

INTRODUCING IT: Reflecting on Our Reactions and Responses to Children's Behavior



WATCH IT (6:47 minutes)

[Reflecting on Our Reactions and Responses to Children's Behavior](#) (Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, 2015)

This resource is a video that encourages us to explore our responses to children's behavior and the actions we take. By understanding our responses and what motivates them, we can better manage them – and ourselves.

Extend your TRY IT! learning through Circle of Security's video on how children's behavior triggers responses in us, along with an assortment of handouts that will help you gauge and manage your stress.



KNOW IT

Here are the **important ideas** this resource offers:

- Early childhood professionals need to be a model for appropriate behavior. Yet, it's hard to model appropriate behavior when we ourselves feel stress.

- The core issue is that it's very hard to monitor our feelings and the reactions challenging behavior create in us, and, it's very hard to respond calmly when we aren't calm inside!
- To solve this dilemma, we must reflect on children's behavior. It is critical to *recognize that the behavior is **not** intentionally directed against **you** – children's challenging behavior is not meant to make you angry, upset, or to hurt you. Behavior is their way to communicate, because they haven't yet found other ways to communicate their feelings and responses.*
- The key to working through this dilemma is to know which behaviors make you angry or upset, and to understand why they make you upset.
 - It can be helpful to intentionally go through this exercise: When the child does (specific behavior), it makes me feel (emotional and physical reactions).
- Children that demonstrate the most challenging behaviors are the children that need us and our support most.
- Recognize that negative responses and feelings to challenging behavior are normal – it's okay to feel them, but it's not okay to act on them.
- The solution is to know ahead of time what sets us off, plan ahead for what you will do, and be prepared to pause – our personal **reaction** should not be our professional **action**.
 - Communicate to colleagues and yourself what your plan is when you feel overwhelmed. If you work with others, be collaborative in helping to support one another.
 - Model speaking about your feelings calmly in front of children so that they learn this skill from you.



RECALL IT

Let's see what you learned from this resource! The answers are provided at the end of this guide.

1. **True or false:** Child care providers and early childhood teachers should not have an emotional response to children's behaviors.
2. **True or false:** Child care providers and early childhood teachers should not take action that is an emotional response to children's behaviors
3. **True or false:** Behavior that is challenging can be a way for children to tell us they are experiencing something that makes them feel stress.
4. **True or false:** Having a good relationship with a particular child, and knowing how he or she responds to big feelings can help you plan ahead.



THINK ABOUT IT

Take a few minutes to consider these questions. If you want to, write your thoughts down.

1. How do you feel about the idea that children do not use their behavior against you personally? Do you agree or disagree? Why? Was there anything in this resource that supported or changed your perspective?
2. What behaviors trigger you? What is it about the behavior that makes you react negatively? What happens to you – physically? Emotionally? Try to identify and capture your thoughts about these feelings. What ideas do you have to help you pause in the moment?



TRY IT!

Here are some ideas to try:

- This resource helped us to understand that the behavior children use as a way to show us their big, unmanageable feelings can make us have big feelings, too! Take a look at this [four-minute video by Circle of Security](#). While it was made for

parents, the information is good for any important caregiver in a young child's life. It will help you to better understand why we react to challenging behaviors, and how we can manage those feelings.

[Video in Spanish](#)

- Stress can get in the way of our ability to act calmly and with intent. It can also reduce our ability to respond with compassion to the children whose behavior is challenging to us. **Handout #1 - Compassion Satisfaction Scale**, is a test that measures your current level of compassion. **Handout # 2 – Compassion Satisfaction Scoring and Results Guide** lets you see your score. Take the test and score your answers to learn if your compassion is in the balanced range.
- Caregivers and teachers have busy schedules and many demands made on them while on the job, which elevates stress levels. Use **Handout #3 – Life Stress Test**, to get a quick snapshot of your stress level. Self-care, or regularly taking time to take care of yourself, can greatly decrease stress and increase positive feelings about yourself and others.
- Taking care of yourself is a gift you can give to yourself – and the children in your care! Try:
 - Making a list of the things you like to do that feed your heart, your body, your mind, and your soul. Try to do at least one of these activities daily.
 - Taking time for yourself EVERY day, even if it is simply stopping to enjoy a beautiful sunset, or sitting to listen to a favorite song. Be intentionally mindful that this is time taken for your enjoyment.
 - Connecting with people who boost your energy and your joy every day.
 - Asking for help when you need it. Asking for help is okay!
 - Offering and sharing mutual support with colleagues, family, and friends
 - Laughing
 - Keeping a gratitude journal

- Want more ideas? Take a look at **Handout #4 – Self-care for Teachers** and **Handout #5 – Tree of Contemplative Practices!**

RECALL IT! Answers: 1. F 2. T 3. T 4. T