**Strategies for Responding to Infant and Toddlers’ Challenging Behavior**

**and Supporting Infant and Toddlers’ Social Emotional Development**

**Social Emotional Development Goal**

**Help Child to:**

Experience, regulate and express emotions

Form close and secure interpersonal relationships

Explore the environment and learn

**All Strategies for Responding to Infant and Toddler Challenging Behavior Should Meet the Following Criteria:**

Acknowledge distress

Offer comfort

Use words to connect with the child

Be attuned to (or in sync with) the child’s individualized needs

Help the child achieve the understood intention

Be developmentally appropriate

**Sample Strategies:**

***Systematic Strategies***

* Attempt to understand and empathize with the child’s experience
* Observe to understand the meaning of the behavior using the Behavior Observation Report
* Track and document frequency, duration, and intensity
* Chart time of day behavior occurs
* Use self reflection to appropriately respond to behavior
* Share reflections/access thoughts and opinions of others
* Monitor progress of social emotional skill development and reduction in concerning behavior

***Strategies to Soothe***

* Make soothing noise *(e.g. saying, “shhhhhhhhhh, shhhhhhhh”)*, or arrange white noise *(e.g. running a vacuum cleaner, white noise machine, or hair dryer)*
* Rock the child: try different ways and stay with what the child seems to respond to *(side to side, back and forth, up and down)*
* Hold and carry to keep infant close to one’s body
* Outside time, fresh air
* Sing, either familiar songs, or a repetitive tune with the child’s name in it
* Encourage sucking (pacifier, fingers)
* Experiment with different types of “holding” such as facing out, gently holding one leg in a bent position *(prevents the child from over-extending and arching)*, etc. Check with the family to see if there are positions that seem to help the child.
* Encourage transitional objects of comfort *(e.g. blankets, dolls, stuffed toy, etc.)*
* Stay calm
* Stay physically close
* For older toddlers, acknowledge their feelings verbally while physically soothing *(“You are crying. I wonder if you are sad? You really wanted to play with that doll.”)*

***Modify Environment and Interactions***

* Reduce and/or minimize number of infant care teachers
* Make adjustments based on child’s temperament (*e.g. offer more time for a slow-to-warm up child; offer more physical activity for a active child)*
* Make appropriate environmental changes *(e.g. reduce stimulation, increase stimulation)*
* Shadow child *(e.g. for a limited time provide as much one-on-one attention and monitoring as possible)*
* Provide extra time and attention including touch

***Provide Increased Predictability and Consistency***

* Create consistency in routines *(e.g. diaper the same way in the same place using the same language; read books before nap;)*
* Use consistent simple words *(e.g. “Food?; You want food?”; “Look with your eyes”)*
* Develop a plan of action/responses and stick to plan
* Set limited clear consistent limits *(e.g. “Gentle touch”; “We only bite food or teethers”)*
* Use objects to help children understand what is coming next. *(Hand them a diaper it is time to change their diaper, show them two objects in a row as a “First…Then” schedule)*
* Use simple visual schedules or “First…Then” visuals to support predictability *(“What do we do next? After playtime we check diapers. There you are in the picture and I am checking your diaper!*

***Model, Coach, Teach Appropriate Behavior***

* Teach expectations *(e.g. “This is a gentle touch”; “Feel the gentle touch”)*
* Teach sign language or gestures for common words *(Many children can learn gestures before they can consistently use words. Try “more”, “help”, “want”)*
* Validate child’s feelings and/or experience *(use exaggerated facial expression, tone of voice and gestures to mirror the child’s emotion)*
* Tell children what TO DO in positive terms *(“Bottom on the chair”; “Feet on the floor”)*
* Notice when child is engaging in desired behavior *(“You gave Sam a turn with that toy”)*
* Acknowledge positive behavior *(“That’s gentle touching”; “You’re so calm now.” “You pointed to the toy”)*
* Suggest labels for the child’s and others’ emotional experience *(“You look sad.”; “Tyrus seems angry”)*
* Use books to illustrate emotions and social skills *(e.g. “How Do I Feel?”, “No Biting”)*
* Read *“I Can Get Calm”* (available to download) ahead of time, then offer options from the book
* Remind the child that they can go take a break in the ‘be by myself’ area, acknowledge their feelings, calm themselves down, and then think, think, think of a solution

***Use Distraction***

*NOTE: Distraction is most useful when a child is interested in a toy or activity that is not safe or not available. This technique is not to be used to distract from feelings. When a child is upset, that feeling is to be acknowledged and the adult can be physically present and supportive. See* ***Strategies to******Soothe*** *above.*

* Offer alternate activities *(“You really want to touch that light switch. Let’s play with this pop-up toy instead.”)*
* Offer substitute behavior *(“You want to bite? You can bite this teething ring”)*
* Play a favorite game or sing a song *(I know you want to go outside. It is too cold. Let’s sing Row Your Boat!”)*