

FOURTH EDITION

Challenging Behavior in Young Children

Understanding, Preventing, and Responding Effectively



Barbara Kaiser

Judy Sklar Rasminsky

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Foreword by Marilou Hyson

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For Jessika, Maita, Sonya, and Abigail

About the Authors

Barbara Kaiser and Judy Sklar Rasminsky first teamed up more than two decades ago to write *The Daycare Handbook* (1991). Since then they've published a number of award-winning and bestselling books and booklets, including *Meeting the Challenge* (a Comprehensive Membership Benefit of the National Association for the Education of Young Children in 1999), *Challenging Behavior in Young Children* (winner of a Texty Award for textbook excellence in 2007), *Challenging Behavior in Elementary and Middle School* (a Texty winner in 2009), and a series of webinars and guides on bullying for the Nova Scotia Department of Education (2013).

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Visit Kaiser and Rasminsky at www.challengingbehavior.com and read their blog at www.childrenwithchallengingbehavior.com

Foreword

There could not be a more important time to welcome the fourth edition of Barbara Kaiser and Judy Sklar Rasminsky's wonderful book. For years, *Challenging Behavior in Young Children: Understanding, Preventing, and Responding Effectively* has been a go-to resource for countless current and future teachers, professional development providers, and program directors. Now we need the authors' wisdom more than ever.

We need this book right now

We now have unprecedented research that shows the importance of young children's social and emotional competence. These skills affect children's holistic development in the early years and far beyond. Children who are able to self-regulate, collaborate with others, understand and manage strong emotions, and persist in the face of frustration have a solid foundation for success in every other aspect of their development. They're also happier with themselves and with life.

Yet as we realize the importance of good social-emotional skills, we also see troubling signs that not enough is being done to help children who show, or are at risk for, challenging behavior. At alarming rates, young children with problem behaviors are being excluded from early childhood programs. According to the Office for Civil Rights, in 2011–2012 more than 8,000 children in public pre-kindergarten were suspended at least once, with African American children and boys being over-represented in these totals. And children in state-supported pre-kindergarten have been found to be three times as likely to be expelled as K-12 students. The impact on teachers is equally troubling. If you are an early childhood professional, you recognize that children's challenging behaviors are the greatest source of job stress, even causing some teachers to leave our field entirely. And pressures on teachers mount, with growing emphasis on preparing children to meet rigorous academic expectations and to succeed in high-stakes assessments. It can be easy to lose sight of the need to build strong social and emotional foundations—yet those foundations are more essential than ever.

What's the same in this edition?

As a reader, you're fortunate that the fourth edition of *Challenging Behavior in Young Children* continues to offer the insights that have been so valuable in the past. Whether you've used this book in earlier editions or are meeting it for the first time, you'll be happy to see:

- Summaries of **research** on all aspects of child development and early learning that potentially affect children's challenging behavior.
- A strong emphasis on nurturing, respectful **relationships** between teachers and young children as the essential basis for prevention and intervention.
- Countless examples of everyday, practical **strategies for prevention and intervention**.
- Sustained attention to **partnerships with families** with diverse cultural and individual characteristics.

And what's new?

Responding to new research as well as new challenges, Kaiser and Rasminsky have enriched this edition with features that give early childhood educators even more resources to help them and their children. In this edition you'll find:

- **New, updated, evidence-based content in critical areas** such as brain development, including new knowledge about toxic stress and the brain's executive functions. The authors also share important new research and insights on bullying, including the role of bystanders, as well as current information about the development of resilience and "grit." Each of these areas has profound implications for young children's challenging behavior, implications that the authors will help you explore.
- **Video clips** that illustrate and promote reflection on many of the key issues discussed in each chapter. The engaging, varied videos feature cartoon characters (a scene with Peanuts' Linus and his teacher Miss Othmar), inspiring images of children's resilience, researchers in action, and provocative scenes in real classrooms. The authors introduce each clip with a framing question to prompt group discussion or self-reflection.
- Expanded **reflection and application tools**, including checklists and end-of-chapter probing questions on "What Do You Know?" and "What Do You Think?"

A sympathetic understanding of children, families, and teachers

One of the qualities that I have always loved about this book is the authors' sincere, sympathetic understanding of young children, their families, and their teachers.

Reading other discussions of challenging behavior, one sometimes senses an exasperated blame-the-child, blame-the-parents, or blame-the-teacher tone—or a combination of all three. In contrast, in this book you will find an abiding respect for the difficulties faced by each child, family, and early childhood professional. Young Andrew is using his tantrums to let everyone know that he does *not* like to have his favorite activities interrupted. His panicked parents are using the kinds of punishments they had experienced when they were young. And his teachers, with five other “Andrews” in the class, are struggling just to get through each day. Barbara Kaiser and Judy Sklar Rasminsky understand these difficulties and offer you the very best research and practical wisdom to create happier early childhood environments and better outcomes for everyone.

Marilou Hyson, Ph.D.

Preface

Why a fourth edition? Because we know that teachers, children, and families continue to struggle with children's challenging behavior; and because, like you, we continue to search for ways to understand and address it.

We can offer no magic fairy dust, no single theory or practice that will work for all teachers or all children. But we do offer you several effective evidence-based strategies so that you can select those that suit who you are and what you believe in—as well as the child with challenging behavior in your own classroom. Every child has some kind of special need, especially children with challenging behavior. This book will help you to see each child as an individual, build a meaningful relationship with him, figure out where he's coming from, and help him to meet his needs more appropriately.

Like you, we have a lot of things on our mind—violence, race, climate change, the economy, technology, the Common Core, how to prevent that child from putting raisins in his nose, not to mention lack of money, time, and sleep—that create stress in our lives and the lives of our children. In the last few years we've learned much more about what stress can do to children's brains, executive function, and behavior, and that research has become our focus in this edition, along with the two strongest antidotes to stress: caring, responsive relationships and an inclusive social climate.

What's new in this edition?

- As described earlier in this text, we've emphasized stress (including toxic stress), executive function, social climate, and social norms throughout the book.
- This text is available as an e-book, which allows us to share videos that illuminate the facts, strategies, and research in each chapter and encourage you to think about the content in a more personal way.
- In each chapter we've added learning goals as well as "What Do You Know?" questions that align with these goals.
- We've written a completely new brain chapter that underlines the profound influence of stress and includes a new section on genes.
- The chapter on resilience, which is also totally new, explains the latest theories and research, including grit and mindset ("growing the brain").

- The bullying chapter has been heavily updated to highlight the importance of social climate, social norms, and bystanders, and it now provides specific details about handling bullying incidents.
- The culture chapter contains the most up-to-date research on dual-language learning and culturally responsive teaching as children from diverse cultures become a “minority majority” in the United States.
- We have included new information from the *DSM-5* on autism, learning disabilities, and emotional and behavioral disorders.
- There is also an enlarged section on curriculum and the Common Core.
- The reflective checklists on social climate, physical environment, routines and transitions, curriculum, and teaching strategies have been substantially revised.
- There are more strategies for connecting with children and families.
- We’ve provided more strategies for self-reflection, including understanding the amygdala hijack.
- In addition, we’ve included several new figures.

Instructor’s Manual

An updated *Instructor’s Manual* is available for download to college instructors who register online at www.pearsonhighered.com, Educators. This manual includes interactive activities, discussion questions, learning outcomes, chapter summaries, and more to enrich a variety of college course formats—online, hybrid, and face-to-face.

Acknowledgments

We could not have written this edition without the help of a great many colleagues, friends, and family members.

Our heartfelt thanks go to Neil Butchard and Bob Spencier for their commitment to children and their willingness to share their wonderful WEVAS™ program; to Carol Patterson and Alida Jansen for passing along their vast experience and expertise in working with children and their families; to Carol Copple, Sue Bredekamp, and Joan Duffell (executive director of the Committee for Children) for believing in us from the beginning; and to Marilou Hyson for her support and helpful feedback as well as for writing the foreword for this edition.

Barbara would like to thank all the participants and organizers of the workshops she’s presented throughout North America and around the world over the past several years: We have both learned so much from them.

We’d also like to thank our reviewers for their invaluable comments—Marilou Hyson at the University of Pennsylvania; Valerie Smirlock at the University of Delaware; and Rachel Sperry at the Devereux Center for Resilient Children.

For giving this book a special spirit, we owe thanks to our young artists, Beatrice Ayoub, Samantha Handal, Emma Harries, Daniel Huang, Miri Izenberg, Julia, Krissy, and Michael Keech, Alexandra Plaitis, Abigail Rasminsky, Sophia Tone, and Hallie Walsh, as well as to their families.

We are very securely attached to our editor, Julie Peters, and the staff at Pearson—Andrea Hall, Megan Muffo, Johanna Burke, Janet Domingo, Doug Bell, and the rest—who have provided the sensitive, responsive care authors require.

It goes without saying that Barbara thanks her sister, Joan, who, in her mind, remains the best pre-K teacher on the planet, for her sense of humor and wonderful stories. Judy thanks her brothers, Daniel and Zachary, whose unflagging support and brilliant literary advice sustained her throughout the writing process.

We thank both of our husbands, Martin Hallett and Michael Rasminsky, for being there for us through thick and thin, cooking innumerable dinners, and keeping our households running. Michael acted as an all-around support system, making graphs, fixing computer glitches, and giving up many hours at the piano without complaint. Without him there would be no brain chapter. In addition, Judy is grateful to Abigail, David, Noa, Sonya, Oren, Toby, and Miri for inspiring her and keeping her tethered to the real world. And as always, Barbara's children, Jessika, Maita, and Jonathan, are constant reminders of how important our work is.

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Introduction



Barbara had been working in the field of early care and education for 14 years when a 2½-year-old named Andrew turned her world upside down.

The teachers at the nonprofit community child care center she directed were all experienced and qualified, but Andrew brought out every flaw in the program and taxed every skill they'd developed. It was the first time they had lacked the ability to help a child regulate his own behavior.

Because they couldn't keep Andrew from hurting others, many of the children no longer felt safe, and several became anxious, copied his behavior, or were just too scared to do much of anything. These "borderline" children, as the staff called them, sometimes tried to provoke Andrew when things were calm. If they could get him to scream, hit, or throw things, they knew what to expect. When they were in need of attention themselves, they saw what worked for Andrew and followed his example. As a result, the group soon contained four or five children with challenging behavior.

The teachers spent their days putting out fires, consoling children, and saying "no" or "stop" far too frequently. They knew they weren't helping Andrew, and worse, they found themselves liking him and some of the other children less—a feeling that made them profoundly uncomfortable. As the year wore on, they began to feel resentful, burned out, inadequate, and full of self-doubt.

As Andrew got older, the problems got bigger. Because he had no diagnosed medical problem or medication, there were no treatment guidelines or extra funds to help care for him. Large for his age, he had poor gross motor skills—and, aside from puzzles, he wasn't interested in fine motor activities either. Although he was extremely articulate, he had difficulty relating to other children, and the only way he could play or communicate was to kick, hit, or push. During transitions and free play, he worked the room, moving from one target to the next, pushing over

block structures and snatching toys. At snack and lunchtime, he often selected a chair that was occupied and sat on the occupant. After a while, the children waited until Andrew was seated, then sat as far away as possible. If he got angry, he emptied the shelves onto the floor and flung chairs around the room. When the teachers tried to redirect him, he refused to move and didn't hesitate to kick, hit, or head-butt them.

Because Andrew's facial expressions and body language seldom reflected his feelings or intentions, his behavior seemed to come out of nowhere. One of his 4-year-old classmates said it best: "Andrew is like a volcano; he's calm on the outside and ready to explode on the inside."

The staff tried to encourage him when he was behaving appropriately, but positive reinforcement made Andrew nervous. If someone showed interest while he was concentrating on a puzzle, he shoved it to the ground or threw the pieces at the child or across the room. Eventually, the teachers found themselves viewing his positive behavior as a chance to take a breath or be with the other children, who were receiving less and less care. The teachers were showing Andrew that the best way to get their attention was to behave inappropriately.

Some of the staff thought he shouldn't be there. They felt ill equipped and unwilling to have him in their group. Not only did he jeopardize the safety of the other children, but his presence compromised their ability to provide the program the children deserved. He consumed so much of their time and energy they had almost nothing left to give.

There were also some irate parents. Each day their children came home with stories about what Andrew had done, sometimes sporting bruises he had inflicted. The parents simply didn't understand why he was allowed to remain at the center. Barbara empathized with them, but she couldn't help wondering what would happen to Andrew if she asked him to leave. Would another center handle his behavior better? Or would he just bounce from center to center?

Barbara felt a sense of responsibility to Andrew, and she wasn't ready to give up. She brought in experts to advise the staff, but she had waited too long to ask for help, and the teachers were so stressed and defensive they couldn't hear the consultants' recommendations. They focused more on punishment than teaching, and they felt so overwhelmed they didn't recognize that any challenging behavior that persists over time is working for the child. When Andrew finally went to kindergarten, they felt they had failed.

Andrew's legacy

Barbara and the staff vowed they would never let this happen again. They attended workshops, read about challenging behavior, and devoted a portion of each staff meeting to discussing the research-based strategies they were learning about. Judy—a former chair of the center's board of directors and a writer specializing in education and family issues—went with them to workshops and read everything she could get her hands on. Everyone searched out new ideas, trying to understand more.

It wasn't all smooth sailing. The nine teachers didn't always see things the same way. Some were eager to try everything. Others were still convinced that

children with challenging behavior didn't belong in regular child care centers. Their emphatic responses reflected their diverse personalities, life experiences, cultures, philosophies, and attitudes toward children. Because teaching isn't simply what one does but also who one is, it was important to pay attention to what everyone felt, so they took it slowly and looked for solutions that felt comfortable to all of them.

Eventually the staff came to realize that Andrew hadn't been out to ruin everyone's day. His behavior had to do with the way he saw the world and the fact that he didn't know how to respond appropriately. More than anybody, he probably wished things had been different. Once the teachers recognized their job was to teach, not to police, they were on the right track.

The new approach

Three years later, 3½-year-old Michael started at the center. During the brief orientation session for new children and their parents, he ran around screaming, hitting, and grabbing toys from the other children. As soon as the children and parents left, Barbara and the staff held an emergency meeting. They talked about what Andrew had taught them and how they could help Michael develop social and emotional skills, impulse control, and self-esteem. Prevention was uppermost in their minds. To keep him from losing control, they decided he would become the partner of one of the teachers, they would place his cubby next to hers, they would give him focused and limited choices during free play, and they would assign everyone tasks at cleanup and seats at snack and lunchtime. Because they didn't yet know what would make Michael feel good about himself, they decided to reinforce his appropriate behavior by smiling, giving him thumbs up throughout the day, and letting him choose a song if he was doing well at circle time.

The teachers also talked about their feelings: their attitudes toward Michael's presence, his behavior, their levels of tolerance, their verbal and nonverbal messages, and their confidence as individuals and members of a team. Because it was important to be consistent, they had to agree about which behaviors were acceptable and what they would do when Michael's behavior was unacceptable. As the meeting went on, it became clear that they all felt much more confident than they had with Andrew. They weren't helpless; they had strategies and plans.

It didn't take long for them to discover that Michael loved to have his back rubbed and that he grinned infectiously when they gave him a thumbs up. Within 6 weeks, all the strategies they'd worked on were in place, they were feeling competent and comfortable about having him at the center, and he was able to play, share, and make friends. Instead of being anxious or frightened, the other children were learning to recognize Michael's strengths and weaknesses, and they enthusiastically encouraged his efforts to behave appropriately. Their support helped him enormously.

It wasn't all perfect. Any change in routine—for example, if his teacher was absent—derailed him. And no matter how much progress he made during the day, his challenging behavior reemerged when his mother arrived. You could feel her apprehension as she walked down the corridor. To help her see how well Michael was doing, the educators made a point of greeting her with a smile and telling her

about something positive he'd done that day. As time passed, they urged her to spend a few minutes in the classroom before bundling him up for the trip home. Michael was delighted to have her sit beside him and meet his friends. He couldn't wait to tell her about the painting he'd made or the game he'd played in the gym. Eventually, even the hassles at the end of the day became easy routines.

After 2 years in the child care center, Michael went off to school. Although he had some testy moments, he has made friends and adjusted well.

Sharing the knowledge

The experience with Michael demonstrated to us that teachers *can* respond effectively to a child's challenging behavior when they have the appropriate knowledge, strategies, and skills. To share what we'd learned, we decided to write a book. The need for it was all too evident. In 2005, a nationwide study of prekindergarten programs by Walter S. Gilliam found that 10.4 percent of teachers had expelled at least one child because of behavior problems during the school year, making it clear that many teachers were not prepared to address children's challenging behavior.

Classrooms in today's child care centers and schools are filled with Andrews and Michaels. If we want them to succeed, we must make sure not only that children are ready for school but also that schools are ready for children—all children. Although research shows that aggressive behavior in early childhood tends to persist, it also shows that children with challenging behavior can learn appropriate ways to behave. Teachers who know what they're doing and why they're doing it can make an enormous difference in the lives of these children. As a teacher or future teacher, you have two choices. Either you can create an environment that welcomes them and *teaches* them how to become the best people they can be, or you can reinforce their growing suspicion that they have nothing to offer, will never belong, and cannot learn or cope with the demands of school.

At first we felt like pioneers when we talked about alternatives to punishment: People were looking for quick fixes and tied to old ways of doing things. But we have learned a lot since then. We know now that a child's behavior is the result of a dynamic process involving his genes and his environment. We are realizing that children with challenging behavior don't know how to communicate their needs, and we have to teach them new skills, not embarrass or humiliate them.

Teaching today is highly demanding, and it may seem impossible to do all we advocate in this book. However, it is worth whatever time and effort it takes to build a relationship with every child, teach social and emotional skills, and develop a caring, inclusive classroom environment. In the long run, dedicating a few minutes a day to preventing challenging behavior and creating opportunities for all children to succeed actually *saves* time and enables them to learn not only appropriate behavior but also the content of the curriculum.

By developing the ability to help children with challenging behavior, you are also helping other children who are often frightened or excited and learn to become bystanders, accept the role of victim, or join in the aggressive behavior. When you are prepared, all the children will feel safe, and the difficult behavior will be less severe, less frequent, and less contagious. Then it becomes possible to make the commitment that everyone who works with children wants to be able to make: to welcome and help each child in your class. You, too, will benefit as you acquire

competence and confidence, gain pride and satisfaction in your job, and feel more positive about the children you spend many hours with each day.

What is in this book?

This book is a kind of survival manual for education students and practicing teachers in child care centers, elementary schools, and family child care homes who work (or plan to work) with children aged 0 to 8 years. It can also be useful to administrators. When they set a positive tone and support teachers dealing with children with challenging behavior, everyone has a better chance for success.

The aim of this book is to provide the basic facts and skills you need to understand and prevent challenging behavior, address it effectively when it occurs, and teach appropriate alternatives. It brings together information and techniques drawn from neuroscience, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, special education, early care and education, child development, cross-cultural research, and proactive social and emotional skills programs. It doesn't provide recipes or formulas, because each child is unique and every situation requires its own solution. And it certainly doesn't come with a money-back guarantee. But it does offer ideas and strategies proven to work time and again—and that *will* work if you give them a chance. Many weeks may elapse between the moment you first realize you need help with a child with challenging behavior and the day a consultant finally appears in your class. These weeks are the time you are most liable to burn out—and the time the strategies here will be useful. But don't wait until then to try them.

Nuts and bolts

As its subtitle suggests, this book falls into three parts: understanding, preventing, and responding effectively, but all of the ideas and strategies in it are interconnected. Therefore please resist the temptation to go straight to the interventions. To get any strategy to work well, you need to prepare both yourself and the environment: No strategy works in a vacuum.

Begin with the first four chapters, which explain what challenging behavior is, the risk and protective factors for challenging behavior, and the role of the brain. The next two chapters are also about understanding—understanding yourself and the child, the importance of your relationship, the child's family and culture, and how your own upbringing and culture affect your teaching and your expectations of appropriate behavior.

The book's middle section focuses on prevention. Chapter 7 looks at the social climate and describes how to develop a community and teach social and emotional skills; Chapter 8 examines the role of the physical environment, routines and transitions, curriculum, and teaching strategies. If every child feels welcome and has an opportunity to succeed, you will be able to prevent many inappropriate behaviors.

The remaining chapters offer several research-based interventions. We describe guidance techniques, such as developmental discipline, teacher effectiveness training, collaborative problem solving, positive reinforcement, and natural and logical consequences; and we discuss the pros and cons of time-out and punishment. We devote an entire chapter to positive behavior support and functional as-

assessment because evidence indicates that understanding the purpose of a child's problem behavior and teaching children to meet their needs appropriately are effective responses.

Because it's likely that you'll have at least one child with a disability in your classroom, Chapter 11 focuses on inclusion. Chapter 12 addresses how we can work with families whose cooperation and involvement are so crucial. And the book's final chapter, "Bullying," will help you to understand how bullying is different from other aggressive behaviors, why children engage in it, why their peers don't intervene, and what you can do to prevent and respond to it.

Woven into almost every chapter are strategies for preventing and managing challenging behavior. Each of these methods can be used alone, but they work extremely well together.

Although challenging behavior is more prevalent among boys, it is increasingly common among girls. In recognition of this situation—and to avoid the awkwardness of "he or she"—we have called a child *he* in the odd-numbered chapters and *she* in the even-numbered chapters.

Culture is a basic part of who children are, and we have worked hard to make our book culturally sensitive. However, we are both white European Americans, and, in the end we probably couldn't disguise that fact. It is important for you, as readers, to be aware of our bias.

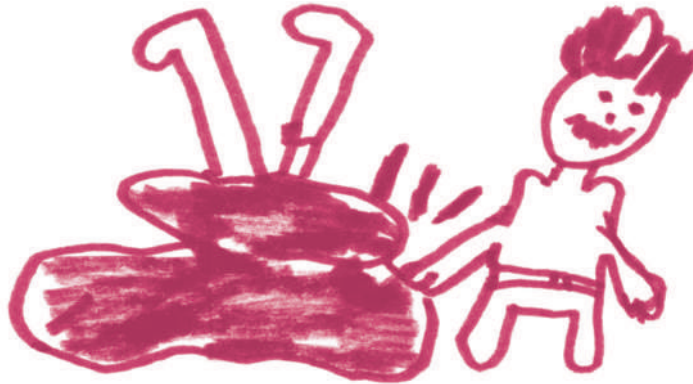
Many children inhabit these pages, but three are more prominent than the rest: Andrew, Michael, and Jazmine. Their stories illuminate the behavior and strategies that are at the heart of this book.

Hang in there

Here are a few hints to keep in mind as you read:

- Have confidence in your own abilities—you can handle this.
- View inappropriate behavior as an opportunity to teach. That will help with everything you do.
- Take it slowly, one behavior at a time, one child at a time. Build in success by setting realistic goals.
- At the end of the day, reflect on what went wrong and what went right. Make notes so you can figure out what to do next time.
- Train yourself to look for, measure, and record minute improvements—they are important signs of progress. Remember that you can't eliminate challenging behavior overnight.
- When you try a new approach, things may get worse before they get better. But if you don't see gains within a reasonable time, try another tack.
- If you work with other people, set common goals. Laugh together; support and compliment each other. If you work alone, seek out your peers. Everyone needs someone to talk to.
- Give yourself a reward, not a guilt trip. Eat that brownie or take that walk. Do whatever will keep you going.

What Is Challenging Behavior?



What does challenging behavior mean to you? For many educators, this term denotes any behavior that they don't have the skills to address effectively. And it is certainly true that if you're feeling overwhelmed, struggling with personal issues, or just not getting enough sleep, any behavior can present a challenge. But even when you're in tip-top shape, some behaviors remain challenging. Those behaviors—and the skills to handle them in ways that enable children to feel safe and to learn—are the subject of this book.

Goals of This Chapter

After reading this chapter, you will be better able to:

- Define different forms of challenging behavior and recognize when they are developmentally appropriate.
- Explain several theories of aggression.
- Identify some ways that culture influences aggression.

BASIC FACTS ABOUT CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR

We define challenging behavior as a pattern of behavior that

- interferes with a child's cognitive, social, or emotional development
- is harmful to the child, other children, or adults
- puts a child at high risk for later social problems or school failure (Klass, Guskin, & Thomas, 1995; McCabe & Frede, 2007)

Although withdrawn and timid behavior can be challenging, we focus on aggressive behaviors because they have such a vast and dramatic impact on the children who use them, their peers, and you, the teacher.

We call these behaviors challenging because they are threatening, provocative, and stimulating, all at the same time. To begin with, they're challenging for the child. They put him in danger by preventing him from learning what he needs to know to get along with his classmates and succeed in school. They're also challenging for him because a lot of the time he may not have much control over them. Even if he knows what to do instead, his ability to regulate his feelings and actions isn't yet up to the job. Improving matters will be an enormous challenge for him.

Challenging behavior is just as challenging for a child's family and teachers. In the face of this behavior, we often find ourselves at a loss. We can't figure out how to turn things around, make the situation tenable, or help him get back on track, behaving acceptably, and feeling good about himself. But with the appropriate information and strategies, we can rise to this challenge and play a pivotal role in the development of a child with challenging behavior, helping him to avoid serious risk and blossom into the fully functioning person all children deserve to become.

What forms does aggressive behavior take?

Aggressive behavior comes in several distinct guises.

- The earliest to appear is *physical aggression*—the use of physical force against others to express anger or frustration, or to reach a goal such as obtaining a toy or being first in line. Physical aggression is *direct* (hitting, pushing, pinching, biting, grabbing, spitting, hair-pulling), and, initially at least, is a form of communication with no intent to harm (Tremblay, 2012). Infants and toddlers begin to use physical aggression as early as 6 months, and although this behavior is challenging, it is also normal and developmentally appropriate. In one study, mothers reported that their toddlers grabbed, pushed, bit, hit, attacked, bullied, or were "cruel" by the time they turned 2 years old. Aggression expert Richard E. Tremblay put it this way: "The question . . . we've been trying to answer for the past 30 years is how do children learn to aggress. But this is the wrong question. The right question is how do they learn not to aggress" (Holden, 2000, p. 581).

Physical aggression has a strong genetic component (Lacourse et al., 2014), but with the aid of families and teachers, most children gradually stop using it after about 3 years of age. As children's language and cognitive skills grow, they learn to regulate their feelings and attention, use words instead of actions, control their impulses, understand another person's point of view, and utilize assertive and prosocial strategies to communicate their needs and achieve their goals. They are also increasingly able to delay gratification. By the time they enter kindergarten, most are relatively pacific and tend to remain so (Broidy et al., 2003).

- *Relational or social aggression* begins as early as 3 years, taking over from physical aggression as children gain verbal, social, and cognitive skills. Used by both boys and girls, relational aggression can be direct and overt (saying "I won't be your friend if you don't do what I say") or *indirect* and covert (spreading rumors, excluding others, betraying a trust). Its goal is to damage another's social standing or reputation

Watch this video clip to see how aggression develops. When and why is it developmentally appropriate?



www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJ0Q_s3gICs



Cresta Johnson/Shutterstock

Physical aggression—the use of physical force against others to express anger or frustration, or to reach a goal such as obtaining a toy or being first in line—is the first form of aggression to appear.

within the peer group (Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick, 2010); a child who has mastered it isn't always liked but is often popular and influential. Studies of twins show that relational aggression is more susceptible to environmental influences than to genetic factors (Brendgen, Girard, Vitaro, Dionne, & Boivin, 2013). Although it is usually stable from early childhood to early adolescence, teachers rarely intervene to stop it because it is hidden (Brendgen, 2012).

- Physically aggressive behavior often overlaps with *disruptive, oppositional, and defiant behaviors*—arguing, tantruming, refusing to comply with rules and requests—that are *overt* and not destructive (Tremblay, 2010). The vast majority of preschoolers use these behaviors, and most of them learn to solve their problems in socially acceptable ways, even if some need more time than others.
- *Antisocial behaviors* that develop later are *covert*. They inflict physical or mental harm or damage property (Loeber, 1985) and violate personal or cultural standards for appropriate behavior (Snyder, Schrepferman, Bullard, McEachern, & Patterson, 2012). They include cheating, lying, stealing, destroying objects, and acting in ways that are abusive, coercive, or cruel. Children who've already encountered antisocial activities and values by kindergarten and first grade pass them along to their peers and continue to use them as they grow older.

Aggressive or antisocial behavior is not the same as conflict, which occurs when people have opposing goals or interests. Conflict can be resolved in many ways—by negotiating, taking turns, persuading, and so on—and learning to resolve conflict helps children to be assertive about their own needs, regulate their negative feelings, and understand others (Cords & Killen, 1998). Aggressive behavior is just one tactic