Strategies for SLPs Working with Children who have Challenging Behaviors

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- I am receiving an honorarium and payment for travel expenses.

Learning Outcomes

1. Discuss the prevalence and comorbidity of communication disorders and emotional/behavioral disorders in young children
2. Implement three behavioral supports to decrease challenging behaviors during speech and language intervention
3. Apply strategies to deescalate disruptive behaviors of children
What's the Problem with Problem Behavior?

- Longitudinal association between behavior difficulties and reduced academic achievement (Kremer, Flower, Huang, Vaughn, 2016; Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Hinshaw, 1992).

Language Disorders and Behavior

- Children with speech and language disorders often demonstrate challenging behaviors (Lindsay & Dockrell, 2000).
- Teachers frequently report that children with communication problems display behavioral and emotional issues that require intervention (Lundervold, Heimann, Manger, 2010).
Durand and Merges (2001) note that problem behaviors may serve a communicative purpose (for example, attention seeking or task avoidance).

Children experiencing difficulties expressing their wants and needs may use challenging behaviors to communicate with those around them (Bopp, Brown, & Mirenda, 2004).

**Other Factor Playing Into Behavior Challenges**

**Major Problem**

- For the period of August 2009, as many umbilical cord samples as possible were collected at 8 regionally diverse hospitals in West Virginia.
  - Tested for amphetamines, cocaine, opiates, marijuana, benzodiazepines, methadone, buprenorphine and alcohol.
  - 146 of 759 collected (19.2%) were positive for drugs or alcohol.
  - 1 in 5 babies
  - Voluntary reporting on birth certificates and other maternal questionnaires underestimated the prevalence by 2-3 fold.

- “Of all the substances of abuse, including heroin, cocaine, and marijuana, alcohol produces by far the most serious neurobehavioral effects in the fetus.” – Institute of Medicine Report to Congress
Expulsions in preschool are high…

- 2016 National Survey of Children’s Health
  - An estimated 50,000 preschoolers were suspended at least once.
  - Approximately 17,000 preschoolers are estimated to have been expelled.
  - This is the first nationally representative survey of preschool discipline that includes private preschools as well as public schools.

- Which means that, across all types of settings, the average school day sees roughly 250 instances of a preschooler being suspended or expelled.

Why are children getting kicked out of school?

- Disruptive behavior problems
  - Aggression
  - Elopement ➔ Isolation/Poor peer relationships
  - Oppositional Behavior
Trauma Impacts Behavior

- Prenatal exposure to alcohol and drugs and postnatal trauma (witnessing violence and/or experiencing abuse, neglect, or psychological harm) can impact a child’s behavior.
- Watson and Westby (2003) discovered that teachers who were unaware of children’s pre- or postnatal exposure to alcohol or drugs assumed that those children were intentionally misbehaving.
  - This view of misbehavior led to punitive and disciplinary responses instead of a trauma-sensitive approach to the disruptive behaviors of children.
  - As heroin use expands across the nation and more children experience prenatal and postnatal trauma in relation to the recent drug epidemic, SLPs must be trained in trauma-informed practices regarding challenging behaviors.

Remember; everyone in the classroom has a story that leads to misbehavior or defiance. Nine times out of ten, the story behind the misbehavior won’t make you angry, it will break your heart.

– Annette Breaux
Goldfish-Shark

--Stacey Gagnon--

• “May we all spend the day looking for the goldfish, instead of punishing the shark.”

http://www.ransomforisrael.com/the-trauma-informed-teacher-silent-front-line/

ACTING OUT CYCLE

(Colvin & Scott, 2015)

Acting Out-Cycle

• Colvin and Scott’s (2015)
  – Calm
  – Trigger
  – Agitation
  – Acceleration
  – Peak
  – De-escalation
  – Recovery

(Hinton, Keals, & Williams, 2018)
Our ability to identify and respond appropriately to the early stages of the acting out cycle may help a child return to a calm state before aggression occurs.

Hinton, Keels, & Williams (2018)

- When teachers and schools can provide consistent, positive support to students, this [negative] cycle can be broken. Such work is done incrementally through the day-to-day interactions that students have with their teachers. When teachers understand and respond to classroom behavior in positive and proactive ways, students (even with histories of disruptive behavior) will begin to re-orient their relationships with teachers and with school.

Building Relationships

Not only good for the student…but for you too!
- Interpersonal relationship formed between teachers and students was the strongest predictor for teachers’ joy (positive relation) (Hagenauer, Hascher, Volet, 2015)
Let's go through the Acting Out Cycle and Discuss Strategies at Each Stage

**Emotion Neutrality**

- Because disruptive behavior can incite maladaptive responses from us, **we must not take the disruptive behavior personally** throughout the acting out cycle.
- Although difficult, practicing emotional neutrality while dealing with negative behaviors is essential in trauma-informed care (Hinton, Keels, & Williams, 2018).

*POKER FACE*
This is the behavior that is expected in the classroom/therapy room
  – Engaged

How should we respond to the calm stage?
  – Develop your relationship
  – Positive attention

STRATEGIES FOR THE CALM PHASE

Intervention/Accommodation Strategies for CALM stage

• Prepare children for play situations using proactive statements
• Recognize and reinforce appropriate social behaviors
  – High reinforcement rate (especially early in intervention). Slowly fade reinforcement.
• Model appropriate reactions using think alouds
• Directly instruct children through role playing
  – Teach children to modify their thoughts and, thus, promote self-regulation
• Teach children strategies for response inhibition and maintaining control

PREPARE CHILDREN FOR PLAY SITUATIONS USING PROACTIVE STATEMENTS
Be Proactive!

- Be clear about behavioral expectations
- Announce transitions
- Provide positive attention when children are on-task and behaving appropriately.
  - Contingent attention – provided in response to specific student behaviors such as giving positive praise
  - Non-contingent attention – informal, interpersonal, relationship-building interactions between teachers and students.
- Empowering principle of “felt safety”

Provide children with executive function weaknesses with “surrogate prefrontal lobe” support they need to succeed

- Become the prefrontal cortex
- When children know what to expect, it reduces anxiety
- Children learn to regulate through co-regulation. “Children from trauma or from hard places, cannot self-regulate because they were never given the experience of co-regulation. They need YOU. Yes, you may be the only co-regulating adult in their life.”
- Kind and gentle
- Stick together
- Use your words
- Show respect
- Accept no

Create routines in your therapy

- A book
- A song
- A handshake
Picture schedules

- Using a visual schedule can develop a positive routine of looking for information and thus increase flexibility and the ability to cope with life’s ups and downs in the future.
- A visual schedule provides a clear external structure for the school day, and may be physiologically calming for students.
  - Although activities should vary throughout the day and week, the routine of using a visual schedule can provide safety and predictability.
  - Classroom staff is responsible for varying the sequence of events regularly (i.e., math is first on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays and reading is first on Tuesdays and Thursdays), while ensuring that the visual schedule is used consistently to provide information to students.
  - Ultimately, the visual schedule can teach students that a change in the sequence of activities is acceptable because the routine of using the visual schedule is consistent and reliable.

Considerations when developing picture schedules

1. Form of representation
2. Length of schedule and presentation format
3. Methods for manipulating the schedule
4. Location of the schedule
5. Initiating use of schedule

Visual timers
Recognition and Reinforcement

High reinforcement schedules

• Recognize, recognize, recognize
• No seriously.....
• RECOGNIZE

Beyond good job....

• Be specific
• Be timely
• Be consistent

• The other side may say…
  – Positive behavior systems undermine a child’s ability to develop intrinsic motivation for good behavior

MODEL APPROPRIATE REACTIONS USING THINK ALOUDS
Think-alouds

- Allow children to “eavesdrop” on your social thinking
- Verbal mediation—use of language “self-talk” to develop self-control and responsible social behavior
  - Consider thinking aloud about a variety of social skills
    - Inferential thinking—“(when my friend talks to me with that kind of voice, it makes me think that she might be mad”)
    - Perspective taking—“(I bet that Sam might be sad or angry if I took away the toy he is playing with.”)

Think-alouds

- With think-alouds….
  - We can model how to manage anger and handle disappointment for children.
  - We can also model remaining calm as naturally occurring disappointing, scary, frustrating and difficult situations happen throughout the day (for example, when something breaks in the classroom or there is a fire drill).

DIRECTLY INSTRUCT CHILDREN THROUGH ROLE PLAYING

Teach children to modify their thoughts and, thus, promote self-regulation

Couldn’t find a meme for this one….lol
Role Playing is a powerful tool in your therapy room

- Materials: Stuffed animals, puppets, action figures, dinosaurs, anything
- Practice the script positively (kind and gentle, accept no)
- Practice the script negatively
- Keep practicing and practicing and practicing

TEACH CHILDREN STRATEGIES FOR RESPONSE INHIBITION AND MAINTAINING CONTROL

Angry responses

Teach children strategies for response inhibition and maintaining control

- Help children “reframe” and modify their processes in order to substitute more neutral interpretations of events

Teach Strategies: Turtle Technique

(Greenberg, Kusche, and Quamma, 1995; Webster-Stratton & Hammon, 1997)

1. Recognize that you are feeling angry
2. Thinking “stop” Going into your “shell” and taking three deep breaths and thinking calming, coping thoughts, “It was an accident. I can calm down and think of good solutions. I am a good problem solver.”
3. Coming out of your “shell” when calm and think of some solutions to the problem.
• Student is triggered
  – Triggers can be social, cognitive (frustrated with learning task), emotional, or physiological (hunger/tired)
• How should we respond to the trigger stage?
  – Change the setting or task
  – Offer positive attention
• The most important thing: Begin to recognize triggers

TRIGGER and AGITATION STRATEGY:
Playful engagement
• Karyn Purvis (author of *The Connected Child*)
• *Are you askin’ or tellin’?*

• Child may be demonstrating frustration with physical signs (tapping, rocking)
• How should we respond in the agitation phase?
  – Redirect
  – Change an activity or offer choices within the activity
  – Provide coaching with calming strategies (take a break, belly breaths)

TRIGGER and AGITATION STRATEGY:
ATTUNEMENT
• Karyn Purvis
• Attune to the child through verbal and nonverbal nurturing communications
  – eye contact
  – voice and inflection
  – body position
  – safe touch.
Attunement

Example of No Attunement

- Inconsistent or non-compliance with directions
- Attempts to provoke SLP or other students
- Negative attention seeking

How should we respond in the acceleration phase?
- Remain calm and attempt to redirect
- Acknowledge feelings
- Make high-probability requests
- DO NOT ARGUE, USE SARCASM, OR OFFER NEGATIVE REMARKS

Physiology of Agitation (Tackie, Nixon, & Keels, 2018)

- When an emotional reaction to a trigger is observed in a child, a physiological response inside of his/her brain is also occurring.
- When a child is deep within the flight/fight/freeze response, neurochemicals are flooding the brain and activation of the frontal lobe is depressed.
  - A child in this state is typically not able to think or act logically.
  - He or she will not be able to follow multiple-step directions or engage in a conversation about the misbehavior.
- It is critical that the SLP be aware that things a child says and does when he/she is in an agitated emotional state are not well thought out or personal attacks.

De-Escalate

Chill Chill he ain't worth it. you on probation son

http://theretapstore.com
It is essential that SLPs consider what is said and how it is said before, during, and after a challenging behavior (Tackie, Nixon, & Keels, 2018)

TO DE-ESCALATE:

• It is important that instruction is given in short and simple phrases.
• Repetition of the instructional phrases can be useful, but it is critical to consider the tone of voice and facial expressions when repeating instructions.
• Ultimatums around compliance should also be avoided. However, it is okay to set limits.
• Arguing or being combative is usually never effective in reducing agitation in children.
• The Satori Alternative to Managing Aggression (SAMA) script offers useful tips for how an educator might acknowledge and validate the agitation in the child while providing him/her with coaching about solutions (Tackie, Nixon, & Keels, 2018).

Satori Alternative to Managing Aggression

1. Can you tell me what is bothering you?
2. Are you feeling upset? What can I do to make you feel better?
3. Can you tell me what you need?

What are you worried about? (short answer)
4. Should we talk about what is going on?
5. For you’re __________ about __________, what might help?

What are you worried about?
What are you feeling?
What do you need?

What are you thinking about?
What are you feeling about?
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Karyn Purvis’ Suggestions for Peak Stage

- Contain the violence while remaining calm and reassuring.
- Formal training in an intervention (restraint) accepted by state laws or regulations of your organization.
- When the violence passes, the caregiver remains with the child or youth until the connection is re-affirmed and the youngster feels safe and secure again.

Sustained Connectedness
(Purvis, Cross, Dansereau, Parris, 2013)

- Ultimate goals—
  1. Guide the child to appropriate behaviors and responses
  2. Child to know that a safe adult will help them regulate until they are able to regain self-regulation.
- Negotiation is a critical component of all Karyn Purvis’ strategies,
  - Our goal is to give voice to children who have lost their voices.
  - “Negotiation is vital in both proactive and responsive strategies because many harmed children and youth have learned to use violence, manipulation, control, or triangulation to keep themselves safe and to get their needs met.”

- Calms down
- May avoid talking about the incident
- How should we respond in the recovery phase?
  – Debrief about the incident
  – Discuss triggers and make plans for preventing
Comprehensive Behavior Plans

- Some examples of strategies that a therapist might utilize include:
  - strategic seating arrangements in group sessions
  - explicit rules that are stated in a positive manner
  - signaling transitions with visual schedules/timers and music
  - frequent proactive statements regarding social and behavioral expectations
  - creative routines that build connection and bonding
  - consideration of culture and students interests in lesson planning
  - provision of frequent positive praise
  - customized behavioral plans/systems for specific children as necessary

References


Thanks…

- Lesley Raisor-Becker, PhD, CCC-SLP
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