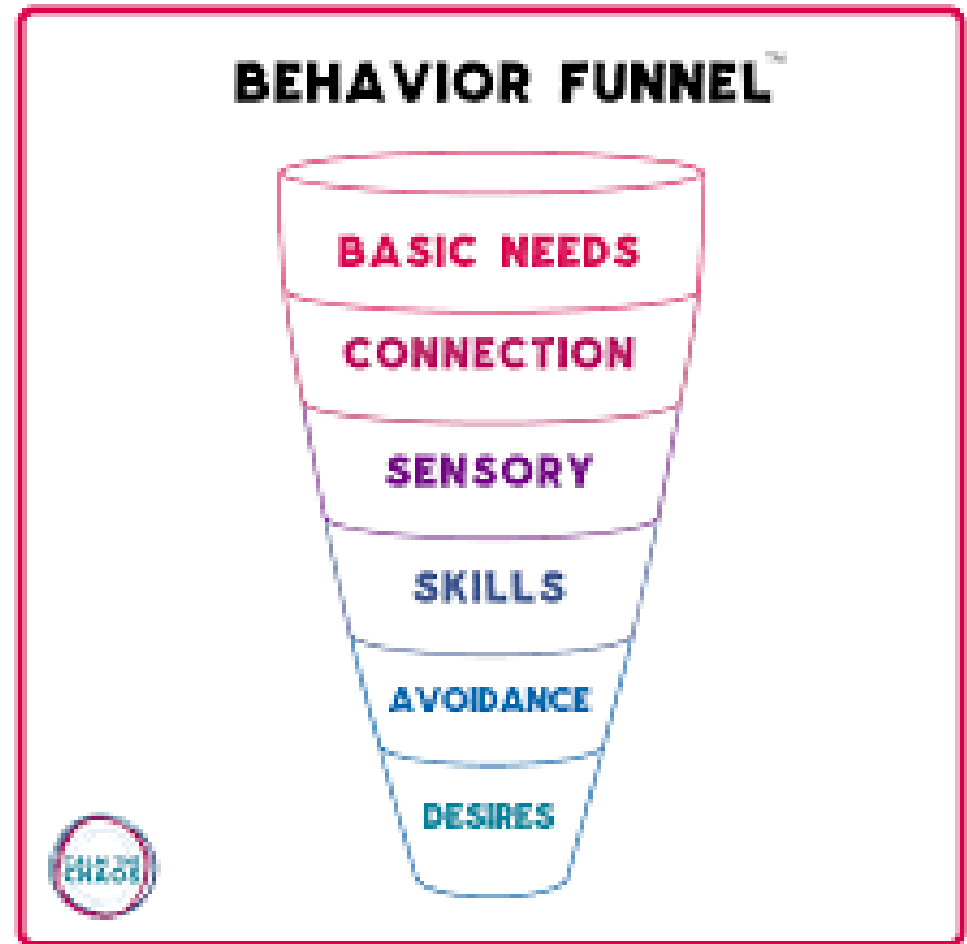
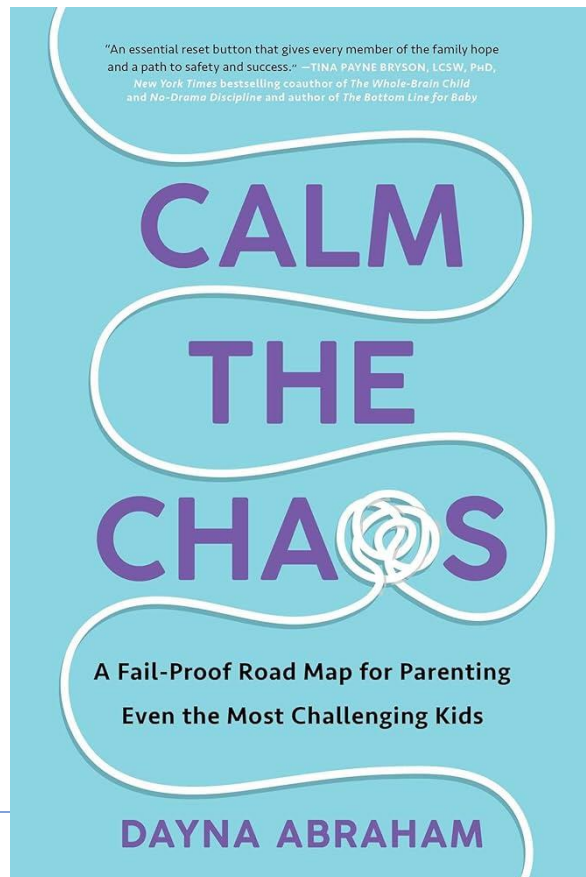
- A single form of behavior may serve multiple functions
- Multiple forms of behavior may serve a single function



Behavioral Iceberg: WHAT



Function: Why?



More Things to Consider

What else might impact behaviors?

Trauma/ACEs

Biological
Reasons

Developmental
Delays



What do you know of the
classroom you currently serve?

ABUSE



Physical



Emotional



Sexual

NEGLECT



Physical



Emotional

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



Mental Illness



Incarcerated Relative



Mother treated violently



Substance Abuse



Divorce



Behavior Has Meaning

Why is it important to understand children's behaviors?



- Children feel valued and important
- Children feel like competent and confident communicators
- Children learn to communicate their intentions, feelings, and emotions

Behavior Has A Purpose



Behavior Has Meaning: Video Example 1



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Behavior Has Meaning: Scenario

Mom has left five-month-old Jenna in center care for the first time. It's been a rough two weeks so far for mom, baby, and the caregivers. When mom leaves, Jenna bursts into tears and screams. She only calms down when held by a teacher. Whenever they need to put her down, she immediately starts crying.

What are your initial thoughts?

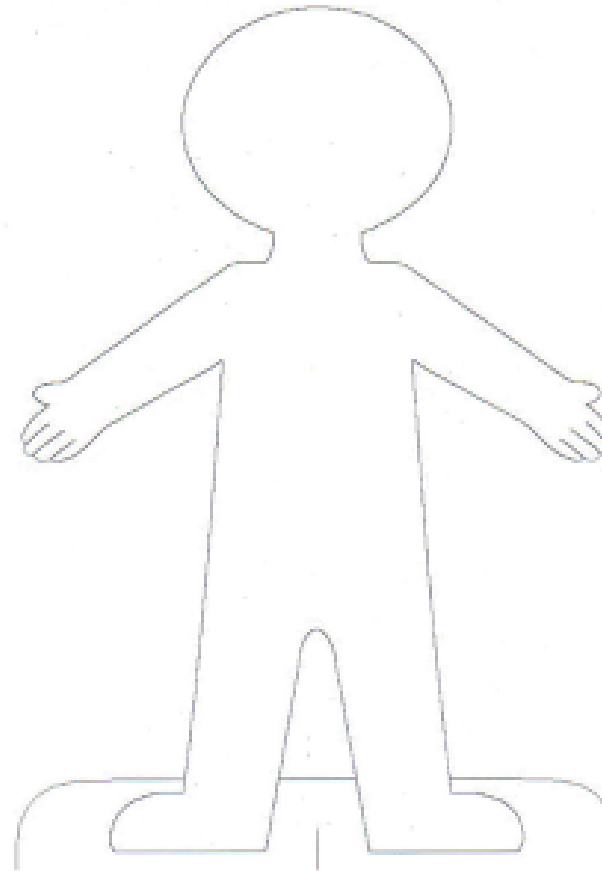
Behavior Has Meaning: Video Example 2



Your
"Button
Pusher"



Resolution: 300x300 px • Free Photoshop PSD file download: www.psdgraphics.com



NCPM Hot Buttons

Write three behaviors that "push your buttons."

1.	2.	3.
----	----	----

Write the emotion word that describes the way each of these behaviors makes you feel.

1.	2.	3.
----	----	----

What is the impact of your feelings? How do you respond to each of these behaviors? Write down how you respond towards a child when he or she displays each behavior.

1.	2.	3.
----	----	----

How do these behaviors and your response impact the relationship you have with the child?

1.	2.	3.
----	----	----

How do the child's behaviors and your response impact the relationship you have with the family?

1.	2.	3.
----	----	----

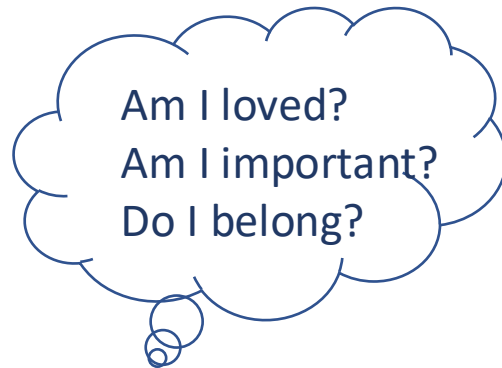
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Calm Chaos Trigger Strategy- Danya Abraham



Reframe: Attention Seeking to...Connection Seeking



Reframing
"ATTENTION SEEKING"
by looking beyond behaviour to unexpressed needs

 CONNECT WITH ME <i>(Connection Seeking)</i> SEE ME, HEAR ME, ACCEPT ME; SHOW INTEREST & DELIGHT IN ME; HOLD ME IN YOUR MIND	 UNDERSTAND ME <i>(Attunement Seeking)</i> CONSIDER & RESPOND TO MY NEEDS; ORGANISE, VALIDATE & HOLD MY FEELINGS; BE CURIOUS ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING FOR ME	 PROTECT ME <i>(Attachment Seeking)</i> SEE MY EXTREME DISTRESS AND THE DIFFERENT WAYS IT IS BEING EXPRESSED; SUPPORT ME TO REGULATE; HELP ME TO FEEL SAFE
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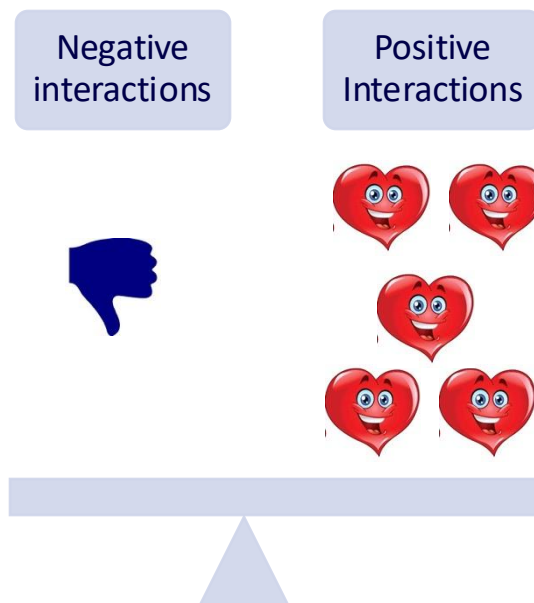
Hidden Treasure with Tracey Farrell

“The kids who need the most love will ask for it in the most unloving of ways.” –Russell A. Barkely

A relationship is the KEY: A child who connects with their teacher is a child who trusts, feels safe, and is motivated to behave.

How to build a
stronger sense of
connection and
belonging?

5:1



Behavior has meaning; how we respond holds value



Interpersonal experiences directly influence how we mentally construct reality. This shaping process occurs throughout life but is most crucial during the early years of childhood. (Siegel, 1999)

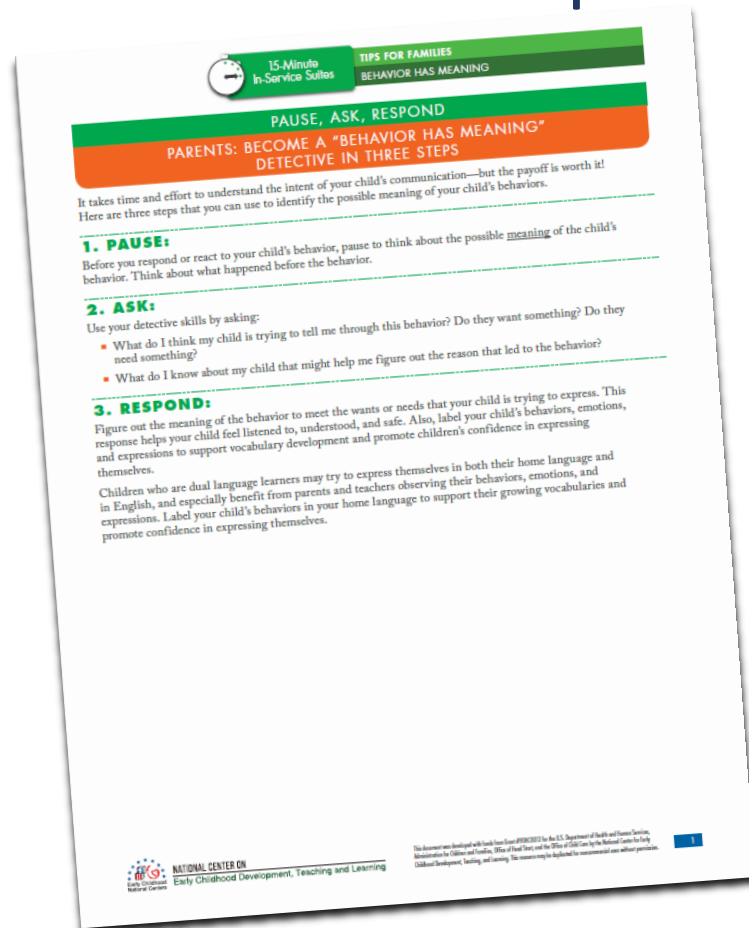
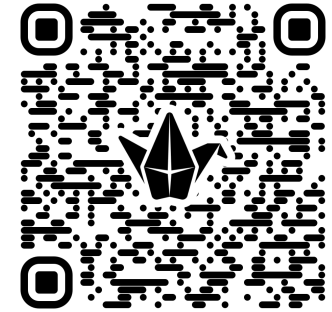
Relationships Have Impact

Play can be a powerful tool for learning and engagement.

- As adults, we can talk about our feelings; children don't often have the words to fully communicate their feelings and instead may play out their feelings.



Relationships Have Impact



Why is it important to understand children's behaviors?

- Relationships are the intervention
 - Adults build nurturing and responsive relationships with children
- Adults pause before they react
- Adults determine what skills we need to model and teach children

Be a “Behavior Has Meaning” Detective



1. Pause
2. Ask
3. Respond



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Self-Care for Teachers

Regulating your responses
when children's behaviors
push your buttons



challengingbehavior.org/document/self-care-for-teachers/



Review Sticky Note Paper Activity



Resources and Handouts

