



POSITION STATEMENT

Identification of and Intervention with Challenging Behavior

August 2007

DEC strongly believes that the early identification of children with serious challenging behavior is critical to providing effective interventions that will decrease the likelihood of poor academic and social outcomes.

There is growing evidence that young children who engage in chronic problem behaviors proceed through a predictable course of ever-escalating challenging behaviors. These challenging behaviors can lead to both short- and long-term negative consequences for the child and family. It also has been well documented that social emotional competence during the early childhood years is predictive of positive social and school outcomes in elementary school and beyond. Children who can communicate their needs and emotions in appropriate ways, form relationships with peers and adults, solve social problems, and control their emotions are more likely to be successful in school. There is a critical need to identify children with challenging behavior early in order to increase the likelihood of school success and decrease the trajectory toward more severe social and academic problems.

In order to accurately identify children who exhibit challenging behavior, comprehensive assessment approaches are needed. First, screening and assessment should be conducted in a variety of settings in which young children spend time. Second, assessment approaches should be comprehensive and include observations of children in their natural environments. Third, parents and other family members should be integrally involved in the screening and assessment process. Fourth, a team-based process that includes input from family members and professionals from a variety of disciplines should be used. Finally, assessment approaches that can be used to develop effective interventions should be included and there should be a clear link between assessment information and intervention strategies.

DEC strongly believes that partnerships between families, service providers, and caregivers in which each family's unique strengths, concerns, and responsibilities are fully recognized are critical to the design and implementation of interventions to prevent and remediate challenging behavior and to support appropriate behavior.

Effective partnerships between early educators, families, and other team members can facilitate identification of the variables that trigger and maintain the challenging behavior, followed by development and implementation of interventions that support the use of more appropriate behaviors. Effective partnerships also focus on developing strategies that build on the strengths and effective practices of team members.

DEC acknowledges the central role that families play in evaluating and addressing challenging behavior. Families may be able to share information about strategies that have been tried in the past, how their child's behavior varies across settings, the impact of challenging behavior on the family, family goals for their child's behavior, and they can implement interventions in the home and other community or natural environments. The level and type of family involvement should be determined by the family, based on family priorities, rather than prescribed by professionals or programs.

All decisions regarding the identification and assessment of challenging behavior, potential interventions, and evaluation of the effectiveness of interventions must be made in accordance with the family through the Individualized Education Plan or Individualized Family Service Plan if the child has one; or if not, through some other team decision-making processes.



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DEC strongly believes that there are effective intervention approaches that may be used to address challenging behavior and support the development of young children's social emotional competence and communication skills.

The range of interventions and supports that are effective in addressing challenging behavior can be conceptualized using the three-tiered public health model of prevention and intervention approaches. The first tier, universal practices, includes strategies designed to promote the development of communication skills, appropriate behaviors, and social competence in all children. Secondary tier interventions include the targeted instruction of social and emotional skills and effective communication skills for children who are at risk for social emotional delays or the development of challenging behavior.

At the tertiary level, individualized interventions, based on an understanding of the behavior in the context where it occurs, provide an effective approach to addressing concerns about challenging behaviors that are persistently used by a child. A functional assessment process should identify the triggers, maintaining consequences, and functions of the challenging behavior. The intervention plan then must be tailored to fit the unique circumstances of the child and the child's family, and should include strategies for teaching the child new skills in addition to problem behavior reduction and prevention strategies. The intervention plan should be designed for implementation by family members and/or early educators in all relevant environments.

In summary, DEC believes that families and early educators must work together to address challenging behavior. This will involve: a) employing comprehensive assessment approaches that include screening and identification of the triggers, maintaining consequences, and the function of behavior; b) implementing a variety of evidence-based strategies and services designed to prevent challenging behavior, to remediate chronic and intensive challenging behavior, and to teach and support social and emotional competence and appropriate communicative and adaptive behavior; and c) providing support to team members as they develop and implement intervention plans in natural environments.

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