**Tier 1 Module: Behavior Expectations**

1. **Description:** This module presents the topic of behavioral expectations across early childhood, which includes the understanding of expectations related to children’s attention, play, self-regulation, and independence and the application to best classroom practices.
2. **Suggested Learning Outcomes:** When teaching this module, emphasize the following …
   1. Understanding developmentally appropriate expectations for children’s attention.
   2. Cultivating an awareness of the development of children’s play behaviors.
   3. Supporting the development of children’s self-regulation skills.
   4. Facilitating the growth of children’s independence.
3. **Video Script:** (see attached)

1. **Handout:** (see attached)

**Resources:**

**Books**

Alber, D. (2023). *A little SPOT emotional regulation box set (Books 49-56: Peaceful hands, anger shield, needs feelings, sleep, disappointment, wasted worry, positive thinking, and emotion coach).* Diane Alber Art LLC.

<https://www.amazon.com/Little-Emotional-Regulation-Books-49-56/dp/1960643045/ref=sr_1_12_sspa?crid=2MV9WPHJ4SACX&keywords=teaching+emotion+regulation&qid=1705766336&sprefix=teaching+emotion+regulation%2Caps%2C126&sr=8-12-spons&sp_csd=d2lkZ2V0TmFtZT1zcF9tdGY&psc=1>

Elkind, D. (2007). *The power of play: Learning what comes naturally*. New Tork: Hachette Books.

<https://www.amazon.com/s?k=The+wisdom+of+play+and+Elkind&crid=2PGAY1DFN7ZUS&sprefix=the+wisdom+of+play+and+elkind%2Caps%2C119&ref=nb_sb_noss>

Garvey, D., & Zeedyk, S. (2018). *Nurturing personal, social and emotional development in early childhood: A practical guide to understanding brain development and young children’s behavior*. London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

<https://www.amazon.com/Nurturing-Personal-Emotional-Development-Childhood/dp/1785922238/ref=sr_1_9?crid=3BMLOYXQ2ZY7W&keywords=behavioral+expectations+of+preschoolers&qid=1705765979&sprefix=behavioral+expectations+of+preschoolers%2Caps%2C118&sr=8-9>

Santomero, A. C. (2018). *Preschool clues: Raising smart, inspired, and engaged kids in a screen-filled world.* New York: Touchstone.

https://www.amazon.com/Preschool-Clues-Raising-Inspired-Screen-Filled/dp/1501174339/ref=sr\_1\_1?crid=33X6SGB48VR51&keywords=Preschool+clues%3A+Raising+smart%2C+inspired%2C+and+engaged+kids+in+a+screen-filled+world&qid=1705970393&sprefix=preschool+clues+raising+smart%2C+inspired%2C+and+engaged+kids+in+a+screen-filled+world%2Caps%2C143&sr=8-1

**Articles**

Children’s Ministry (2020). *Nine different approaches to getting kids’ attention*. Retrieved from <https://www.printfriendly.com/p/g/59AmYu>

Christiansen, K. T. (2019). *Classroom jobs and helper chart and ideas*. Retrieved from

<https://preschoolinspirations.com/classroom-jobs/>

Degel Sanchez, D., Steece-Doran, D., & Jablon, J. (2013). Planning for positive guidance: Powerful interactions make a difference. *Young Children, 6(3),* 12-14. Retrieved from https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/dec2012/planning-for-positive-guidance

Bottom of Form

Hancock, C. L., & Carter, D. R. (2016). Building environments that encourage positive behavior: The preschool behavior support self-assessment. *Young Children, 71(1).* Retrieved from <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/mar2016/building-environments-encourage-positive-behavior-preschool>

Panchal, R. (2023). *15+ Best Daily Activities To Encourage Independence In Preschoolers.* Retrieved from https://blog.burbankids.com/best-activities-to-encourage-independence/

Zero to Three (2010). *Developing self-confidence from 24–36 months.* Retrieved from https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/developing-self-confidence-from-24-36-months/

**Videos**

Attention span

<https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?&q=Attention+Span+Disorder&&mid=F98FC7178E939E6FE2DCF98FC7178E939E6FE2DC&&FORM=VRDGAR>

Choice time self-regulation

<https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?&q=development+of+children+self+regulation&&mid=F05427797C2180055E9EF05427797C2180055E9E&&FORM=VRDGAR>

Learning through play

<https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?&q=promoting+learning+through+play&&mid=DB983E364A7E964F1E10DB983E364A7E964F1E10&&FORM=VRDGAR>

<https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?&q=promoting+learning+through+play&&mid=CF5AEC7495898F18EADDCF5AEC7495898F18EADD&&FORM=VRDGAR>

Setting rules and expectations

<https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?&q=behavioral+expectations+of+young+children&&mid=F7FCB0FCC9C2763EC45CF7FCB0FCC9C2763EC45C&&FORM=VRDGAR>

**Martin Luther College Courses**

EDU A Field Guide to Early Childhood Development—add number

EDU8101 Intellectual, Social, and Emotional Development

EDU8103 Developing Home and School Relationships

EDU8113 Assessment of Young Children

SPE2101 Educating the Exceptional Learner

**Video Script: Behavioral Expectations**

Early childhood is a period in life in which so much growth and development happens. As early childhood caregivers, we know that babies and Kindergarteners are not the same across pretty much all domains of development. Because of this knowledge, we have different expectations when working with each age group. To best understand what is realistically expected of each child, we need to become well-versed in developmental milestones, assessments, and most importantly get to know each child in our care. It is also important to share information about developmentally appropriate expectations with families. In this video, we will focus on four common areas where expectations are commonly misaligned with a child’s development. You will gain insight into children’s expectations related to their attention, play, self-regulation, and independence as well as learn ways to cultivate and support their development.

*Attention*

Why can’t he sit still? Why is she not listening? Why is he still at the puzzle center when he should have moved to the carpet? The common thread among these questions is attention. Attention is foundational for learning! When thinking about attention, we often think of attention span or sustained attention. However, this is just one aspect of attention. Researchers often divide attention into three main areas: sustained attention, attention focusing, and attention shifting (see Siegler et al., 2019). The definitions for these types of attention can be found in their terms—*sustained*, is to hold attention; *focusing*, is to pay attention to the task at hand and not get distracted by other things; *shifting*, is the ability to change attention from the current task to a new task. All types of attention are necessary for successful learning to occur.

How long can we expect children to pay attention, in other words: What is a realistic attention span? From birth, babies gather information about their environments through their observations. Infants should be expected to track objects and look towards someone speaking to them. Two- and three-year-olds have an attention span close to their ages (Gillam, 2014) and preschoolers can be expected to hold their attention for 5-10 minutes (Mabale, 2023). When trying to keep young children’s attention, caregivers need to be visually engaging and keep material interesting and relevant (see DiCarlo et al., 2012). Asking questions keeps children engaged for longer periods of time as well. Researchers have found that a balanced approach to presenting learning concepts as a whole-group versus small-group or individual level sustains children’s attention (DiCarlo et al., 2012).

Around 4 ½ years of age, there is tremendous growth in the frontal cortex of the brain, which is attributed to vast improvements in children’s attention, specifically, their attention focusing and shifting. Before that, children are capable of focusing and shifting their attention in short bursts but need encouragement and patience from caregivers. Additional supports may include removing extra distractions, giving a reminder about transitioning to the next activity, and making sure children are paying attention before stating directions. Classroom routines are very helpful to children so that they have clear expectations of what is happening and what is going to happen throughout their day. Attention focusing and shifting are still considered emerging skills throughout the preschool years.

*Play*

Why is she always playing by herself? Why is he only playing with blocks? Why is she constantly by my side and not wanting to play? The answers to these common scenarios depend on so many factors—from personal preferences to social anxiety to age of the child. We all know the importance of play. Take time to reflect on the definition of play. Do you think of play as child-directed, open-ended, involving peers, spontaneous? It can be all those things. Opportunities for play should be varied to provide multiple learning opportunities for children. As children grow older, their play should become increasingly more complex and involve more peer interactions. Providing children with the appropriate manipulatives and allowing an appropriate amount of time are necessary to support the development of play.

There are six main categories of play: unoccupied, solitary, onlooking, parallel, associative, and cooperative (see Washington, 2017). Each category maps on to a particular age-span, but that does not mean that the particular-aged child only engages in that type of play. The type of play can vary depending on the context and many other factors. *Unoccupied* is typical of newborns and young infants who are not mobile and absorb information in their environments through observations. Infants are known for *solitary* play; they typically play by themselves and there is limited interaction with other infants. Young toddlers, 2-2 ½ year-olds, are typically found to engage in *onlooking* play. They should be curious about their peers and observe other toddlers around them but still want to play on their own. Between 2-3 years of age, young preschoolers commonly play alongside others but will not play together with them; this type of play is considered *parallel* play. Notice that the type of play is increasingly involving peers as children age. *Associative* play should emerge between 3-4 years when children start to interact with others and engage with the same toys during their play. As children turn 4 years old, they should be observed engaging in *cooperative* play. Cooperative play is viewed as the most complex level because children share aims and goals and build peer relationships.

Regardless of children’s ages, there are common classroom management and teaching strategies to support the development of children’s play behaviors. For example, it is important to build a classroom community of Christian love and acceptance. Telling Bible stories, providing opportunities for children to share interests and likes, and playing classroom games are excellent ways to build a sense of community. A harmonious classroom environment helps children feel a sense of belonging, and it is this feeling of belonging that connects children to one another. Drawing connections among children will spur on peer interactions.

Modeling socially appropriate behaviors and observing children’s interactions are two ways to influence positive peer interactions. When caregivers model appropriate behaviors, children learn about what is expected of them. As children engage with their peers more and more, attentive observation becomes increasingly important. Through observations caregivers can learn about which additional supports are needed to further develop children’s essential social skills and emotional competencies necessary for quality peer interactions (see Thompson & Twibell, 2009). In addition to practicing social skills and emotion recognition and labeling, children will need assistance in developing their regulation skills, more to come on this later.

*Independence*

For children to try new things on their own, they first need to feel comfortable exploring their environments and to be confident in their own abilities. Consistency in meeting children’s needs and offering nurturant support help lay a solid foundation for children’s confidence and ultimately their independence. Establishing routines and having an organized classroom helps children know about what happens in their environment and enables children to find, use, and return materials independently (Epstein, 2014). Even young toddlers can follow basic directions and communicate their desires through pointing (Gilliam, 2014). Generally, if children can do something by themselves, let them. It may take longer for toddlers to put on their own coats and carry their own backpacks, but it is something that they should start practicing and receive praise and encouragement along the way. Remember to praise the process and not the outcome. Also remember that children will need different amounts of help. Mistakes and failures are part of learning, but if we always rush in, children will never learn.

Classroom jobs and responsibilities are a great way to promote children’s independence and positive sense of self. Based on the self-determination theory, a person’s ability to thrive is based on autonomy, competence, and connection to other people (see Lewis, 2018). From the beginning of Creation, God tasked Adam and Eve with responsibilities. From a young age, children can be tasked with responsibilities. According to researchers, toddlers can help sweep and clean up spills, pick up and put toys away, and wipe counters clean (Lewis, 2018). Preschoolers can do all the things toddlers can do but more efficiently and additional jobs that require more coordination like watering indoor plants and serving snacks. Assigning children classroom jobs and responsibilities not only teaches children life skills but also boosts their intrinsic motivation and confidence because they are contributing to the classroom.

*Self-regulation*

Last, and most importantly, let’s discuss self-regulation. Regulation is at the heart of all the previous behavioral expectations that we have discussed. To have attention drawn to the appropriate information and situations, you need to regulate. To have enjoyable play interactions, you need to regulate. To be independent, you need to regulate. Self-regulation is defined as modulating emotional responses, complying with external requests, controlling behavior, controlling attention, and engaging in self-directed thinking and problem solving (Bronson, 2008). Complying with external suggestions begins emerging in infancy; controlling impulses, in toddlerhood; and deliberate actions, planning, and control, in the preschool years. As children age, they should be progressing in their self-regulation.

How should we support the development of regulation? During infancy, create routines so that infants can learn through consistency and have expectations for the effects of their behaviors. Infants will discover their own ability to control the environment through their actions. During toddlerhood, there is much support needed for labeling and communicating emotions as well as assistance with impulse control. For example, a child hits another child. When asked what the rule is about how to use our hands, the child will likely state the rule verbatim. When asked “why”, the child will likely not have an answer. Children need to have firm and loving boundaries in place, and they need caregivers to explain these boundaries and rules clearly and repeatedly. Impulse control improves over time as children’s brains maturate and as children have more practice with appropriate strategies. The preschool years provide ample opportunities for practicing regulation skills and strategies as peer interactions increase and children increasingly engage with the world around them.

*Conclusion*

Recall in this video, that we discussed behavioral expectations related to infants’, toddlers’, and preschoolers’ attention, play, self-regulation, and independence. As a result of understanding more about children’s development, you will be able to have more realistic and appropriate behavioral expectations for the children in your care.

References

Bronson, M. B. (2008). Recognizing and supporting development of self-regulation. In Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (Eds.), *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8* (pp. 49-64). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

DiCarlo, C. F., Pierce, S. H., Baumgartner, J., Harris, M. E., & Ota, C. (2012). Whole-Group Instruction Practices and Children’s Attention: A Preliminary Report. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, *26(2),* 154-168.

Epstein, A. S. (2014). *The intentional teacher: Choosing the best strategies for young children’s learning.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Gilliam, W. (2014, August). Milestones of EF. *Parents, 89(8),* 30-31.

Lewis, K. R. (2018). *The good news about bad behavior: Why kids are less disciplined than ever – And what to do about it.* New York: Public Affairs.

Mabale, J. (2023). *Attention Span by Age: How It Changes Over Time.* Retrieved from <https://www.neeuro.com/blog/attention-span-by-age#:~:text=Throughout%20all%20stages%20of%20life%2C%20several%20factors%20can,stimulating%20activities%2C%20can%20impact%20attention.%20...%20More%20items>.

Siegler, R., Saffran, J., Gershoff, E., Eisenberg, N., & DeLoache, J. (2019). *How children develop* (6th ed.). New York: Worth.

Thompson, J. E., & Twibell, K. K. (2009). Teaching hearts and minds in early childhood classrooms: Curriculum for social and emotional development. In O. A. Barbarin & B. H. Wasik (Eds.), *Handbook of child development and early education: Research to practice* (pp. 199–222). The Guilford Press.

Washington, V. (2017). *Essentials for working with young children* (2nd ed.). Washington, D.C.: Child Development Associate.

**Handout: Behavioral Expectations**

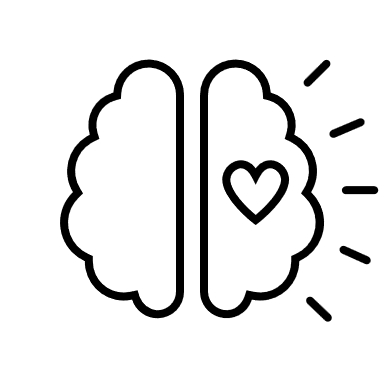
*In this handout, take time to summarize key takeaways on the behavioral expectations of children’s attention, play, independence, and self-regulation and reflect on your own classroom practices.*

**What are reasonable expectations of each category of behavior for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers? Complete the table.**

|  | Attention | Play | Independence | Self-regulation |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Infants |  |  |  |  |
| Toddlers |  |  |  |  |
| Preschoolers |  |  |  |  |

**Thinking about the age group you most work with, what are some best classroom practices of each category of behavior to facilitate positive development.**

|  | Attention | Play | Independence | Self-regulation |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Age group:  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |  |



***Reflect*: What is something you are excited to try in your classroom?**