Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

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Helping Children Learn to Manage Their Own Behavior

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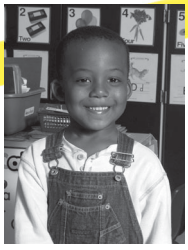

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SERIES
WHAT WORKS BRIEFS

Helping Children Learn to Manage Their Own Behavior

This *What Works Brief* is part of a continuing series of short, easy-to-read, "how to" information packets on a variety of evidence-based practices, strategies, and intervention procedures. The Briefs are designed to help teachers, parents, and other caregivers support young children's social and emotional development. They include examples and vignettes that illustrate how practical strategies might be used in a variety of early childhood settings and home environments.

Teaching young children to manage their own behavior allows teachers to spend more time teaching and less time dealing with occurrences of challenging behaviors in their early childhood classrooms. For example, every day following art activities, Ms. Susan asks the children in her class to put the art supplies away, put their creations in their cubbies, and gather together on the rug for story time. David, a 4-year-old boy in her class, often leaves everything on the table and wanders around the room instead. To help David participate in this classroom routine, Ms. Susan might give David a chart with photographs that illustrates the desired steps, walk him through the steps, and then ask him to mark on the chart each day whether or not he completed each step. This visual aid will not only remind David of what he is expected to do, but it will also show him what steps he needs to work on in order to complete the desired task. Ms. Susan will provide positive attention to David for successfully completing the steps of the task. The goal will be for David will learn to manage his own behavior.

What Is Self-Management?

Self-management is used to teach children (typically 4 years of age and older) to pay attention to their own behavior and to complete activities or engage in interactions using appropriate behavior. Self-management can help children use appropriate play and social interaction skills, participate in classroom routines, and engage in instructional activities. For example, self-management can be used to teach children what is expected of them, such as tasks they are supposed to do. In the above example, Ms. Susan is helping David learn the steps for cleaning up one activity and preparing for the next one. Self-management procedures can help children keep track of whether or not they completed these tasks. Children can learn to monitor their own behavior and control their own actions through using these self-management techniques.

How Can I Facilitate Self-Management?

In order to help children learn to monitor their own behavior, teachers should ask themselves the following questions:

- ⇒ Is the child able to make an accurate self-assessment of his or her behavior?
- ⇒ What is the child's current level of self-management skills?
- ⇒ What is it that interests or engages the child that may be used to begin a self-management program?
- ⇒ Are there any factors or challenges that the child faces that need to be considered before implementing a self-management plan?
- ⇒ What goals do I have for the child and the classroom or home environment in using a self-management plan?

How Does Self-Management Work?

Step 1: Teachers should assess the child's current level of self-management skills to accurately report on his or her behavior. For example, the teacher may ask a child as he sits to eat snack, "Did you wash your hands?" If the teacher has just observed the child sit at the table without washing his hands yet he responds that he did wash his hands, the teacher will realize that the child cannot accurately assess his behaviors. It is easier to have children assess behaviors around activities in which they are currently engaged. Some children may not be able to accurately assess their own behaviors and may need to be taught how to self-assess prior to using a self-management program. Teachers may need to teach children to correctly report if they did or did not perform a task that the teacher asked about, such as getting a drink of water, putting away a backpack, or returning a book to the shelf.

Step 2: Teachers can identify what observable behaviors they want the child to learn to self-manage. Each step should clearly describe what the child should do. For example, David may be taught that when told to "clean up," he should stop playing, pick up toys, place them on the shelf, and take a seat in the circle area.

Step 3: Once the behaviors have been identified, they are visually displayed for the child using photographs or drawings on a poster, on a sheet of paper, or in a booklet. The child is given a way to monitor his behaviors using a checklist or chart

that shows the activity with a place to indicate whether the child performed the step correctly (with a check mark, smiley face, sticker, thumbs up/thumbs down). You may want to laminate the chart or checklist and use a wipe-off marker so that it is reusable, or you may want to make a chart that the child can take home to share with his family.

A goal of the chart or checklist is to teach the child how to independently engage in appropriate behavior. It is not to be used to punish or withhold activities. It may be used to chart special activities or materials that the child earns. Sometimes children respond well to the use of an earned "special" activity if they complete the chart. Examples of special activities may be reading a book with the teacher, playing with a specific toy, or having time on the computer. If the self-management chart includes a special activity or material, the child can choose the special activity. A visual representation (such as a photo or picture cut out from a catalog or magazine) of the special activity can then be placed on the chart as a reminder of what the child can earn when the chart is complete.

Step 4: The child is taught to engage in the desired behaviors and then to monitor his or her performance. Once the chart is prepared, the teacher should review the chart with the child after the activity or routine has occurred. The teacher can review the steps that are listed on the chart and explain how the child's performance will be marked. For example, "The second picture shows 'I put the toys on the shelf.' If you put the toys on the shelf, we are going to mark a 'thumbs up.' If you did not put the toys on the shelf, we will mark a 'thumbs down.' Let's think about what happened. Did you put the toy on the shelf? Yes, you did. We can mark a 'thumbs up.'" Once the teacher has reviewed the system with the child and he or she believes that the child understands it, the teacher should try it out the next time the activity or routine occurs. During the activity, the teacher can remind the child of the behaviors on the chart. When the activity is over, the teacher can help the child mark the chart. Another way to teach the use of the self-management system is for the teacher to mark a chart and the child to mark a copy of the chart and then compare the two charts.

Step 5: The teacher provides positive attention or feedback to the child while the child is learning the self-management system. When the teacher gives the child feedback for using the chart, the teacher should praise him for engaging in the behavior and the accuracy of his ability to self-manage. Over time, the teacher can gradually provide less assistance for using the chart. The goal will be to get the child to use the chart independently until the child does the behavior easily and no longer needs the self-management system.

Who Are the Children Who Have Participated in Research on Self-Management?

Studies that show the effectiveness of self-management have been conducted with young children who have behavior problems, children with developmental delays, children at-risk, and children with identified disabilities. Research has been conducted in a wide variety of settings, including Head Start and special education classrooms, inclusive child care programs, and family homes. Research has been conducted with children from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Nevertheless, teachers should be cautious when using self-management procedures, making sure that these procedures are culturally, linguistically, and individually appropriate for the children. For example, the teacher may want to meet with members of the child's family to discuss their perspectives about expectations for their child's independence and to decide about expectations for independent behavior in the classroom.

What Changes Might Occur as a Result of a Self-Management System?

Self-management systems are designed to teach children how to engage in appropriate behavior, independently. Over time, the teacher should decrease his or her assistance and support children to use self-management independently. If a child misses a step or does not complete the chart, the teacher should gently redirect the child to complete the step and encourage the child to try harder the following day or during the next appropriate activity.

When self-management procedures are carefully implemented, positive changes in behavior can be expected.

When self-management procedures are carefully implemented, positive changes in behavior can be expected. Self-management procedures are most effective when the teacher implements the program systematically and monitors the child's progress. When a child has difficulty with the process or is not making progress, the self-management system must be reviewed, and additional instruction or new procedures may be needed.

If we were to look into Ms. Susan's classroom a few months later, we would see that David is independently putting his art supplies and art project away, and coming to story time with the other children. He appears to enjoy the satisfaction that comes from completing a task by himself. Eventually, David will not need to use his chart to remind him of what to do. Ms. Susan is relieved that she does not have to spend so much time dealing with David's behavior and is happy to see that David is more independent as a result of the self-management process. In fact, several of the other children became curious about David's chart and his enjoyment of the process. Ms. Susan found that she was able to use the same type of monitoring system for other children in her class. The children still have a long way to go, but the environment in the classroom seems to be more positive and responsive to the children, and the children seem to be gaining more independence each week.

We welcome your feedback on this What Works Brief. Please go to the CSEFEL Web site (http://csefel.uiuc.edu) or call us at (217) 333-4123 to offer suggestions.

Where Do I Find Information on Implementing This Practice?

(See the CSEFEL Web site (http://csefel.uiuc.edu) for additional resources.)

Carta, J. J., Estes, J. S., Schiefelbusch, J., & Terry, B. J. (2000). *Project Slide: Skills for learning independence in developmentally appropriate environments*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West (available from http://www.sopriswest.com).

What Is the Scientific Basis for This Practice?

For those wishing to learn more about the topic, the following resources provide more information:

Atwater, J. B., Orth-Lopes, L., Elliott, M., Carta, J., & Schwartz, I. (1994). Completing the circle: Planning and implementing transitions to other programs. In M. Wolery & J. S. Wilbers (Eds.) *Including children with special needs in early childhood programs*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Connell, M. C., Carta, J. J., Lutz, S., & Randall, C. (1993). Building independence during in-class transitions: Teaching in-class transition skills to preschoolers with developmental delays through choral-response-based self-assessment and contingent praise. *Education and Treatment of Children, 16*(2), 160-174.

Fowler, S. A. (1986). Peer-monitoring and self-monitoring: Alternatives to traditional teacher management. *Exceptional Children, 52*(6), 573-581.

Kochanska, G., Koy, K. C. & Murray, K. T. (2001). The development of self-regulation in the first four years of life. *Child Development*, 72, 1091-1111.

Landy, S. (2003). *Pathways to competence: Encouraging healthy social and emotional development in young children.* Baltimore: Brookes Publishing.

Reinecke, D. R., Newman, B., & Meinberg, D. L. (1999). Self-management of sharing in three pre-schoolers with autism. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, 3*(3), 312-317.

Sainato, D. M., Strain, P. S., Lefebvre, D., & Repp, N. (1990). Effects of self-evaluation on the independent work skills of preschool children with disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 56*(6), 540-549.

Strain, P. S., Kohler, F. W., Storey, K., & Danko, C. D. (1994). Teaching preschoolers with autism to self-monitor their social interactions: An analysis of results in home and school settings. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 2*(2), 78-88.

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