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PRINCIPLES FOR UNDERSTANDING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR



Principle 1: Challenging Behaviors Are Communicative

Most challenging behaviors serve the same purpose as other forms of communication, such as speech, gestures, and facial expressions. Sometimes challenging behavior is used to communicate a desire for attention, a desire to get out of an activity, or a desire to have a food item or toy. Challenging behaviors are often used because they work to act on the social environment in much the same way that other forms of communication act on the environment.

Principle 2: Challenging Behaviors Are Maintained by Consequences

The law of reinforcement is a basic law of behavioral science. It states that a behavior will be maintained if it is followed by a positive reinforcer that acts as a reward. If a child is using tantrums to communicate a desire for attention, the reward would be when the teacher attends to the child. Consequences are important, and challenging behaviors will not continue if they are not followed by consequences that serve as rewards.

Principle 3: Challenging Behaviors Occur in Context

Challenging behaviors occur at different rates or intensities in different contexts or environments. For example, one child's screaming may occur frequently when he is asked to participate in fine motor tasks, but the same child might never scream during snack or outdoor play. Behaviors aren't random and tend to occur predictably in particular situations.