

Receiving News About Your Child's Day: Navigating Conversations Around Behavior

Engagement Workgroup NCPMI Family¹

When someone from your child's child care program or preschool calls, emails, or sends a note about their behavior, it can feel surprising or unsettling. It is helpful to remember that all children go through phases when their behaviors feel big and hard to understand. These moments are a natural part of learning, growing, and developing. As a parent or caregiver, you might feel uncomfortable or worried when you learn that your child is having these moments in child care or at school, and you might wonder, "What should I do next?"

Your child's challenging behavior shows that something feels hard for them. During these moments, you and your child's teacher or program staff are on the same team. You can work together to support your child in ways that help them feel safe, understood, and ready to play and learn. Working together works best when you can openly communicate and share ideas and perspectives. Understanding your child's strengths, needs, and what may be making things hard helps you and your child's program work together to provide any extra support your child may need in their care or learning environment.



When you receive a communication about your child's behavior:

Listen, ask questions, and share your perspective.

As your child's teacher or program staff shares information, try to understand the specific behaviors and what was happening at the time. It's important that you also share your perspective and ask any questions you have.

Agree to be solution-focused. Being solution-focused means staying focused on your child's needs and strengths, focusing on what helps, and working together to identify next steps rather than getting stuck on problems or blame.

Schedule a time to meet or have a longer conversation.

Most collaborative conversations about a child's behavior cannot happen over email or text or during a brief phone call. Ask when a phone conversation or an in-person meeting can be scheduled. Find a time to talk that works well for both of you.

Be ready to share the strengths and positives about your child. Conversations around behavior might feel discouraging. It is helpful to highlight what is going well for your child or to share something you love about them.

Collaborate. Working together as a team will create the best environment for your child to learn and thrive. Be ready to share your ideas and solutions. Sharing ideas about what works at home is helpful to the program.

Be open. Be open and willing to try new strategies.

When you are meeting or having a longer conversation with your child's teacher or program staff, the following questions and suggestions can help you understand what happened, consider solutions, and work together to support your child.

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To get the conversation started:

- ▶ Can we start with what we're hoping for ____ (my child)? What do we want ____ (my child) to experience or do?
- ▶ Before we get into our conversation, could we talk a bit about what ____ (my child) likes to do and play and who they like to play with?
- ▶ I'd love to hear how your relationship with my child is going. What helps you two connect during the day?



To help you understand specific behaviors and situations:

- ▶ Is this a new behavior for my child, or has it gotten more intense (lasting longer, occurring more often, or being harder to redirect) over time?
- ▶ How often does the behavior occur?
- ▶ Are there times during the day when the behavior seems to happen the most (e.g., transitions, specific activities, playtime with specific children)? When does the behavior not happen?
- ▶ When the behavior happens, what happens just before (e.g., frustrated with a toy or task, given a direction)? What typically happens after the behavior?
- ▶ How did my child seem during or after the situation (e.g., anxious, scared, angry, withdrawn)?
- ▶ Could this behavior be due to my child's age, or is it something other children of my child's age might do in situations like this?

To help you understand what supports and strategies adults use to support your child:

These questions can help you work together to understand what is working and what may need to change so that you can make the best decisions for your child. You might have a range of feelings about the situation or how the conversation was started. It can be helpful to start with something positive. Try to identify something positive that you appreciate about your child's teacher or program. It could also feel overwhelming for your child's teacher or program staff to be asked all of these questions at once. Before you ask them, you might start with a comment like:

- ▶ I appreciate how interested you are in my child's development and behavior. I know everyone is trying their best. I'd like to ask a few questions to understand what's happening in the classroom and how I can help with ideas to support my child.
- ▶ I appreciate how interested you are in hearing what I have to say. I am glad we get to talk about ____ (my child) today.
- ▶ It's important to me that we work together. I have a few questions that can help me understand what's working and what we might try next.
- ▶ I want to make sure that we're supporting ____ (my child) in the same way. Can I ask a few questions to help us think together?

Then, you can decide which questions to ask based on what you are sharing and learning from one another. Make sure to share your experience at home with your child. It is not unusual for a child to behave differently at home and in a program.

- ▶ When this happened, what did you try? How did they respond?
- ▶ When moments like this happen, what do you hope ____ (my child) can learn to do?
- ▶ When ____ (my child) uses the behavior, what steps do adults take to help them do something else instead (i.e., to redirect them)?
- ▶ What kinds of things do you do to help prevent tough moments?
- ▶ After a behavior happens, what helps ____ (my child) calm down? What are the social-emotional skills you are teaching the children that you want ____ (my child) to be using in this situation? I also want to work on those at home.
- ▶ Could I share what we do at home when this happens?

To decide how your child will be supported moving forward:

- ▶ What will support look like for my child during the day, especially in moments when things feel hard for them?
- ▶ What will adults do ahead of time to help my child have a smoother day or prevent hard moments? How can we work together to support _____ (my child) in similar ways and to help them learn the same skills at home and when they are with you?
- ▶ I'm open to trying new ideas at home. Are there strategies that could work both at home and here?
- ▶ How do we know if my child's behaviors are improving? Is data being collected to track if behavior is improving or occurring less often?
- ▶ How will we know if the strategies are helping my child? Will someone check in with me about how things are going?
- ▶ Are there community supports we could look at together?

To help you continue collaborating with your child's teacher or program staff:

- ▶ I'd like us to have regular check-ins, not just when something hard happens. Can we make a plan for how you'll update me, who will do that, and how often we'll connect?
- ▶ When I have questions, ideas, or information that will be helpful, who can I reach out to, and what is the best way to do that (e.g., text, email, phone, written notes, app)?
- ▶ If other things happen or you start to observe different behaviors, how do you usually share information with families about their children's behaviors? Is there a form or process you use?

If you hear information during the conversation that feels upsetting or uncomfortable, here are some ideas to help you feel calm:

- ▶ Check in with yourself. See how you are feeling.
- ▶ Take deep breaths to help you feel grounded.
- ▶ Go for a brief walk or take a stretch break.
- ▶ Connect with a trusted family member or friend.
- ▶ If you are not in the best physical or emotional state (e.g., you receive the call just before stepping into a meeting at work, you are in a crowded space) ask to have the conversation later. It is okay to say that now is not a good time and to suggest a time that works better for you.

Remember:

- ▶ Building a strong partnership with your child's teacher is one of the best ways to support your child's behavior and social-emotional development.
- ▶ Sharing perspectives, asking questions, and working together as a team will help you create a supportive environment where your child can learn, play, grow, and feel connected.

If you are interested in learning more about family-school partnerships or supporting your child to learn new social-emotional skills, here are a few resources to explore:

- ▶ [NCPMI Teacher-Family Relationship](#)
- ▶ [NCPMI Behavior Regulation](#)
- ▶ [Family Voice and Choice in the Individualized Behavior Support Process](#)