

Guiding Principles

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

Prevention

As a general rule, efforts are much more beneficial and cost-efficient if they serve to prevent, rather than repair, social and emotional distress and challenging behaviors. The training modules emphasize the importance of implementing universal strategies that can promote resilience and prevent the emergence of social and emotional difficulties.

Comprehensiveness

Efforts to address child social and emotional development must consider all aspects of child and family functioning and the views of all key stakeholders (e.g., family, caregivers, children, administrators). These training modules promote the important involvement of the family system and the need to consider staff support in the design of effective interventions.

Intensity

It is critical to recognize that while many occurrences of challenging behavior and social and emotional distress can be prevented by universal program and family practices, there are children and families whose needs require individualized and intensive intervention and support. The training modules include a focus on building the capacity of providers to meet the needs of children with the most significant behavioral challenges through positive behavior support.

Clear Criteria for Efficacy

The CSEFEL is committed to disseminating information that is based on evidence-based practices and principles. All of the information and strategies presented within the training modules are based in the efficacy research literature.

Cost and Time Efficiency

A vital consideration is that the evidence-based practices that are promoted by the Center be feasible and that the issues of cost and time efficiency to use the practices be considered. These training modules include information that has direct practical application within natural settings.

Long-term Essential Outcomes

In selecting intervention approaches, the importance of long-term outcomes for children, families, and providers must be considered. These training modules are based on the perspective that enhancing the lives of children and families is the primary agenda of intervention practices. In that regard, quick-fix interventions that do not build the capacity of children, families, and providers are not included in the training.

Family-Centeredness

The social and emotional needs of children may reflect the needs of the family, and the most crucial resources available to children are most often those of the family. An underlying principle of the training modules is that all recommendations and assistance efforts must involve the family, and individual support efforts must be driven by the family's input and the family's goals. Respect for diversity among families is necessary.

Cultural Sensitivity and Competence

The children, families, and programs that are the ultimate beneficiaries of this Center's efforts are extremely and increasingly diverse. All training materials are geared to the cultural and linguistic diversity in the targeted programs and regions and include the promotion of culturally competent practices.

Definitions

Center for Evidence-based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior

Challenging Behavior

For the purpose of the Center “challenging behavior” shall be defined as any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in prosocial interactions with peers and adults. Challenging behavior is thus defined on the basis of its effects. While some children’s challenging behaviors are developmentally normative and effectively addressed by adult vigilance and the use of appropriate guidance procedures, the Center is focused on identifying evidence-based practices that prevent and/or address challenging behaviors that are persistent or unresponsive to those approaches. Common topographies of those behaviors include prolonged tantrums, physical and verbal aggression, disruptive vocal and motor responding (e.g., screaming, stereotypy), property destruction, self-injury, noncompliance, and withdrawal.

Head Start Performance Standards (1308.8) Emotional/Behavior Disorders

1308.8-Eligibility criteria: Emotional/behavior disorders

An emotional/behavior disorder is a condition in which a child’s behavioral or emotional responses are so different from those of the generally accepted, age-appropriate norms of children with the same ethnic or cultural background as to result in significant impairment in social relationships, self-care, educational progress, or classroom behavior. A child is classified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder who exhibits one or more the following characteristics with such frequency, intensity, or duration as to require intervention:

- (1) Seriously delayed social development including an inability to build or maintain satisfactory (age-appropriate) interpersonal relationships with peers or adults (e.g., avoids playing with peers);
- (2) Inappropriate behavior (e.g., dangerously aggressive towards others, self-destructive, severely withdrawn, non-communicative);
- (3) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, or evidence of excessive anxiety or fears (e.g., frequent crying episodes, constant need for reassurance); or
- (4) Has professional diagnosis of serious emotional disturbance.

The eligibility decision must be based on multiple sources of data, including assessment of the child’s behavior or emotional functioning in multiple settings.

The evaluation process must include a review of the child’s regular Head Start physical examination to eliminate the possibility of misdiagnosis due to an underlying physical condition.

Center for Evidence-based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior

Evidence-based

The level of evidence that supports the efficacy and generality of a practice; e.g., empirical (research) evidence published in peer-reviewed journals, evaluation reports, multi-authored consensus publications, etc.