

Addressing Challenging Behavior in Early Childhood: Strategies for Teachers and Trainers

Maureen A. Conroy, Ph.D.

University of Florida

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

DEC Recommended Practices Training Series

Erlanger, KY

September 24, 2004

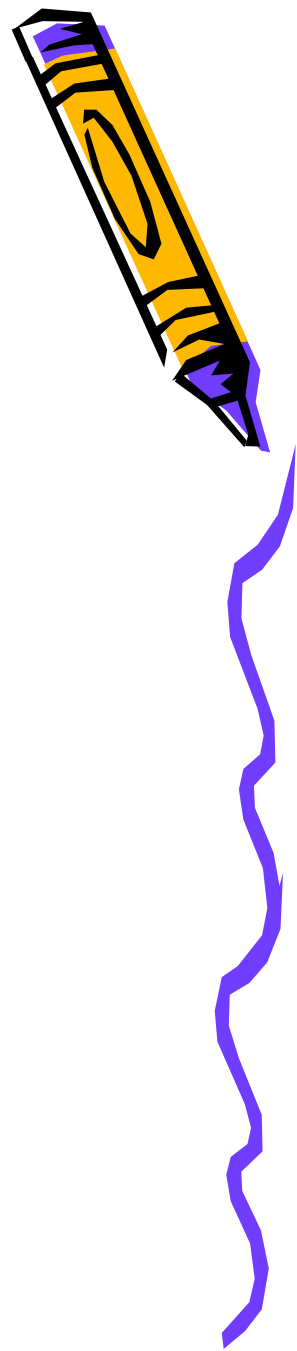
Purpose of Presentation

- Provide an overview of challenging behaviors
- Present techniques for identifying the reasons for challenging behaviors
- Describe proactive interventions for changing challenging behaviors



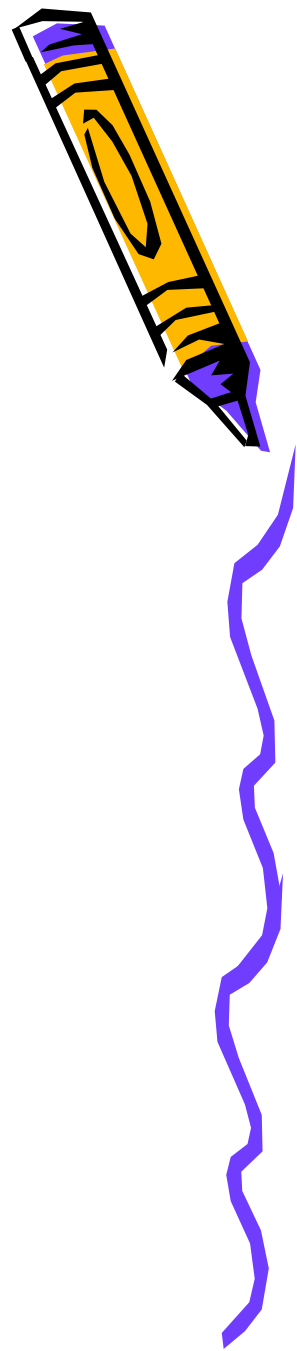
Challenging Behaviors

- Behaviors that.....
 - Cause injury to self, or others
 - Cause damage to the physical environment
 - Interfere with learning new skills
 - Socially isolate a child



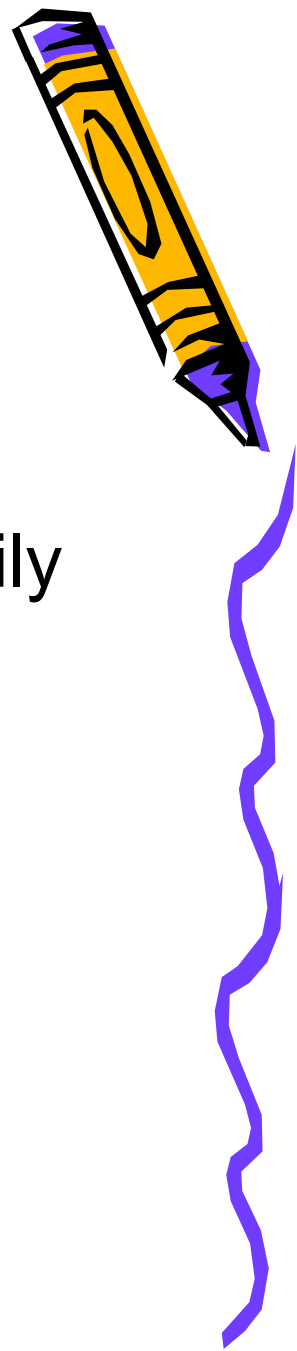
Challenging Behaviors

- Behaviors that....
 - are inappropriate for the child's developmental level and/or cultural background



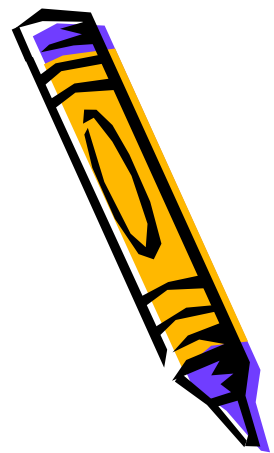
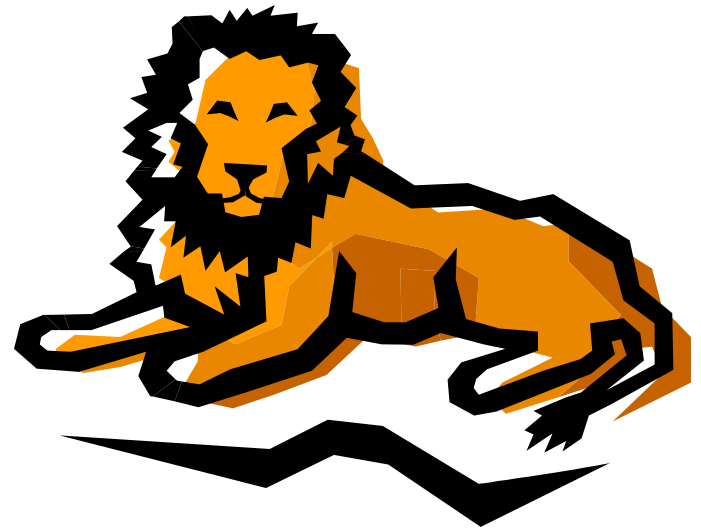
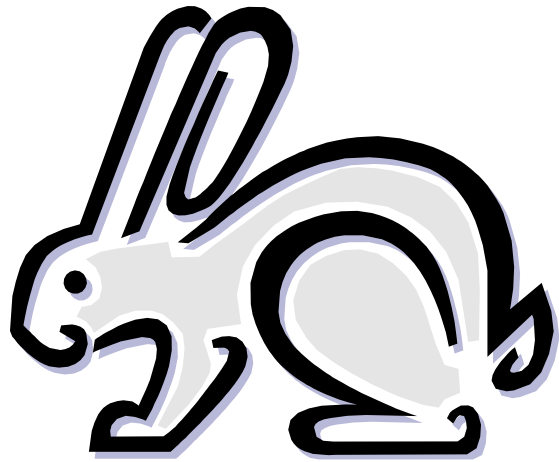
Challenging Behaviors

- Behaviors that....
 - are a challenge for educators and family members to be manage



Challenging Behaviors

- What do challenging behaviors look like?

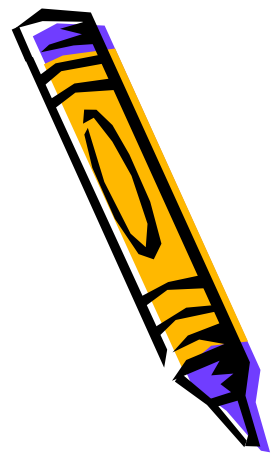


Challenging Behaviors

- How do these behaviors make us feel?



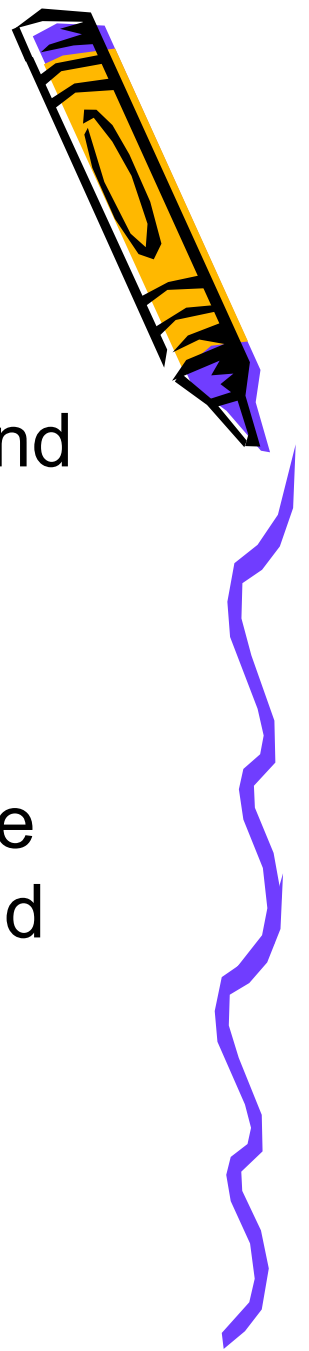
Changing Our View



- Understand ***why*** challenging behaviors happen and ***what purpose*** they serve
- Focus on ***developing a broader range of skills and outcomes*** for children
- Implement interventions for these behaviors at an early age that help children ***learn new behaviors***
- Develop ***preventative interventions*** that are practical and ongoing



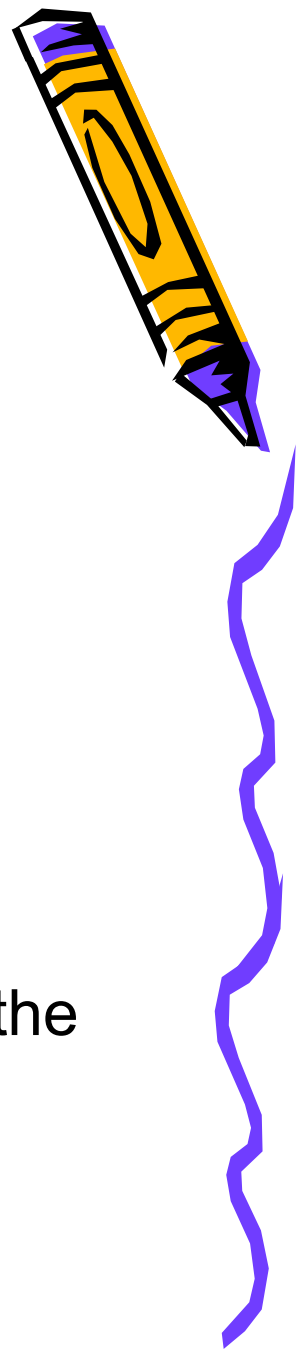
Changing Our View



- Take the problem **away from the child** and ask:
 - **Why** is this behavior occurring?
- What **changes can I make to prevent** the problem from occurring and teach the child new skills?



Understanding Challenging Behaviors



Form vs. Function

– Form

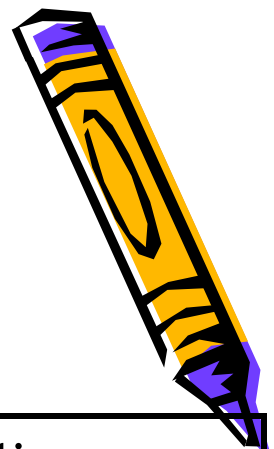
- What does the behavior **look like**?

– Function

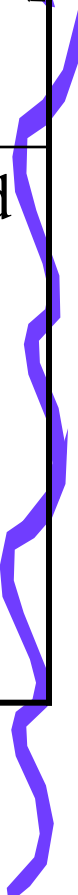
- What is the **purpose** of the behavior from the child's perspective?



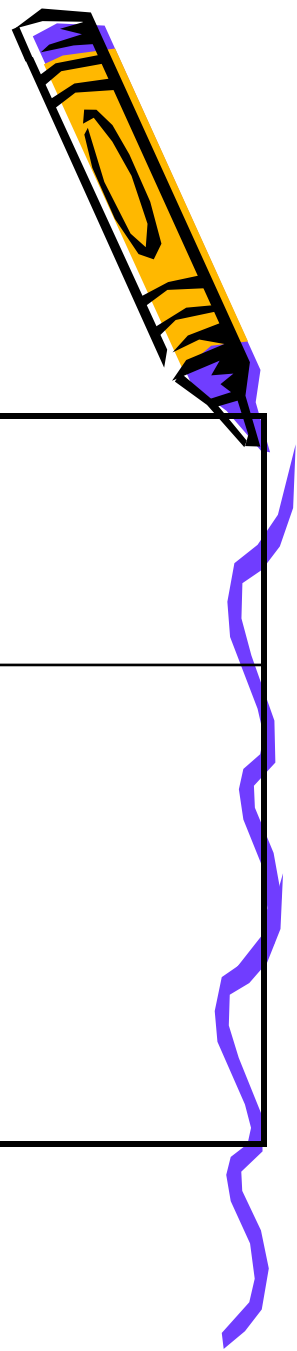
Forms of Challenging Behavior



Aggression	Tantrum	Noncompliance
Hitting Scratching Kicking Biting Throwing things Pinching Threatening	Screaming Crying Whining Cussing	Refuses to respond to a request Passive when a request is made



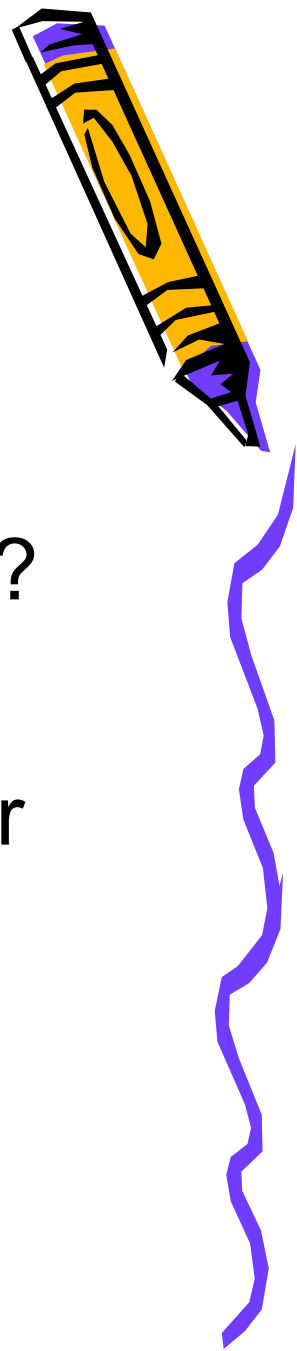
Forms of Challenging Behavior



Social Withdrawal	Self injury/ Repetitive Behaviors	Others?
Primarily plays alone Doesn't respond to peers attempts to play	Scratching self Biting self Hitting self Rocking back & forth Spinning objects	



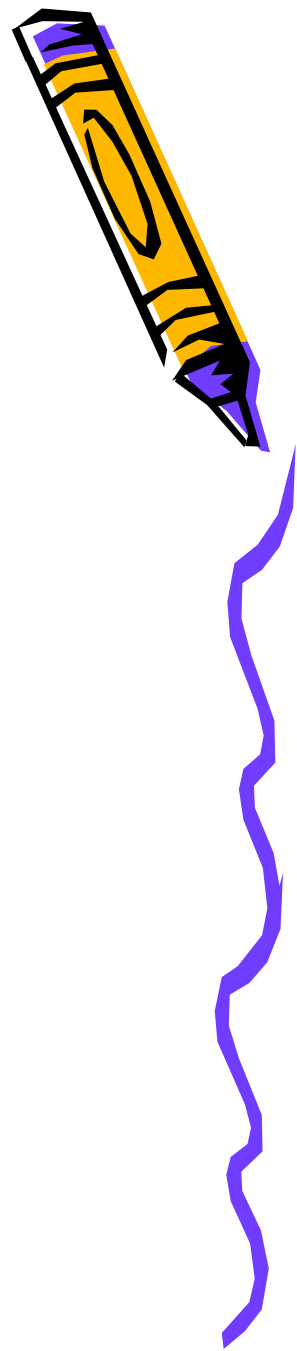
Functions of Challenging Behaviors



- **Why** do children do these behaviors?
- What is the **purpose or outcome** for the child?



Functions of Challenging Behaviors



- 3 Functions

1. Obtain something

- Attention of adult or peer
- Activity, toy, food, materials

2. Escape something

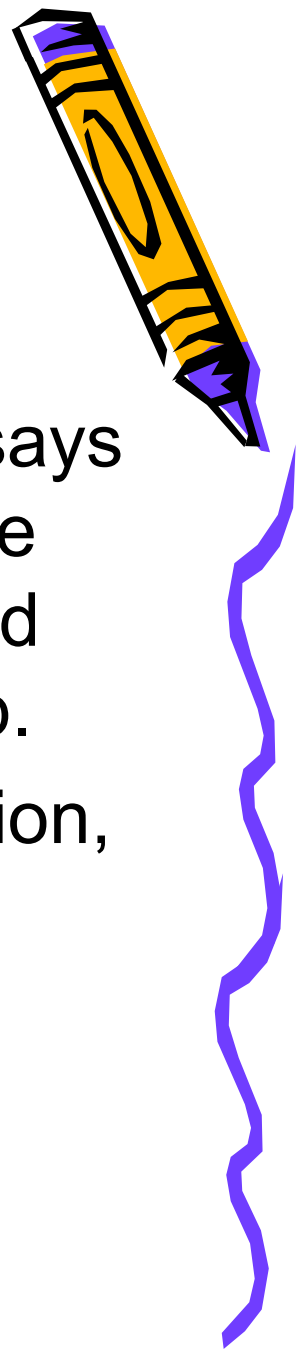
- Attention of an adult or peer
- Activity, toy, food, materials

3. Self stimulation



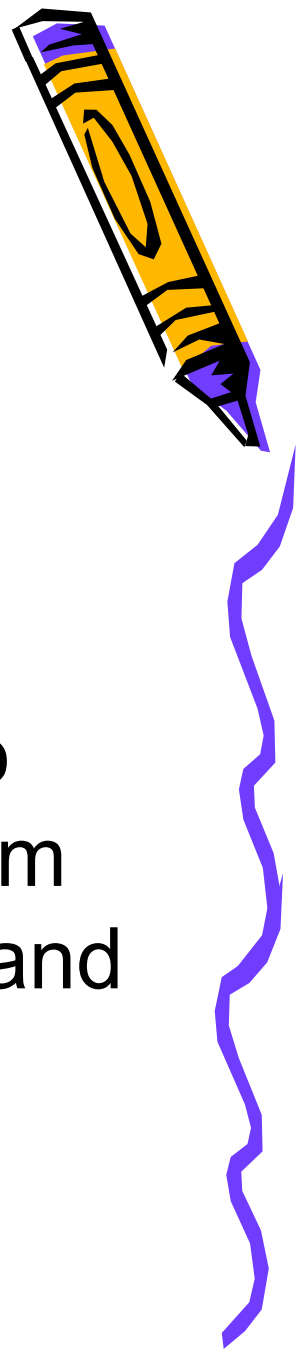
What is the function?

- Sevon, a 3 year old hits the teacher and says “no” when given a puzzle to complete. The teacher removes Sevon from the table and places him in a chair away from the group.
- Franz, a preschooler with mental retardation, cries when the teacher is passing out popcorn and accidentally skips him. The teacher quickly gives him some popcorn.



What is the function?

- Kevin, a 4 year old throws a temper tantrum when he see the M & M's at the checkout counter at the grocery store and is told by her caregiver “no candy today.” He continues to tantrum and the caregiver says “Oh, alright” and buys Kevin the candy



What is the function?

- Christina, who has autism, rocks back and forth when there is free play in the classroom. The class ignores her.
- Mary, a 4 year old, “smarts off” to her teacher and the entire class laughs.
- Kirby, who is 3 years old, runs to the play area when his teacher tells him it is time to sit at the table. The teacher says “no” and brings Kirby back to the table.

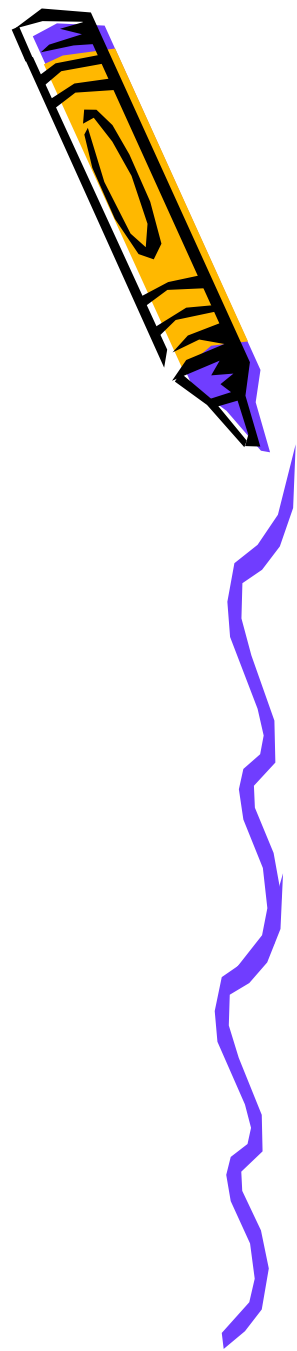


What is the function?

- Jose cusses loudly when the teacher asks him to stop playing, the entire class looks at him and the teacher sends him to time-out.
- Rudy, who is 4 years old, refuses to sit down at the beginning of story time. The teachers' assistant picks Rudy up and puts him in her lap.



How do these situations
apply to the behaviors you
see in your early childhood
settings?



The Functional Assessment Process

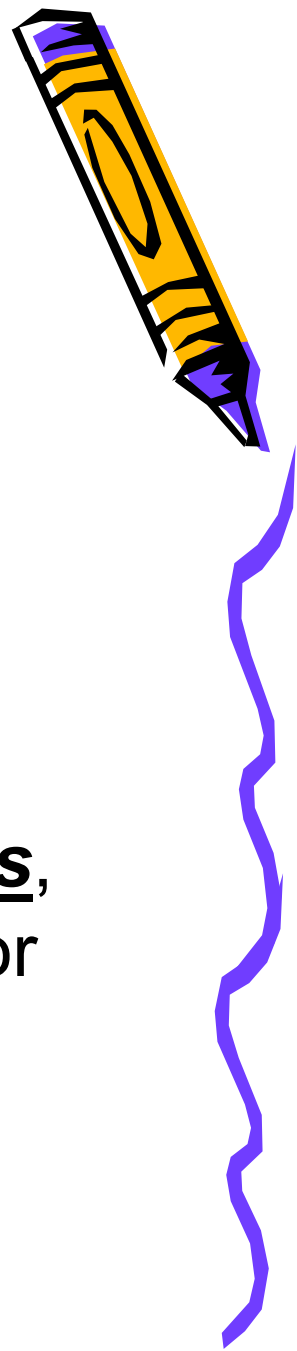


- Choose from a variety of assessment tools
 - Interview the teacher, caregiver, and/or child
 - Complete a rating scale
 - Directly observe the challenging behaviors when they occur and appropriate behaviors when they occur



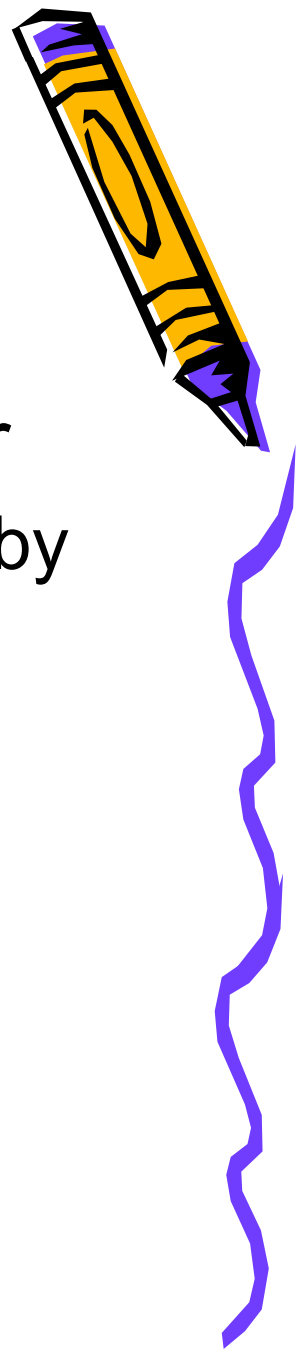
Identifying Functions of Behavior

- Look at the *situation* in which the behavior occurs
 - *Identify* and *describe* the challenging behavior
 - Identify what *events, people, activities,* are usually associated with the behavior

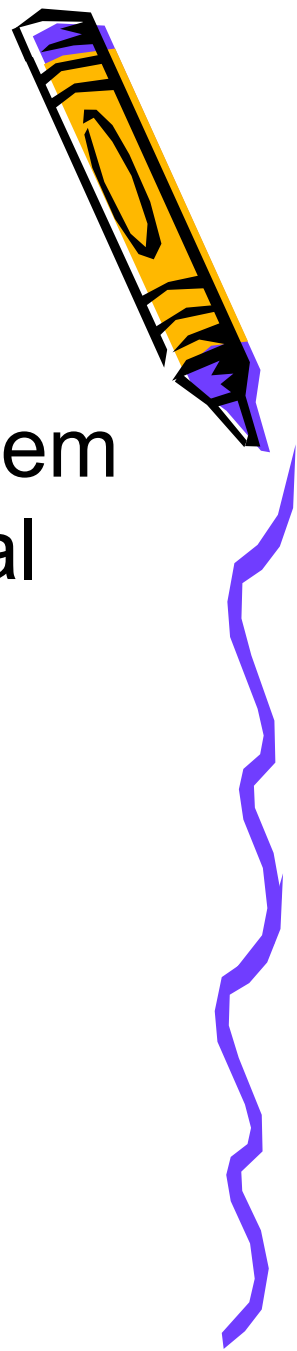


Identifying Functions of Behavior

- Identify the **outcome** of the behavior
 - Ask yourself “What is this child getting by engaging in this behavior”?
 - Obtaining peer or adult attention?
 - Obtaining an activity, materials, food, toy?
 - Escaping a task or activity?
 - Escaping peer or adult attention?
 - Self stimulation?



Functional Assessment Interview



- An interview that describes the problem behavior and identifies environmental factors that reliably result in the challenging behavior

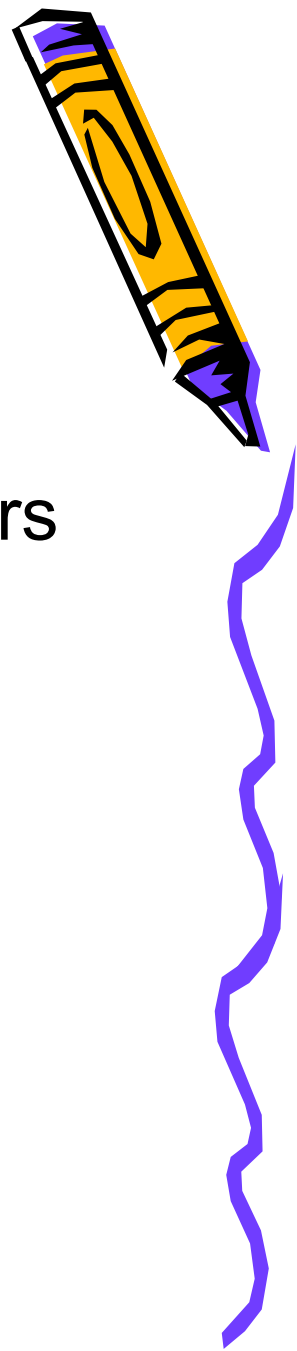


Function Assessment Interview



- Ask the following questions:
 - What exactly does the behavior look like?
 - What do you think is the possible reason that the child is engaging in the behavior?
 - What events/situations predict the behavior?
 - What does the child like and not like?
 - How does the child communicate what she or he likes or dislikes?
 - Does the child have skill deficits?
 - What other things may be related to the behavior?
 - Does the child have a illness?
 - Is the family in transition?





Motivation Assessment Scale

- A rating scale designed to assess the potential functions of challenging behaviors
 - Attention
 - Escape
 - Tangible
 - Sensory
- 16 items (4 for each function)
- Likert scale from 0 - 6



Motivation Assessment Scale



1. Would the behavior occur if the person was left alone?
2. Does the behavior occur following a request to perform a difficult task?
3. Does the behavior occur in response to your talking to another person
4. Does the behavior occur to get a toy, food, or activity?

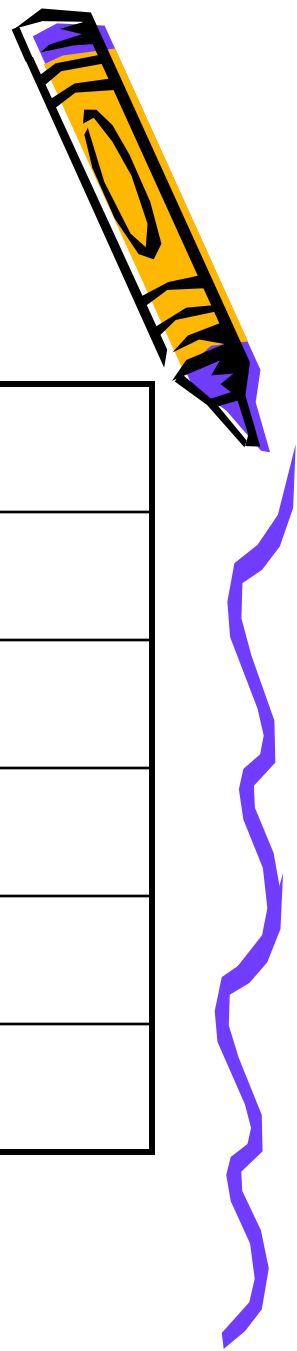


Direct Observation

- “Snap-shot” method
 - Direct observation tool developed to obtain a “picture” of the events that occur prior to and following challenging behavior



Behavior “Snap-shots”



Name:	Date:
Classroom Context/Activity	
Social Context	
Child's Response	
Social Reaction	
Possible Function?	



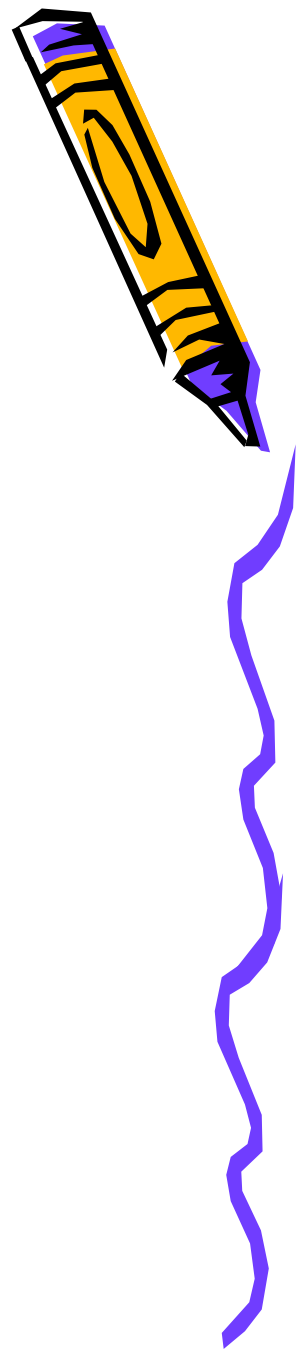
Let's Practice: Alex

- The children are sitting at small tables working on puzzles, beads, and coloring. Ms. Chrissy, the teacher, notices that every day during this time, Alex is noncompliant, whines, and throws his play materials. When Alex does this, Ms. Chrissy removes him from the activity.



Alex's MAS Results

- **Escape ranked 1 (mean = 4)**
- Tangible ranked 2 (mean = 2)
- Attention ranked 3 (mean = .75)
- Sensory ranked 0 (mean = 0)



Alex's "Snap-shot"

Name: Alex

Date: 9/2/04

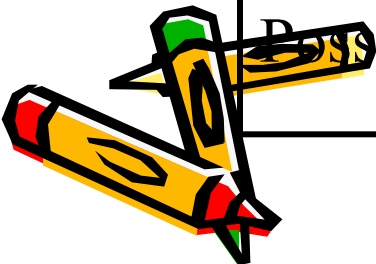
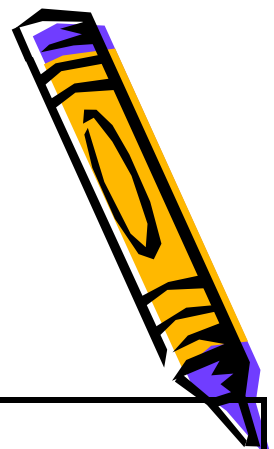
Classroom Context/Activity: Small group, manipulative activity

Social Context: Teacher and peers close by engaging in task

Child's Response: Alex throws play materials

Social Reaction: Teacher removes Alex from table

Possible Function?





- According to the MAS, she determines that the purpose of Alex's behavior is escape. Ms. Chrissy also notices when observing Alex that he has difficulty completing fine motor tasks by himself. What might be possible interventions?



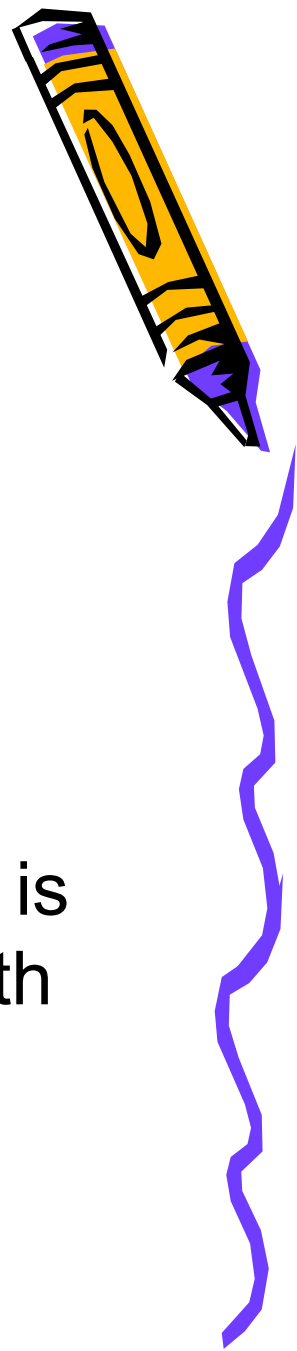


- Ms. Chrissy decides to teach Alex to request assistance when she notices that he begins to get frustrated with the task. She uses the following strategies:
 - Practicing requesting assistance in a one-to-one situation with Ms. Chrissy prompting Alex and praising his attempts
 - Placing Alex in a small group with other children who will model requesting assistance.



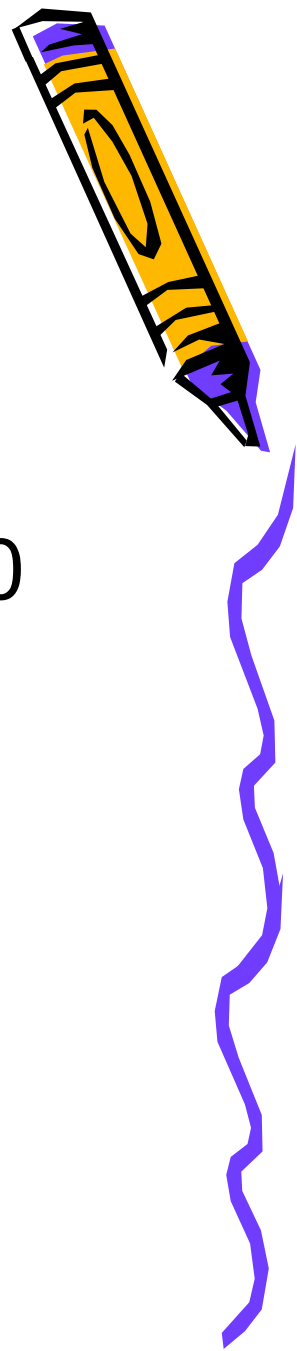
Let's Practice: Heather

- Heather is a five year old with mental retardation & autism. The teacher notices that during recess, Heather is socially withdrawn and spends most of her time “spinning the wheels” on a toy truck or rocking back and forth. Heather’s teacher is concerned that she doesn’t like to play with the other children.

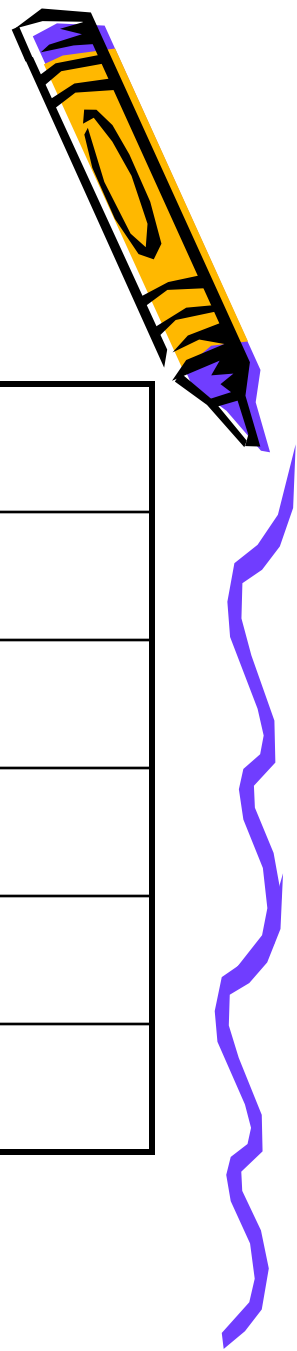


Heather's MAS

- **Sensory ranked 1 (mean = 5.24)**
- **Escape, Attention, Tangible ranked 0**

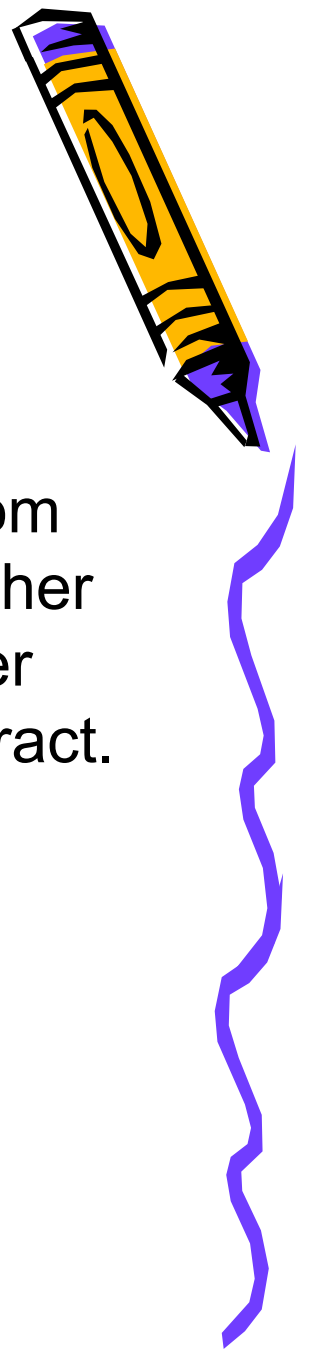


Heather's "Snap-shot"



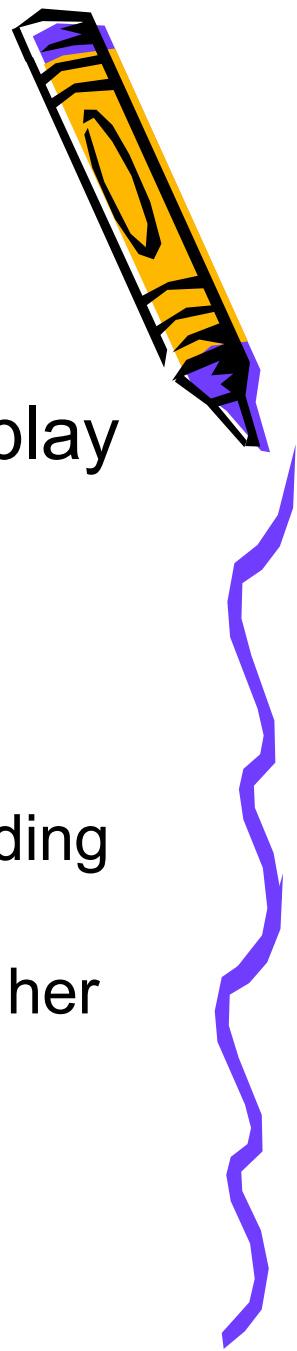
Name: Heather	Date: 5/30/04
Classroom Context/Activity: Outside playground	
Social Context: Peers are playing on the playground	
Child's Response: Heather plays by herself	
Social Reaction: Peers ignore her	
Possible Function?	



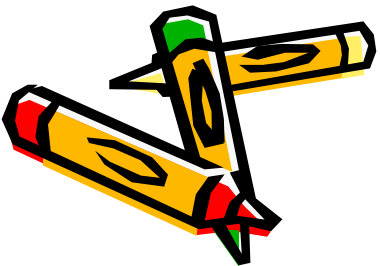


- According to the MAS, the function of Heather's behavior is sensory. The teacher also noticed from the direct observation, that the children ask Heather to play, but she is unable to respond. The teacher believes that Heather does not know how to interact. What would be a good replacement behavior for Heather?





- The teacher decides to teach Heather to play with another child using the toy cars. She uses the following strategy:
 - Chooses a peer to a model and buddy for Heather
 - Teaches the peer to initiate to Heather by holding her hand and taking her over to the toy cars
 - Prompts and praises Heather for playing with her friend



Using Assessment Information

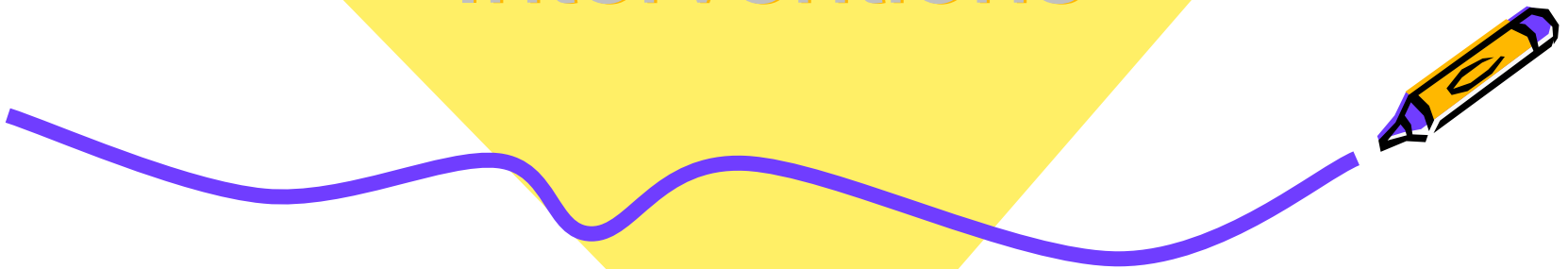


- Develop hypotheses about the ***function*** of the behavior
- Develop hypotheses about ***factors*** that may predict the behavior
- Identify ***new behaviors*** to ***teach*** that ***match the functions*** of the behaviors and strategies for teaching these behaviors





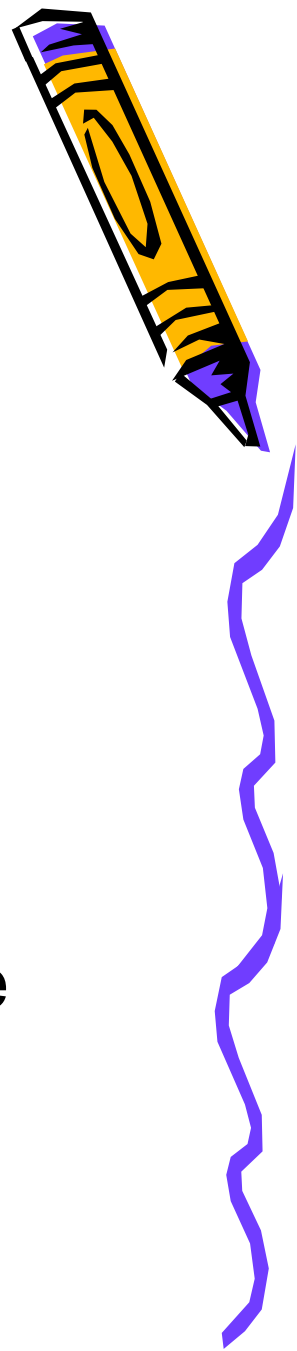
Developing Proactive & Preventative Interventions



Proactive Interventions

You have...

1. Defined the behavior
2. Identified factors related to the behavior
 - When and where the behavior occurs
 - Persons the behavior occurs with
 - Activities and times related to the behavior
3. Identified the functions/outcomes for the behavior ...



Proactive Interventions

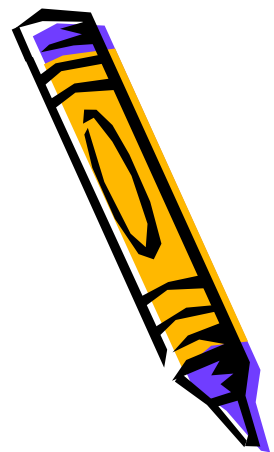
To develop an intervention ask yourself...

1. What ***can I do*** to change the behavior?
2. How can ***I modify or change*** the factors that contribute to the behavior?
3. What can ***I teach*** the child to use as a replacement behavior that addresses the same purpose or outcome?

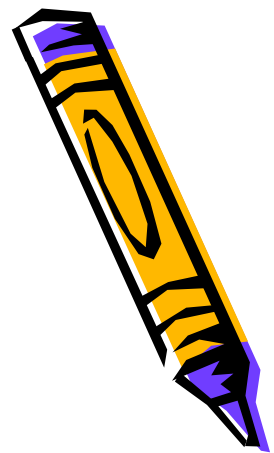


Proactive Interventions

4. How will I ***teach*** the replacement behavior to the child?
5. How can I make sure that I am ***NOT reinforcing the outcome*** of the challenging behavior?
6. How can I ***reinforce the replacement behavior*** so that it matches the function of the challenging behavior?

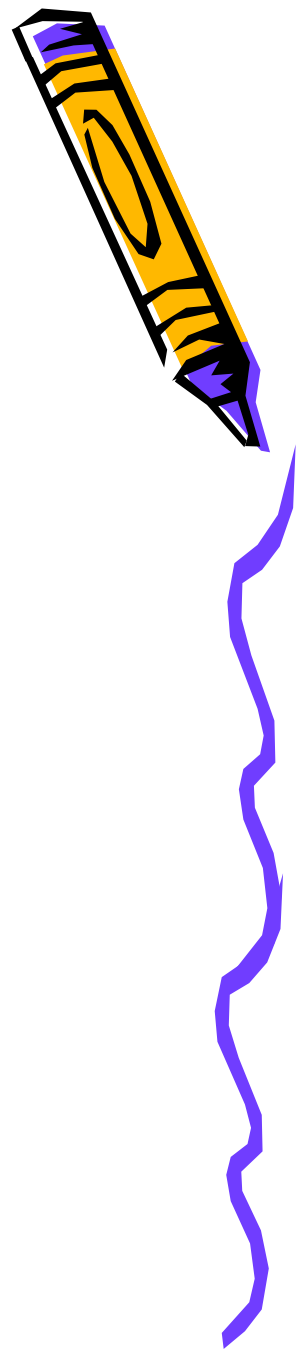


Environmental Arrangement



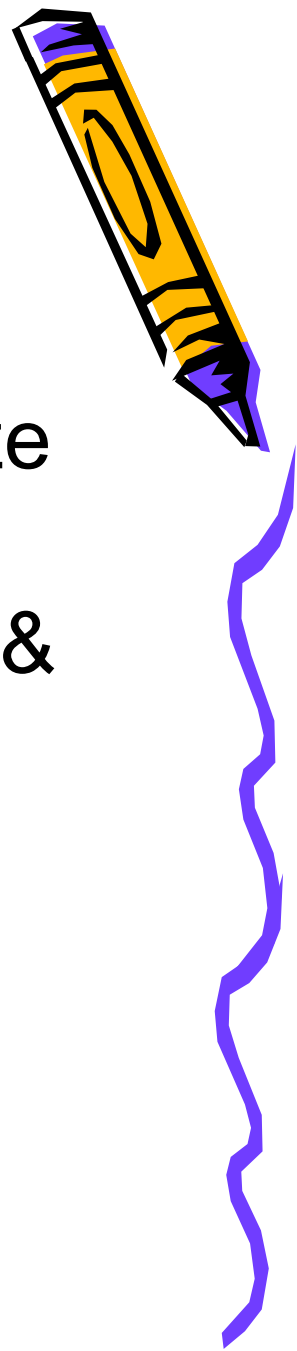
Purpose of Environmental Arrangement

- Maximize the child's engagement with the environment
- Decrease challenging behavior
- Encourage greater staff efficiency
- Easy to implement
- Developmentally Appropriate Practices



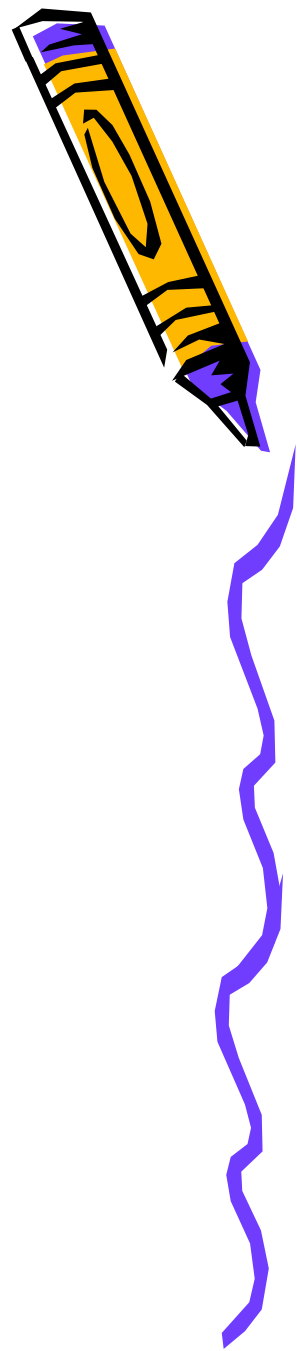
Environmental Arrangement

- Arrange physical space to minimize challenging behaviors
- Organize the classroom schedule & transitions
- Implement classroom rules
- Examine staffing patterns and arrangement

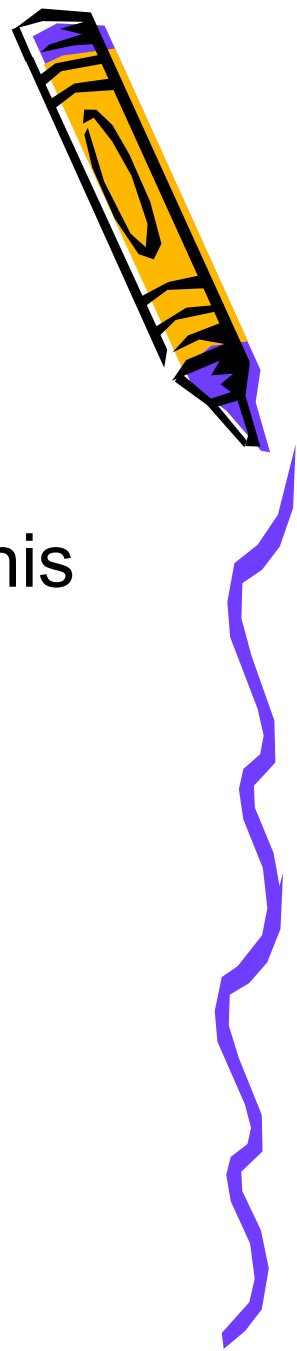


Physical Arrangement

- Space
 - Quiet Vs. Active
 - Centers
- Building Independence in Classroom
- Density of Areas
- Physical Boundaries
- Seating Arrangements
- Materials



Physical Arrangement Activity

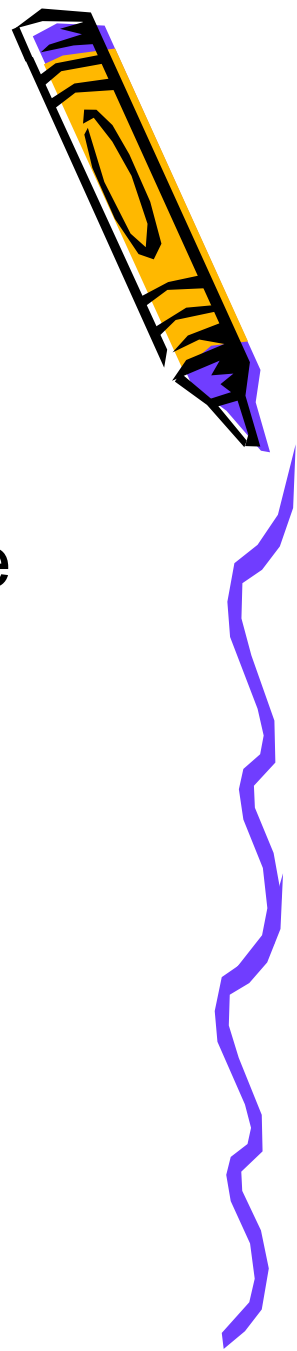


- Book Activity (clip #7)
 - Why are the children engaged during this activity?

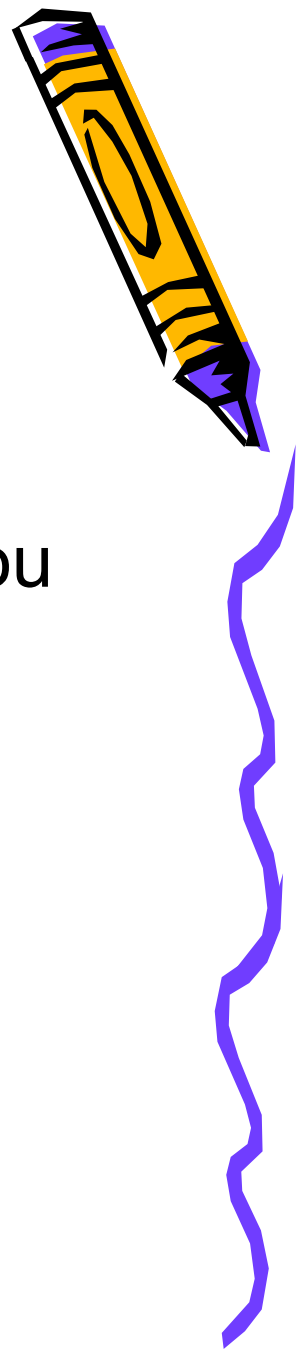


Physical Arrangement Activity

- Outdoor Play (clip #2)
 - What would make this activity run more smoothly



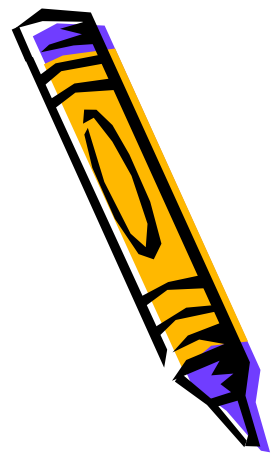
Physical Arrangement Activity



- Snack (clip #5)
 - What went wrong here? What would you do differently?



Physical Arrangement Activity

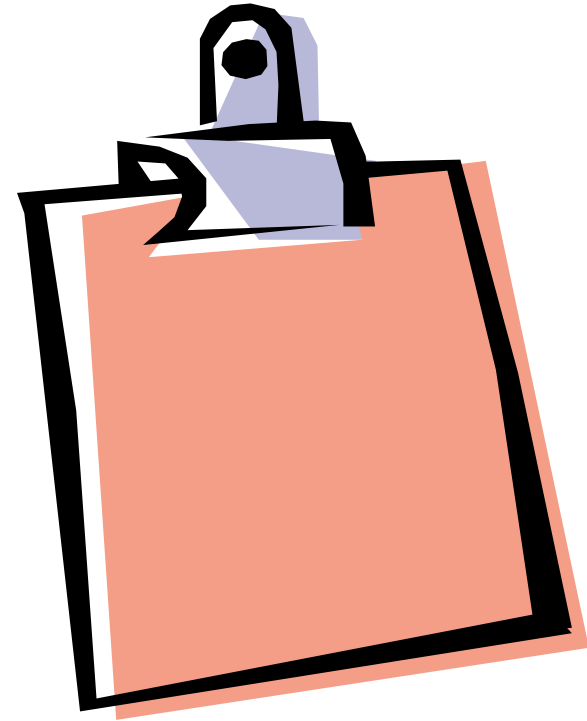


- Draw a map of your classroom
 - Target classroom areas where problem behaviors occur
- Reorganize your classroom to minimize problem behaviors
 - Incorporate the following into your plan
 - Room dividers where children are observable
 - Accessible space for personal items (teacher & child)
 - Large group, small group, and individual work areas
 - Structured seating arrangements



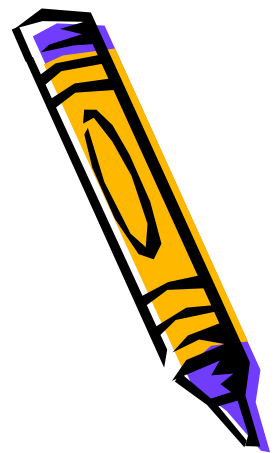
Organizational

- Schedule
- Transitions
- Staffing Patterns
- Classrooms Rules



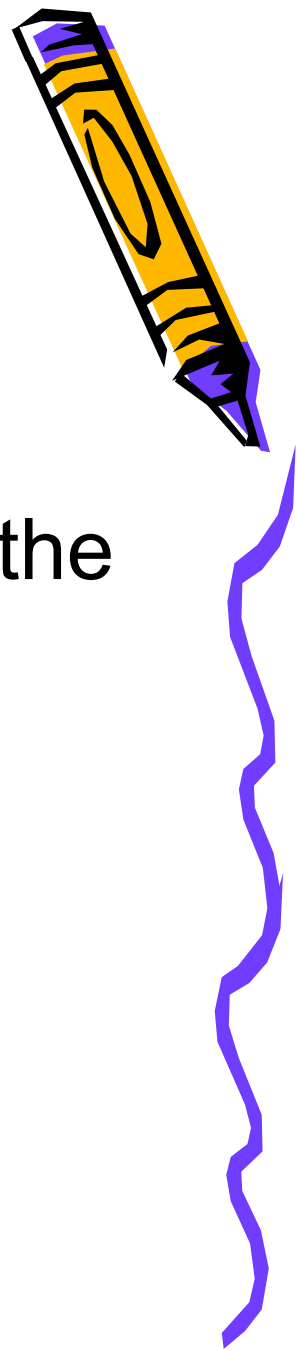
Schedule

- Arrival Times
- Consistent Times
- Sequencing and Length of Activities
- Planned Clean-up/Transitioning Routine
- Productive Learning Times Early
- Explaining Changes



What is a schedule?

- A group of symbols (e.g. objects, pictures, written words) that informs the child of the activities that will occur during a designated period of time



What is the purpose of the schedule?

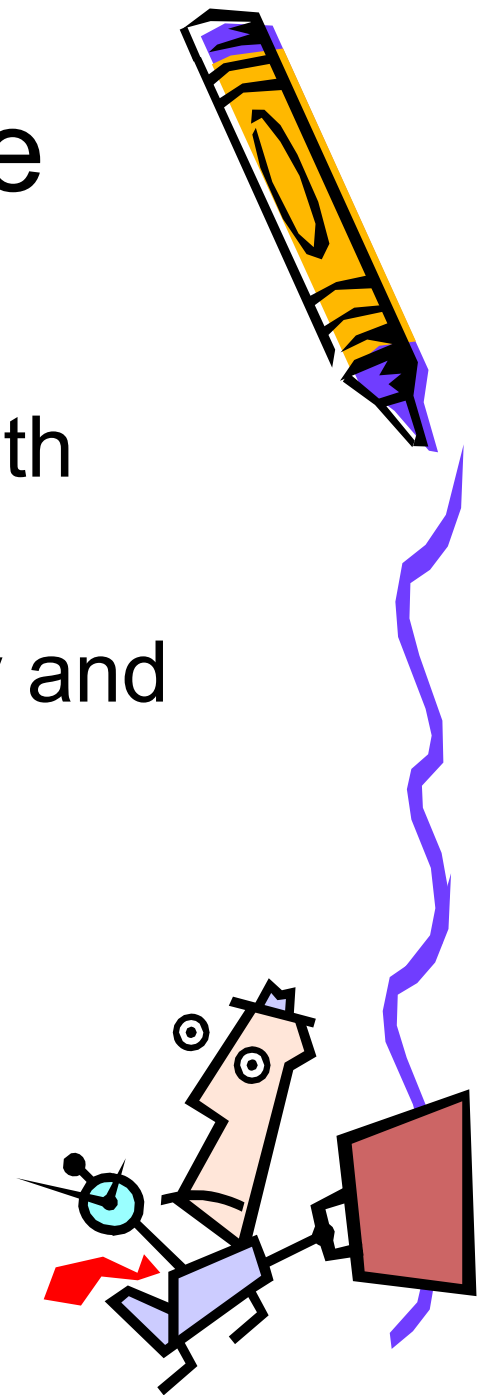


- To give the child information about the day
- To teach the child to be independent
- To facilitate interaction with peers, teachers, and family members about what the student has been doing or is going to do



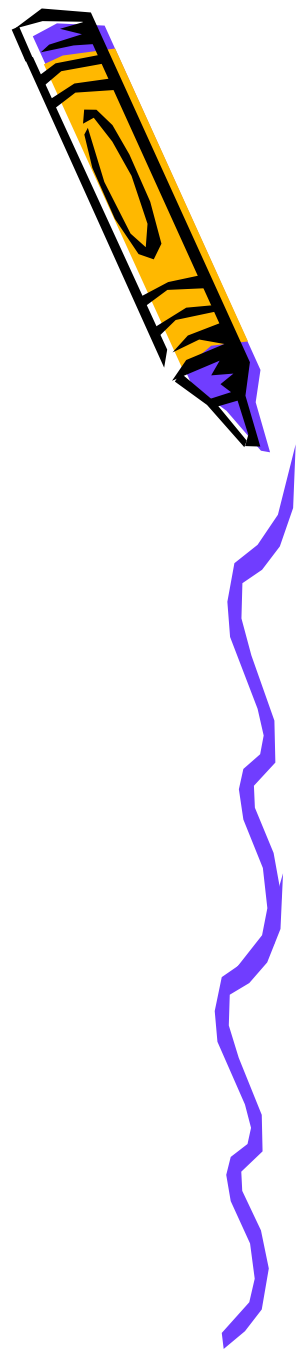
For whom is a schedule useful?

- Children who have difficulties with transitions
- Children who need predictability and structure
- Children who need visual cues



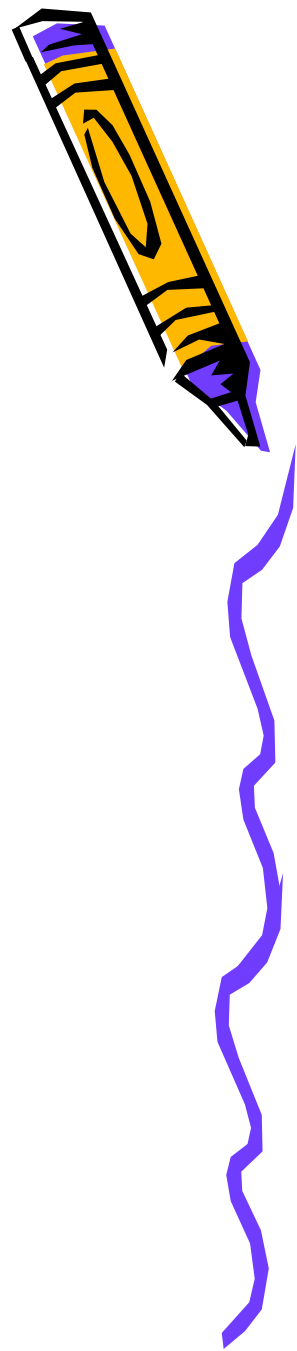
Developing Schedules

- What would you change in this schedule?
 - Inside Free Play
 - Outside Free Play
 - Circle Time
 - Centers
 - Lunch
 - Sleep
 - Free Play
 - Home

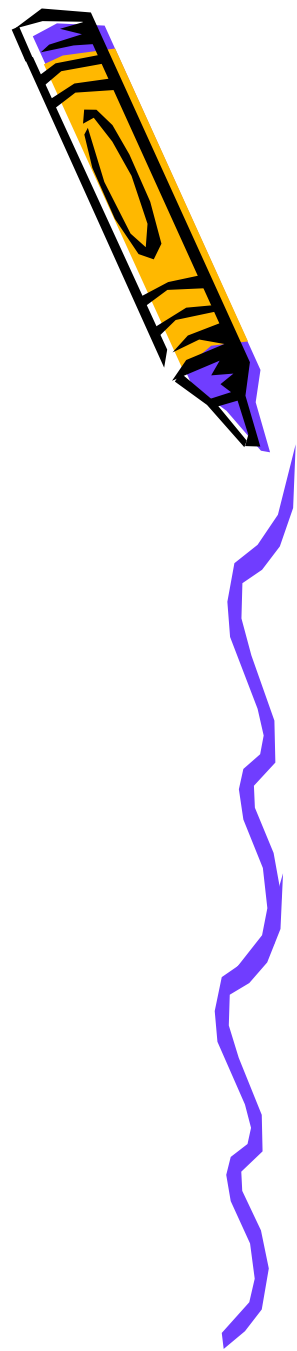


Developing Schedules

- What would you change in the schedule?
 - Conduct a structured activity first thing in the morning
 - Plan transition activities
 - Incorporate another structured activity in the afternoon
 - Alternate active and more passive activities



Schedule Group Activity



- Create a classroom schedule for your classroom
 - Include the following:
 - Teacher-initiated activities
 - Child-initiated activities
 - Quiet, individual time
 - Large and small group activities
 - Transitions
 - Outdoor play
 - Meals (as appropriate)

– Note:

- Remember to use written or pictorial cues to communicate the schedule to the children



Schedule Group Activity

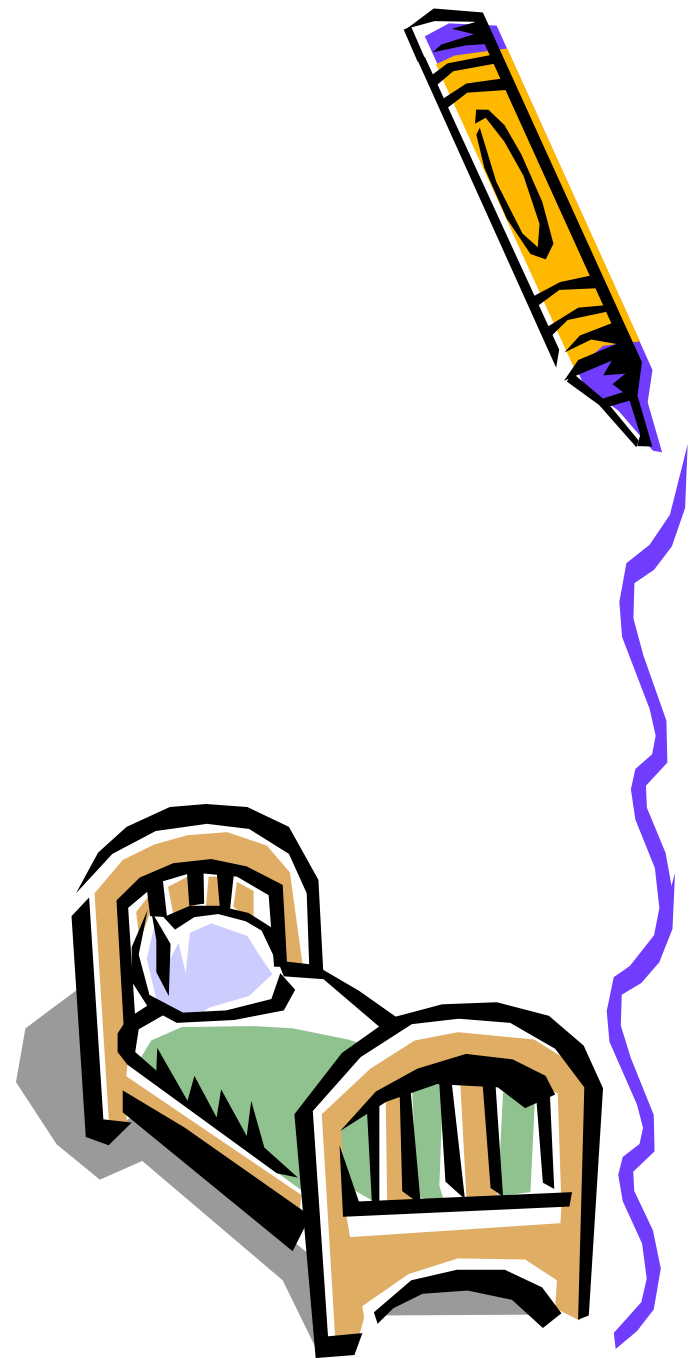


- How would you adapt your schedule for the following children?
 - Jane (3 years old) who does not verbally communicate?
 - Dick (2 years old) with almost age-appropriate expressive and receptive communication skills, but is unable to follow directions?



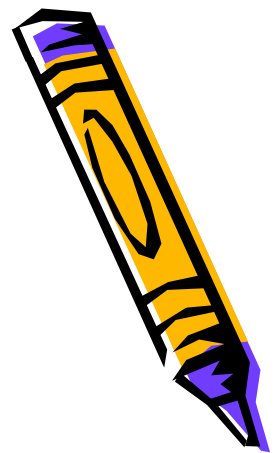
Transitions

- Routine
- Clearly Outlined
- Cues/Prompts
- Practice Wait Time



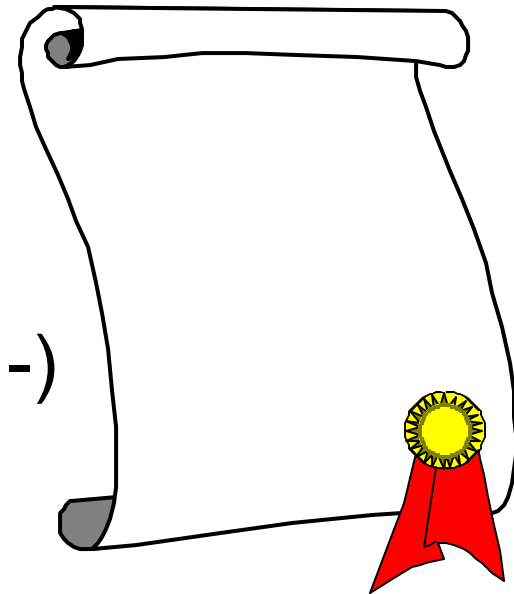
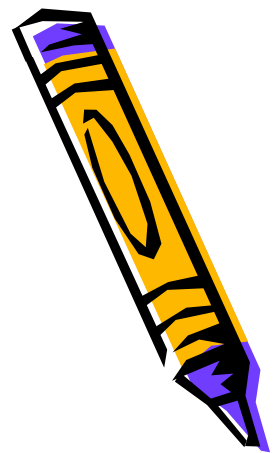
Staffing Patterns

- Zone/Man-to-Man
- Ratio
- Assistants



Classroom Rules/Routines

- Few
- Concise
- Positive
- Posted
- Provide Consequences (+ & -)
- Apply Consistently
- Review Frequently

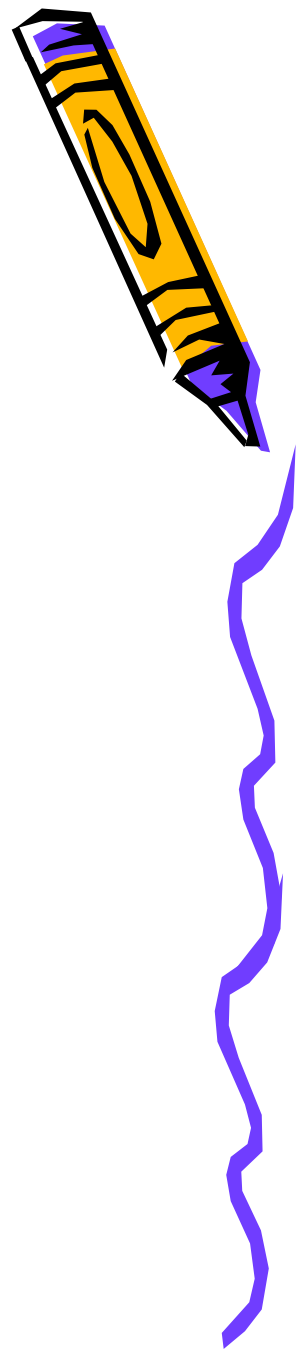


Routine Activity

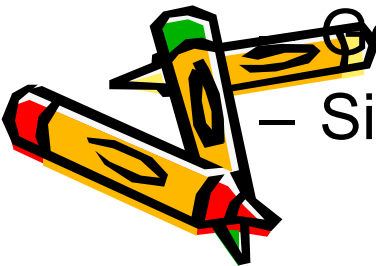
- Arrival (video clip #1)
 - Morning routine to prevent problem behavior during arrival
 - Why are the children engaged and compliant?



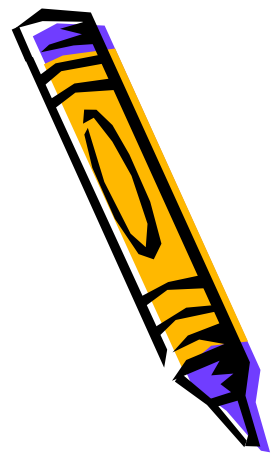
Routines Group Activity



- Choose from the following and develop specific procedures to teach children the following routines:
 - Putting coats and belongings away
 - Getting quiet
 - Cleaning up
 - Lining up
 - Getting ready for rest time
 - Using the bathroom
 - Getting ready to go home for the day
 - Sitting at the circle or morning meeting time



Curriculum Adaptations



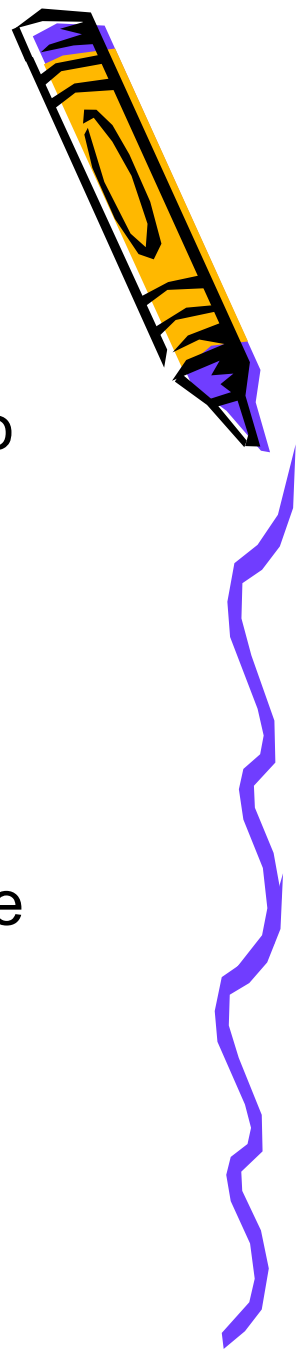
Ensuring an individually appropriate curriculum

- Does the child have the skills to successfully complete the activity or task? Can the child follow directions?
- Provide material on a skill level that is appropriate for the child
- Reduce or change initial expectations, gradually increasing expectations
- Implement more frequent activity breaks
- Provide positive and appropriate reinforcement for appropriate behavior



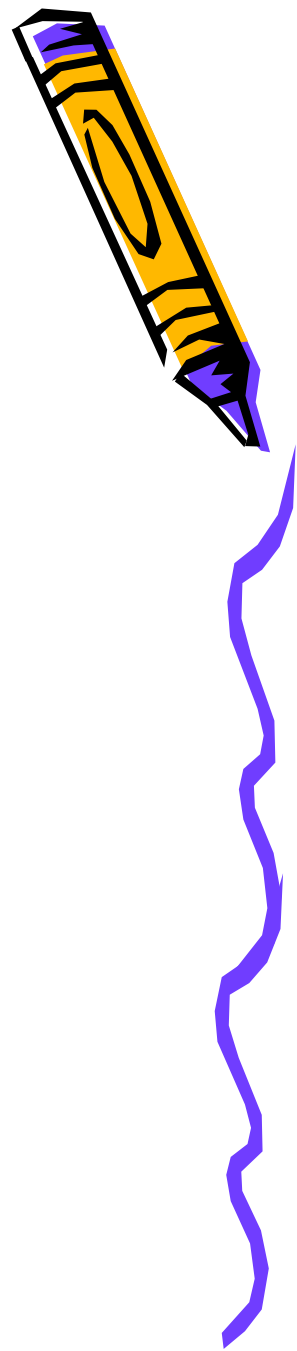
Curriculum Adaptations

- Provide distraction free areas for children who need “quiet time”
- Vary teaching methods and activities
- Provide adult support when needed
- Develop materials so that the child can be independent
- Get additional information or training if you are unsure about how to address the challenging behavior



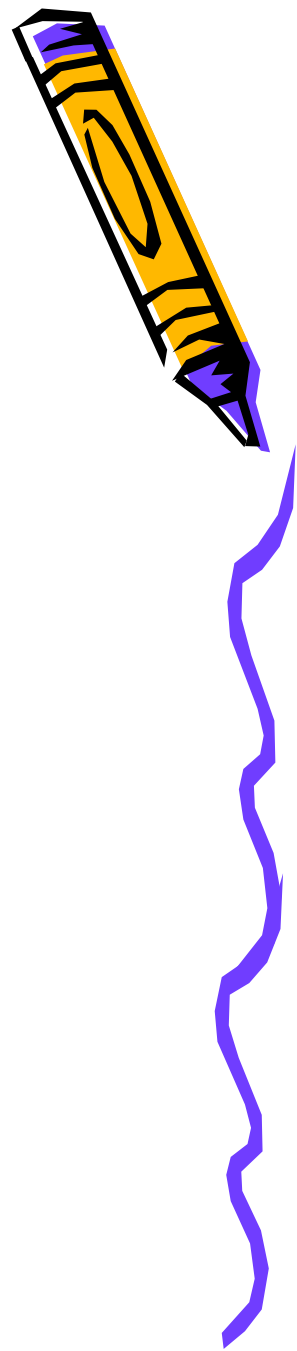
Teacher Responsibilities

- Develop materials so that child can be independent
- Present information via visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile modalities
- Provide additional adult support when needed

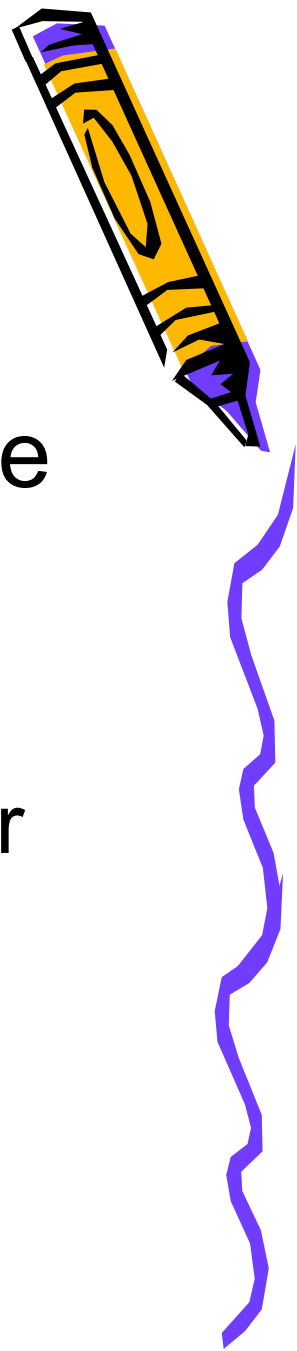


Teacher Responsibilities

- Vary levels of difficulty in instructional activities
- Use cooperative learning techniques
- Consult with other teachers and parents
- Get information/training if unsure how to address the problem



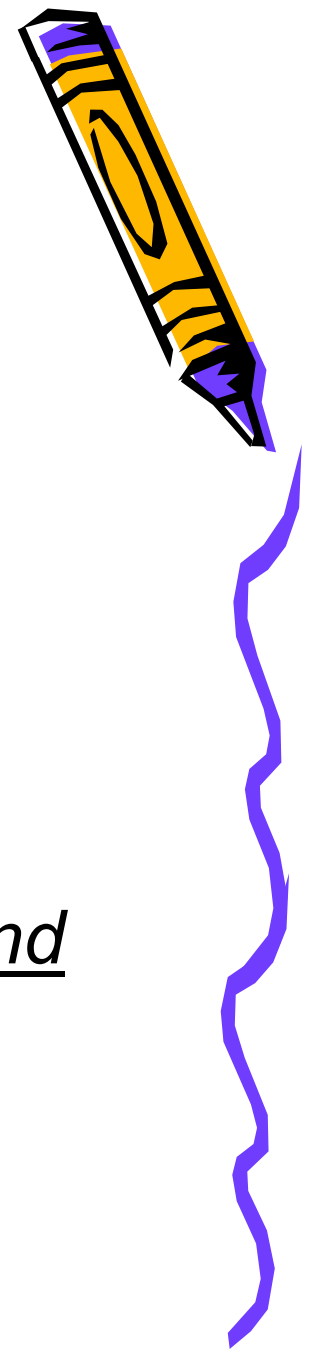
Teaching Replacement Behaviors



- When the function is appropriate
- But the form is not appropriate
- What can I teach as a replacement behavior for the challenging behavior that addresses the same outcome?



Teaching Replacement Behaviors



- Choosing a replacement behavior
 - Find a behavior that serves the same purpose or function as the challenging behavior
 - Teach a behavior that helps the child achieve the purpose easier, quicker, and better than the challenging behavior



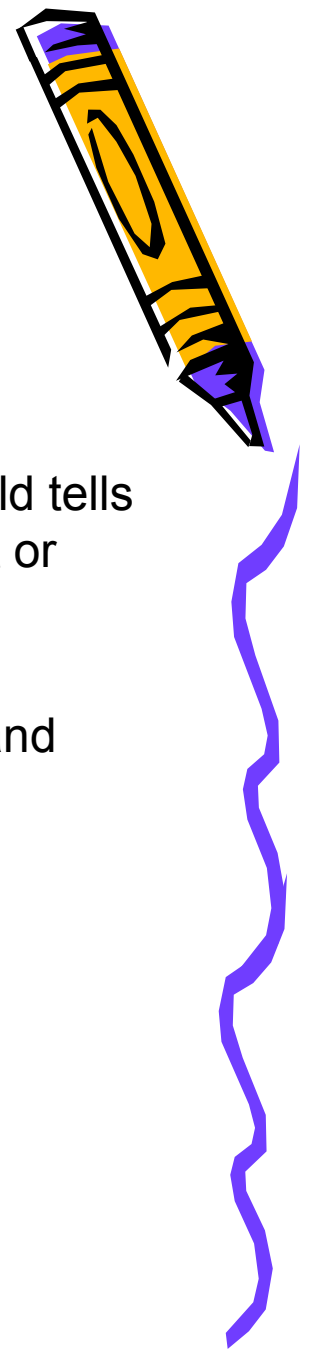
Teaching Replacement Behaviors



- Teaching functional communication skills
 - Replace the need to obtain or escape from attention, activities/tasks, or predictability
 - Teach appropriate skills for saying “no” or requesting help



Communicative Replacement Examples



- **Beth**
 - wants to interact with peers
 - expressive language disorder
 - doesn't know how to initiate interactions
 - takes objects or interrupts peers
- **learn & use social initiation skills**
- **Billy**
 - whenever another child tells teacher he/she is hurt or needs help
 - Billy immediately approaches teacher and makes same request
- **learn & use appropriate attention getting or conversation behavior**



Teaching Replacement Behaviors

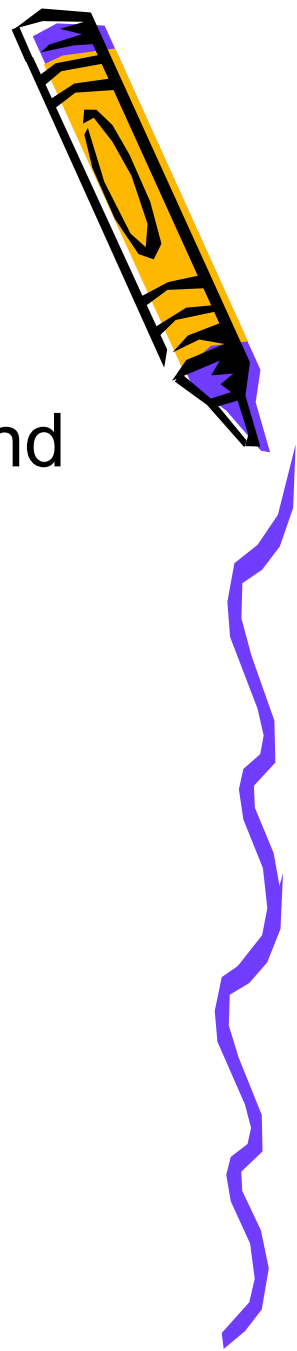


- How will I teach the replacement behavior to the child?
 - What are the goals and expectations of the situation, activity, or task?
 - How much instruction is needed to teach the child these skills or expectations?



Teaching Replacement Behaviors

- Be consistent in setting expectations and stick to them!
- Reinforce the replacement behavior
 - Who?
 - How often?



Teaching Replacement Behaviors

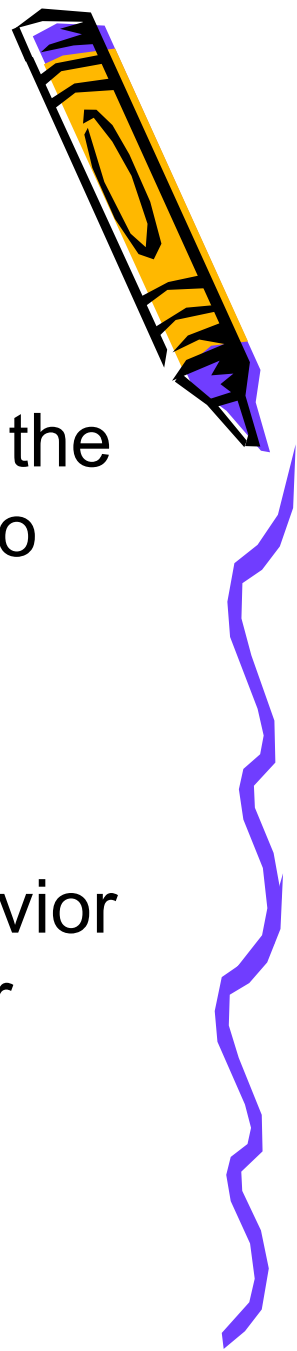


- How to make sure you are NOT reinforcing the challenging behavior Ask ourselves...
 - What are we doing now that may be reinforcing the challenging behavior?
 - How can we change our response to the challenging behavior when it does happen?
 - How can we be consistent with our response?
 - How will we reinforce the replacement behavior so that it addresses the function?

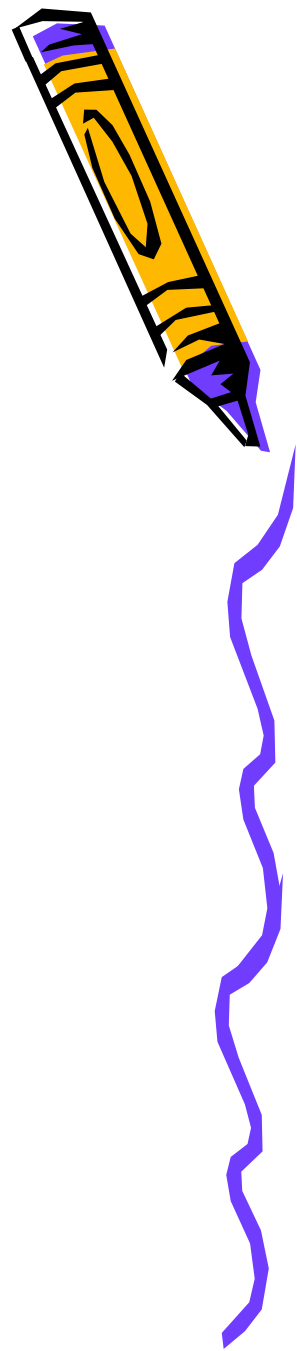


Teaching Replacement Behaviors

- Decide when you want the child to use the replacement behavior, teach the child to use the behavior, and reinforce that behavior by providing the child with the outcome
- If you can, ignore the challenging behavior or only minimally attend to the behavior



Alternative Instructional Strategies



- Preferred Items
- High Probability Requests
- Embedding Difficult Tasks
- Providing Choices
- Collaboration
- Teaching Tolerance for Delay



Let's Practice



- Betty and Veronica have observed that there is a lot of “fighting” after lunch around the sink area
- What interventions could you try to address this?
 - Entire Class
 - Single child who is engaging in most of the pushing and shoving



Let's Practice



- Archie and Jughead are concerned because the children are rolling around on the floor during circle time
- What interventions could you try to address this?
 - Entire class
 - Single child who is engaging in the behavior



Next Steps

- Choose a child in your program
- What are the target challenging behaviors?
- Why do think those behaviors occur?
 - What is the function?
 - What environmental factors are associated with the behavior?
- What environmental factors can you change to decrease the probability of the behavior?
- What curriculum modifications are needed?
- What replacement behaviors can you teach the child?
- What alternative instructional strategies would be helpful?





Thank you!

Contact Information:

Maureen A. Conroy, Ph.D.

Box 117050

Department of Special Education

University of Florida

Gainesville, FL 32611

mconroy@coe.ufl.edu

