

... "bite size"
news from
your
Region 10
Behavior
Specialist



OH, Behave!

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Behavior Tip of the Month:

Ask children,
"What can be
done to help this
situation?"

In every exciting issue:

- Ask The Behavior Specialist
- Behavior Tip of the Month
- Calming Choice Card
- Social/Emotional Book Nook



This is a special issue dedicated to the children, families and early care and education professionals dealing with the after effects of Hurricane Matthew so the "Ask The Behavior Specialist" column has been eliminated for space reasons. It will return in the Winter edition.

Understanding Behavior After Traumatic Situations

The devastation Hurricane Matthew left behind has been stressful and upsetting for many families. As a teacher, you may have had children in your classroom ask you questions that are difficult to answer. Children don't have to be directly impacted by a distressing situation to develop worries and concerns. Children hear and see the news; overhear adult conversations; and/or may have family and friends who reside in areas of our state that were directly affected by storm damage and flooding. The way adults respond to children who have developed fears from terrible things happening in our world makes a huge difference in how they process negative experiences and are able to move forward.

A common mistake is thinking children are unaffected because they may not show concern when we expect them to. Children may seem fine one day, but not the next. This is typical behavior and not at all unusual. In fact, children may grieve

intensely and then go play. This doesn't mean they are not affected or are too young to understand what happened. Nor does this mean they are "over it".

Children may be very blunt when asking questions. This does not mean they are uncaring. Keep in mind the way young children think. Children are egocentric which means they think of themselves and have difficulty seeing the perspective of another person. Additionally, be aware that questions about what happened may come up at inopportune times. Be patient and answer honestly and with facts. Children are also very literal in their thinking so avoid saying things like, "They are hanging on by a thread!" to describe a situation. Children will believe someone is holding onto something as small as a piece of string in a disaster.

Children have trouble thinking in terms of transformation. In other words, seeing their home

or school surrounded by six feet of water can be extra traumatic because they see it in the "now" not thinking it can ever be ok again.

Since many of the feelings and emotions that accompany a traumatic situation can be difficult to express, children will show how they feel through play. Play is natural for children and can be a healing way for them to process what occurred. Children may re-enact a situation by painting in colors of gray or black. A pile of blocks on a doll may represent a family stranded and in need of help. Extending time for free play can be helpful for children to act out their feelings or concerns. Adults can support a child by giving reflective feedback, describing the feelings expressed, and pointing out a hopeful solution to a problem or situation. Asking open-ended questions will help determine what a child is illustrating through their play. For example (using the above scenario), "That doll looks like she might have a hard time getting up with all



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those blocks on top of her.” Allow the child to explain to you what is happening and use open-ended questions if the response is vague. The child may have a plan for a rescue worker to come and save the doll, and by observing, you can see how well a child is dealing with what he or she saw or experienced. If this is not the outcome, you may want to help the child find a hopeful solution. You might say, “How can we help her (the doll)?” By allowing a child to play without too much disruption or adult influence, you can learn a great deal about how a child is feeling. Listen and let children bring up a traumatic situation if they want to talk. Follow a child’s lead. Children may regress in behaviors they have mastered. For example, a child who is fully toilet-trained, may begin to have accidents. Or a child who is typically self-confident and a leader may become clingy and shy. Don’t overact. Take the time to

reassure a child that he or she is safe and offer a comforting presence.

Keep routines and rules in place. Maintain daily rituals and don’t alter the schedules unless absolutely necessary. Children feel most comfortable when they know what to expect and have a regular, familiar routine. Keep the environment soothing, calm, and stable.

Be mindful that naptime and transitional times of the day may be more problematic than usual. Build in lots of reassurance during these times to help keep children calm. Adding more sensory items to the classroom and offering more outdoor play moments can help a stressed child unwind.

Remember, we can’t control what happens once a child leaves the classroom, but we CAN make sure the classroom is a safe, predictable place for all children.

In each issue you will find a new card to help you build your very own “Calming Choices” Card Set for your classroom.

When I am upset, I can...

WATCH THE BIRDS OUTSIDE THE WINDOW




For durability and repetitive use, print on cardstock paper and laminate.



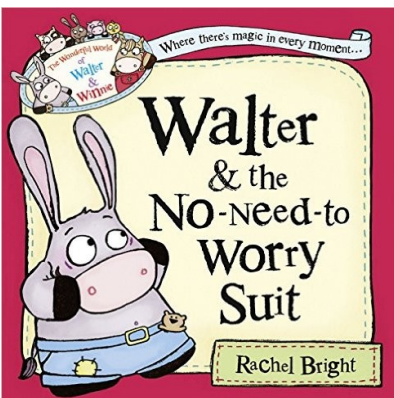
“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.”

-Fred Rogers

This issue is lovingly dedicated to all those who have been struggling in the wake of Hurricane Matthew. As you work to heal and recover, we wish you well.




Social/Emotional Book Nook



Rachel Bright brings us a fun and humorous way to look at a serious situation. Walter and the No-Need-to-Worry Suit will make children and adults laugh out loud while also offering reassurance. When Walter’s worries become excessive, his friends try to think of a solution. Ideal for children beginning at age three and older, this is one of a series of books that gently addresses a first experience that all children can relate to.

Do you have a question you would like to see answered in our monthly column? Feel free to fax your question to 336-761-5107. You can remain anonymous if you prefer, but please put your question to the attention of “Ask The Behavior Specialist”.



Questions or Comments?




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