

SUPPORTING STUDENTS THROUGH CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

Practical Tips for Adults

A few tips for adults who are working with students exhibiting challenging behaviors:

- Build connections with students before you have to intervene for challenging behavior. Interventions are easier and the student will want to work with you on the strategies.
- Talk to students in a tone that is calm and curious.
- When intervening with students exhibiting challenging behavior, try to go into the situation with a mindset of “What does this student need?” rather than “What did the student do wrong?”
- Remember that students’ behaviors are responses to things they are experiencing. While certain behaviors may be challenging to manage, we never want to label students as being “challenging” or having “bad” behavior.
- Make sure that when you feel overwhelmed by the student’s behavior that you take a pause, let yourself feel those emotions, and then go back to working with the student when you feel more calm. Students need to see adults experiencing emotions and coping with them in healthy ways.
- When you make a mistake helping a student with their challenging behavior, do not wait long to apologize to the student for the mistake. It teaches them appropriate behavior and that adults make mistakes too.
- No child is the same. Their behaviors are all different, and the strategies used to help students are different. It may take testing a few strategies before noticing a change in the student and their behavior.
- Teach the strategy in a one-on-one setting first, and then push into the classroom to support the strategy in real life. From there, conduct check-in/check-outs throughout the day for a week or two.

For each strategy, we recommend first taking time to talk with the student, using the questions provided as a starting point, and then determining what strategies will be most effective for that student. Help the student pick some strategies to try, then make a plan for following up with them using the Check In, Check Out Goal Sheet **handout**.

Communicate the intervention plan with teachers, relevant school staff, and caregivers to ensure consistent support across settings. Once the student is calm and regulated, use restorative practices to help repair harm, rebuild relationships, reflect on choices, and practice appropriate replacement behaviors rather than relying solely on punishment.