New Mexico Early Childhood Education & Care Department | Family Support and Early Intervention Division FAMILY INFANT TODDLER (FIT) PROGRAM

CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENT & DISABILITY

Early Childhood Evaluation Program – Technical Assistance & Consultation
Continuing Education series for NM FIT Providers

Dealing with Challenging Behaviors from an Interdisciplinary Perspective

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Dealing with Challenging Behaviors from an Interdisciplinary Perspective: **Challenges with Community Safety, Elopement, Running Off**



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University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center
Department of Pediatrics - Center for Development & Disability



Introductions and Housekeeping

- Today's ECEP Team
- We want to see you- cameras on!
- We want to hear you
  - Please use the chat or jump in with comments, ideas, and questions.
  - Goal is to share experiences and knowledge.



Remember: New and Improved Format!

- Topical Information and Background
- De-identified Case Example and Discussion
- Volunteer case consultation and questions!

***Please note this zoom platform is not HIPAA-compliant - please de-identify any confidential/case-related information.**



Objectives for today



- ❑ Develop strategies to identify potential causes and triggers for behaviors.
- ❑ Identify red flags for behaviors that would warrant an outside referral/next steps.
- ❑ Identify cross-discipline strategies to support families in dealing with challenging behavior, and understand how to differentiate when to use each type of strategy.

How can we understand challenging behaviors in toddlers?



A framework for observation, gathering key information, and ruling out concerns:

1. Rule out possible medical concerns/causes and establish typical behavior range
2. Consider/question what is happening
   - Before
   - During
   - After
3. Use strategies to track behavior (calendar, data collection, notes) – Looking for "trends" over time
   - Always ask, What have you tried? and, For how long?
4. Look at the behavior from different perspectives – consider other discipline lenses (and overlap between these lenses)
5. Consider an outside perspective – consultation or possible resources!

Challenging Behaviors: What's Typical?



Elopement (wandering) is when a child leaves a safe area or a responsible caregiver.

Typical

- Running away/wandering (i.e., elopement) can be common in toddlers
  - are exploring their environment and learning to assert independence.

- **Of Concern**
  - Wandering becomes much less common after 4 years of age
  - **About half of children and youth with ASD were reported to wander.**
    - Of those children, 1 in 4 were missing long enough to cause concern
    - most commonly in danger of drowning or traffic injury
    - wandered most often from their own home or another home, stores, and classrooms or schools.

Why do children wander?

The primary reasons for wandering included

- Enjoyment of running or exploring
- To get to a place the child enjoys (such as a pond)
- To get out of a situation that causes stress (for example, being asked to do something at school or getting away from a loud noise)
- To go see something interesting (for example, running to the road to see a road sign)
- Because they enjoy running or being chased by a caregiver.

- Challenges with communication, social interaction, attention, and learning can put many children with developmental disabilities at risk for becoming lost or injured due to wandering.

Prevention strategies

- Put locks on doors/ windows that child cannot unlock.
  - If using a key, ensure the key is easily accessible to adults in case of an emergency.
- Install alarms to alert if your child has opened a door or window.
- Have child wear a tracking device that allows you to track location, or some can alert caregivers if child has left a certain perimeter.
- Monitor child frequently. During busy times/ when distracted, set a timer to remind yourself to check on child.
- Give frequent praise and/or rewards when your child doesn't elope.
- Identify people (neighbors, family) to help search if needed.
- Prepare materials that include your child's name, communication abilities, ways to calm your child if upset, a current picture, caregiver contact information, and places your child has commonly eloped to in the past.
- Teach child to recite name, telephone number and address.

More tips for prevention and planning

Watch the child's behaviors

- Notice signs that the child may wander off before it happens (for example, child makes a certain sound or looks towards the door)
- Be alert about the child's location

Have an emergency plan to respond

- Keep information about the child up-to-date (picture, description)
- Secure your home (fences, door locks)
- Keep identification on the child (ID bracelet or information card)
- Inform neighbors and school workers
- Alert first responders

Teach safety skills

- Responding to safety commands ("stop")
- Stating name and phone number (or showing ID)
- Swimming, crossing the street

Case Example #3

Running off or "Elopement"

Hannah is a 33 month old who has been in early intervention since age 2. She has a history of delays in speech, cognitive, social-emotional, and self-help skills. She is an extremely active child, and rarely sits to engage with toys. She can attend to a favorite activity for a few minutes at a time, but usually moves from one toy to another and prefers to play outdoors. Her family has a large backyard that she spends time in, but they rarely take her out because of fear that she will run off. When they do take her on walks or errands, they hold her hand tightly or buckle her into a stroller or shopping cart. However, she is wanting to be more independent, and these strategies are not working as well.

Medical Considerations



- Vision
- Hearing
- Is this related to impulse control, so again, prenatal exposures increase the risk of impulsive actions and reduced awareness of risk, particularly prenatal alcohol exposure.
- Is there a family history of AD/HD and is Hannah at genetic risk for this?
- Autism/cognitive delay: Children with ASD or cognitive delay are at higher risk for elopement
- Consider general safety awareness and pain threshold
- Unusual number of injuries and context for injuries

Speech and Language Considerations



Before: How is her receptive and expressive language?

Are there are communicative attempts before she runs off– Behaviors? Gestures? Vocalizations? Words?

Can we re-direct beforehand? Give choices? External cues: visual schedule, visual timer, auditory reminders.

During: When are we using language to help others regulate?

Does she respond if you call her?

After: Reflect on what worked and didn't. Does she understand the impact of her actions on others? Setting up the environment and interventions. Social stories may help, or other visual strategies.

Sensory Considerations



Before: What do we know about her sensory system? Are there concerns about lack of body awareness? Seeking intense movement? Sensory over-reactions that trigger fear?

When is she most calm and settled?

During: What is happening in the environment? Add fun rhythmic movement?

Carry or push something heavy like a cart? Help her tune in to visual cues?

After: Practice outings in very small increments? Sensory tools or strategies?

Build in regular opportunities for calming input throughout the day? Practice feeling calm and settled to set her up for success.

Infant Mental Health and Behavioral Considerations



Before: What seem to be triggers, frequency, and duration of behavior? Can we anticipate these and proactively help child in the moment?

Be proactive – Use routines, pre-teaching how to act in community settings, prepare/practice coping strategies, and decrease stimuli that cause overwhelm.

During: Consider cause of elopement to determine response (e.g., sensory overwhelm- take a break). Use tools child will tolerate- holding hand, leash/backpack, cart, stroller, holding a stuffy together, rewarding check-ins.

After: Talk to child about big feelings and strategies to use in the future. Share safety concerns. Consider evaluation for ASD and cognitive development.

Parent Support: How do parents react/respond in these situations? What comes up for parents when child runs away? How can we support their regulation and concerns about observers' reactions, child physical safety, child emotional safety, etc.? Look at environment and explore concrete strategies to support safety.

What have they tried, and what has/hasn't worked?

How long has elopement been an issue, and what was happening in the family/for child when this started?

Discussion



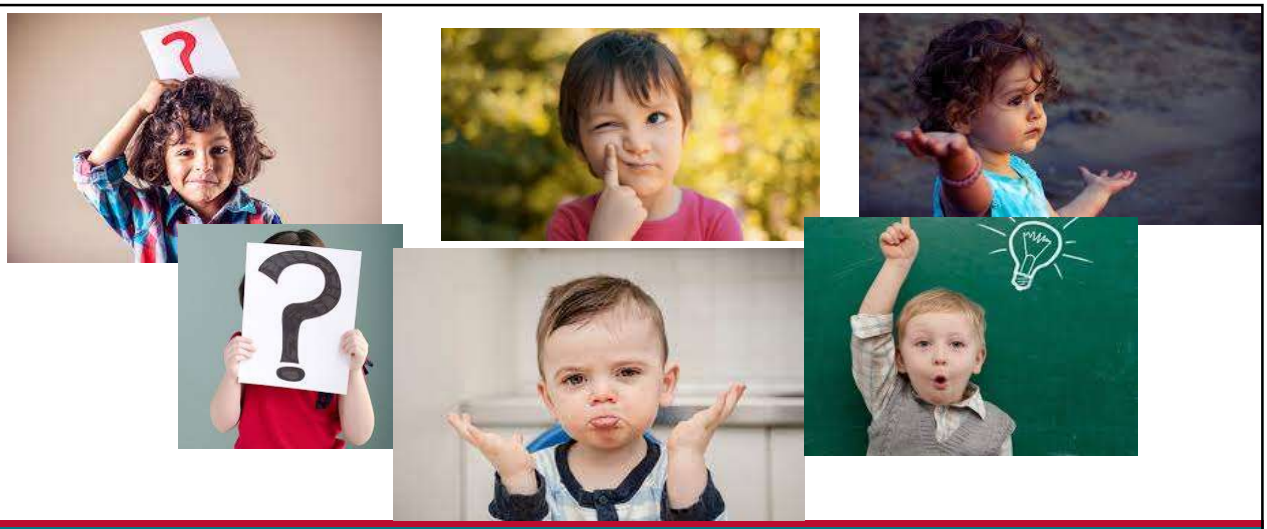
Case examples?

Successes?

Challenges?

Team considerations?

Next Steps?



Questions

Join us for more ECEP Office Hours in 2024-25!

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Contact information



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Resources



Zero to Three

https://www.zerotothree.org/

Pathways

https://pathways.org/

CDC

https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html

AAP Bright Futures

https://www.aap.org/en/practice-management/bright-futures

What to Expect

https://www.whattoexpect.com/