

Handle With Care

"Handle with Care" might apply to your child if he or she:

- Needs extra preparation when it is time to change activities
- Uses "physical communication" (hitting, pushing, biting) instead of words when frustrated
- Has difficulty getting along with other children in group settings
- Is extra-sensitive to some things - to noise, to crowds, to changes in routine

What is Challenging Behavior?

Challenging behavior means different things to different people. In this brochure, the term is used to mean any behavior that interferes with the child's ability to learn and/or develop and maintain relationships with others.

Quality Matters

When examining child care it is important to focus on quality. Research has found that high quality child care settings have the least problems with children's behavior. High quality settings are also better suited to support children with special needs, including challenging behavior. There are many useful checklists and brochures on choosing quality child care, including <http://ccapub.childcareaware.org/docs/pubs/102e.pdf>

Finding the Right Child Care Fit

If you have found that your child needs extra-special handling to get through life's ups and downs, you may want some additional information when making child care work for your child. The ideas offered here are described in more detail in *Children with Challenging Behavior: Strategies for Reflective Thinking* available through <challengingbehavior@hotmail.com>

HANDLE WITH CARE:

Choosing Child Care When Your Child Has Challenging Behavior



Based on the 2005 book:
*Children with Challenging Behavior:
Strategies for Reflective Thinking.*
Linda and Tom Brault
BraultBehavior.org

When you are selecting a child care setting for your child with challenging behavior, consider these three areas:

People

Relationships are so important with people in the child care setting - director, teacher, family child care provider or assistant. In many ways, you will be "co-parenting" with these people. You and your child should feel connected, comfortable and able to communicate freely with the early childhood professionals in the setting. Things to look for:

Adult-to-Child Ratio

The number of adults should allow for lots of interaction and positive attention to the children.

Commitment to the Job

Do the adults seem to enjoy their work with children? Have people worked there for a long time or is there a lot of turnover? You will find that people who are committed to their job will be easier to partner with and work together on supporting your child's positive behavior. Ongoing education and training of staff is another sign of commitment.

A Good Fit

All adults and children have individual preferences and ways of experiencing the world. Their preferences are known as "temperament" and their ways of experiencing the world are known as learning styles. Understanding your child's temperament and learning style can help you look at child care settings with his or her specific preferences in mind. Are his or her needs being met in this setting? Is there a good fit?

For more information about temperament, you may want to read *"Raising Your Spirited Child: A Guide for Parents Whose Child is More Intense, Sensitive, Perceptive, Persistent, and Energetic"* by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka or visit the Preventive Ounce website, www.preventiveoz.org, an interactive web site that lets you discover your child's temperament and find parenting ideas. More temperament information is available at <http://kera-kids.org/ready-for-life/parents/temperament/>.

Practices

The ongoing philosophy, techniques and strategies used by early childhood professionals make up their practices. It is important that the child care staff continue to grow as professionals through workshops, courses and reading. Find out about:

Prevention of Behavior Problems

Many children engage in challenging behavior because they are bored, frustrated, unable to understand what they are supposed to do or unable to interact acceptably with other children. The most effective way of addressing these behavior problems is to prevent them from occurring in the first place! In many high quality settings the emphasis is on prevention. This is done by paying careful attention to the program (the environment and curriculum), the people (staff, children and families) and their practices. For example, transitions between activities are carefully planned, relationships with children are emphasized and groups are small.

Guidance and Discipline

Social skills are an important part of every curriculum. What strategies are used to support children's behavior? Does staff focus on guiding and teaching appropriate behavior? What do they do for inappropriate behavior? Beware of "one solution for all behaviors", such as an over-reliance on time-out. There are many other positive and effective ways to change behavior.

Understanding of Behavior

Behavior is communication. Young children let us know what they need through their behavior. Understanding the purpose behind the behavior takes careful observation and reflection. Can the staff describe how they address challenging behavior? How do they make decisions about what is behind the behavior and what to try to change the behavior? Do they consider differences in cultural practice or language spoken? Finally, the most important practice is that the staff involve you, the parent, as they develop a plan.

Program

What do children do all day (curriculum) and where do they do it (environment)? These two areas are usually covered in "Choosing Child Care" checklists. When looking for the best program for *your* child, here are some extra areas of focus:

Smaller is Usually Better

Children with challenging behaviors are often at their best when there are fewer children around. The total number of children in the classroom or setting should be at the low end of what is allowed. A lower teacher to child ratio is also important. Most activities should happen with groups of three to four children.

Organization Matters

If the space is well organized, your child will know what to do in each area of the setting. When the room is arranged carefully, the environment will support appropriate behavior. Look around and think, "Would I want to spend time here? Will my child know what is expected in each area?" Are transitions between activities planned?

Look, Listen and Feel

The background noises, colorful walls and hands-on art activities may be wonderful for many children, but some children are very sensitive to sound, sight and touch. Think of your child's needs as you "look, listen and feel" around the setting.

Interesting, Appropriate Activities

Pay particular attention to the variety of toys and materials. Can you imagine your child finding things to do all day? Will the activities be at the right level of development? Can your child practice old skills while learning new ones?

Matching Expectations

Spend time talking with the staff and watching what they do with the children. Do their expectations of behavior and independence in eating, toileting, etc. match yours? Do they seem interested in how you do things at home?