

# Positive Behavior



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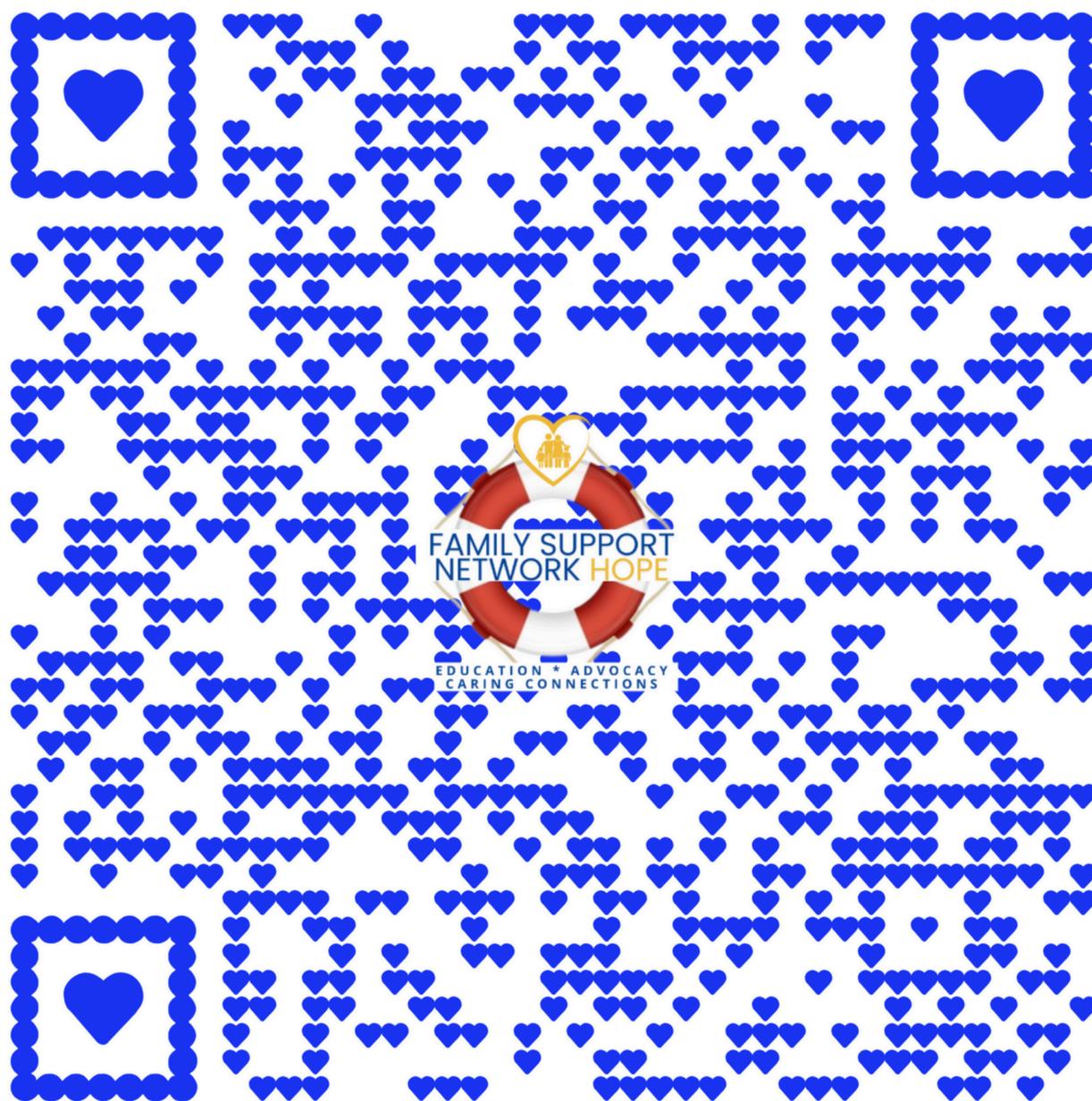
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EDUCATION \* ADVOCACY  
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FSN/HOPE works hard to bring you useful and quality materials. We would appreciate your help in completing this brief (30 second) survey. It allows us to continue bringing you the materials you want.



# Things That Will Help Me Stay Calm

## Toddlers

Try to understand what my behavior is communicating.

I want your attention.

I'm tired.

I need a break.

I need a diaper change.

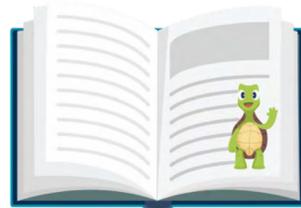


Consistency throughout our day. Having a similar order to the day and doing activities in a similar way helps me feel safe.

- reading a book or telling stories at bedtime
- singing a song during diaper time

First

Read a book



Then

Sleep



Connect with me throughout the day: talking, smiling, hugging, singing, holding.

- Listen and respond when I try to tell you something.
  - When we play together, let me take turns with you.
  - Join in my play and follow my lead.
  - Talk about what I am doing or watching.
  - Talk and play with me at my level.
- Bring me up or lower yourself down.



Stay close in new places and with new people. I rely on you to know I am ok.



Teach me about emotions. Name your feelings and my feelings throughout our day.



Help me prepare for new or challenging situations (e.g., talk about what will happen, give me a comfort item).



Play problem-solving games. Pretend to forget an action or item during a part of our day and see if I remember what to do.

What do you need to eat your cereal?



Provide me with choices throughout my day.

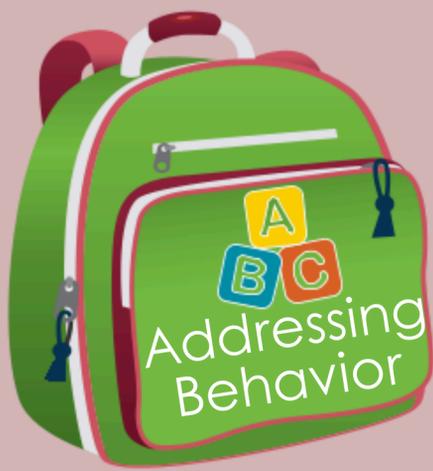


More family resources at [ChallengingBehavior.org/Implementation/Family.html](https://ChallengingBehavior.org/Implementation/Family.html)



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## Backpack Connection Series

### About this Series

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### The Pyramid Model



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# Teachable Moments: How to Help Your Child Avoid Meltdowns

Brooke Brogle, Alyson Jiron & Jill Giacomini

Does this sound familiar? Your children are playing in the living room while you clean up the kitchen. You answer the phone, and a few minutes later, one child is angry and screaming because someone took her toy and the other is in tears because her sister hit her. It is in escalated moments like this that parents often find themselves trying to teach rules or give long explanations. Unfortunately, in moments such as this, your child usually is not even hearing your words let alone learning the rule. This is not a teachable moment.

There are countless teachable moments daily when skills can be taught and emotions discussed, such as during play time, in the car, at bath time or while reading together. As a parent, you can reduce challenging behaviors such as hitting, biting, pushing and whining when you 1) concentrate on calming your child during a challenging behavior incident and 2) wait until an appropriate teachable moment to actually teach your child.

Think again about the scenario when you are on the phone and your children are fighting. Below are several examples of how you could use teachable moments throughout the day to reduce the chance that the challenging behavior occurs in the first place.

**Teachable Moment #1** – During morning reading time, read the book *Hands Are Not for Hitting* by Martine Agassi. For additional activities to do with this book, go to <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html#booknook>.

**Teachable Moment #2** – During breakfast time, intentionally teach the skill of sharing by saying, "Thank you for sharing the syrup with your sister!"

**Teachable Moment #3** – When your children are playing on the floor quietly, sit on the floor, make eye contact and say, "Wow, you girls have been playing for 10 minutes quietly! Tell me about what you are building." This teaches the desired behavior of playing quietly together.

**Teachable Moment #4** - When the phone rings. Put the phone down, tap both girls on the shoulder and say, "I am going to be on the phone for 10 minutes. When this timer is done, come tap me on my leg and show me the timer."



## Try This at Home

Find teachable moments throughout the day!

### Play Time (responding to common challenging behavior):

"Oh, no! I see that your bunny is super sad. Her sister is trying to take her toy. I wonder what she can do?" You can teach appropriate ways of getting her needs met. She

can ask for help, get a timer or trade her sister for another toy.

### Bath Time (teaching rules):

"The water stays in the tub. You can use the cup and pour water into another cup or you can pour water on your body."

**Car Time (teaching friendship skills):** "I saw that your friend, Bella was sad at school today and you made her a picture. I bet that made her feel better. What a great friend you are!"

**Story Time (teaching emotions):** "Wow, that little girl in this book is really angry! I saw that she asked her mom for a hug. That is a great way to feel better. I wonder what you can do when you feel angry?"

**Meal Time (teaching expectations):** "Let's practice asking for more milk." Role play with whining, yelling or just banging your cup. Then, teach the expected behavior. "You can ask nicely, say, 'Mommy, milk please.' When she does this, jump up and say, 'I'm happy to get you milk!'"



## Practice at School

At school, teachers prepare students to solve social problems in appropriate ways before problems occur. Teachers use role playing, puppets or circle time to discuss emotions and possible solutions. Teachers provide opportunities to practice and reinforce skills during class. For example, children may practice how to trade a toy at circle time with a puppet. Later, teachers can compliment a child when they see him trade during play time. "Wow! You remembered that when a friend is using a toy, you can ask him to trade!" Teaching skills in advance gives children the confidence to successfully manage a situation and allows caregivers the opportunity to praise a child for making a wise choice.



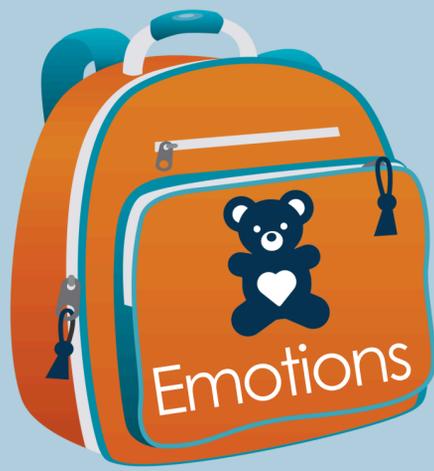
## The Bottom Line

Young children are learning in every moment. They are actively discovering the world around them. You are always teaching your child. Strolling in the park, reading books and giving her a kiss before bed all teach her about her world. You can use the many calm and happy moments in your day to intentionally teach expectations, rules and skills that will help your child be successful and reduce challenging behavior.



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# How to Use Positive Language to Improve Your Child's Behavior

Brooke Brogle, Alyson Jiron y Jill Giacomini

"Stop it." "No." "Don't do that!" As a parent, you might find yourself using these words and phrases more often when your child begins to make his own choices. Now, stop for a moment and consider how the conversation might feel if you couldn't use these words? What if, rather than telling your child what he can't do, you instead chose words to tell him what he can do? While this shift in language might seem small, it actually provides a powerful positive change to the tone of the conversation. When you focus on using positive language with your child, you will likely find that he has fewer tantrums, whines less and overall experiences fewer challenging behaviors.

How can such a small change make such a big difference? While it is obvious to adults, young children are not able to make the logical connection that when they are told not to do something, what they actually should do is the opposite. For example, the directions, "Don't climb on the counter" can be very confusing to a child. However, "Please keep your feet on the floor" tells the child exactly what the expectation is and how he can change what he is doing. Using positive language also empowers a child to make an appropriate choice on his own, which can boost his self-esteem. When you are specific in your directions by telling your child exactly what he can do and when, it is easier for him to comply and he is more likely to cooperate with the request.



### Try This at Home

**Replace "don't" with "do".** Tell your child what she can do! If you saw her cutting the leaves of a plant, rather than saying "Don't cut that!" you could say, "Scissors are for cutting paper or play dough. Which one do you want to cut?" It is more likely that your child will make an appropriate choice when you help her to understand exactly what appropriate options are available.

**Offer a choice.** When you provide your child with a choice of things that he can do, wear or go, he is more likely to select one of the options you have offered because it makes him feel like he is in control. This strategy also works for you as a parent because you approve of either choice.

**Tell your child "when."** When your child asks to do something, rather than saying no, acknowledge her wish and tell her when she might be able to do it. This answer feels more like a "yes" to a child. For example, if your child asks to go to the park, but you are on the computer finishing up a work project, you could say, "The park sounds like a great idea! I need to finish this letter for work right now. Would you like to go after your nap today or tomorrow morning after breakfast?"

**Use "first-then" language.** Another way to tell a child when he can do something in a positive way is to use a "first-then" statement. For example, if he wants to watch TV but you would like for him to pick up his toys, you could say "First, pick up your toys and then you may watch a TV show."



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### Give your child time to think.

Sometimes, you may feel frustrated when your child does not respond quickly to requests and feel tempted to use demands and raise your voice.

When that happens, remember that your child is learning language and how to use it. She needs time to think about what you said and how she is going to respond. It can take her several seconds, or even minutes, longer than you to process the information. If you remain calm and patiently repeat the statement again, you will see fewer challenging behaviors and enjoy more quality time with your child.



**Help your child to remember.** Children are easily distracted. Sometimes your child may need you to help him remember what you asked him to do in order to do it. "I remember" statements are very useful in these situations. For example, imagine you have asked your child to put on his shoes so that he can go outside, and he comes over to you without his shoes on and is trying to go outside. You can say, "I remember you need to put your shoes on before you can go outside." Stating the information as a simple fact, rather than a command, gives him the information he needs to make the right choice on his own without blaming him or making him feel like he has failed.



### Practice at School

Teachers use positive language at school to help children become more confident and independent. When teachers tell children what they can do, children begin to manage themselves, classroom routines and interactions with peers by themselves. For example, a child who is throwing sand on the playground can be shown that, instead, she can use a shovel to put the sand in a bucket. The teacher might say, "If you want to play with the sand, you can fill this bucket. Would you like a blue bucket or this red one?" In this way, the teacher honors the child's interest, but directs it to a more appropriate play choice.

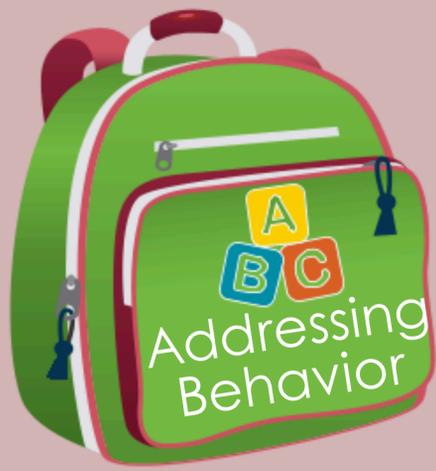


### The Bottom Line

Positive relationships with parents, teachers and other caregivers provide the foundation for a successful and happy child, are the building blocks for your child's self-esteem and ability to empathize and predict future positive behavior choices. The manner in which you talk to your child has a significant impact on his behavior. Making positive changes to your communication style can be hard work, but with a little practice, you will see a big difference in your relationship with your child. Your child will feel more encouraged, positive and independent and, as a result, you will enjoy better overall cooperation.



Office of Special  
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# How to Understand the Meaning of Your Child's Challenging Behavior

Brooke Brogle, Alyson Jiron & Jill Giacomini

As a parent or caregiver, you may see your child behave in a way that doesn't make sense and ask yourself, "Why does she keep doing that?" It can be very frustrating, especially when it seems like it should be easy for your child to figure out on her own a more appropriate way to behave. In moments like this, it is important to remember that children continue to use a behavior because it works! Your child's behavior is a powerful communication tool that she uses to tell you what she needs or wants. Sometimes, when a child does not know the appropriate way (such as words, sign language or pointing to pictures) to express her needs or wants she may use challenging behavior (such as hitting, screaming or spitting) to communicate. Challenging behavior gives children the ability to send a message in a fast and powerful way. Children will use challenging behavior to communicate until they learn new, more appropriate ways to express their wants and needs. To change the behavior, it is important for you to first discover what is causing the behavior. If you know why your child is choosing a behavior, you can then teach her to communicate her wants and needs in a new way that everyone feels good about.

Children use challenging behavior to either:

- 1) get something, such as attention, a toy or a nap, or,
- 2) get out of doing something, such as going to bed, eating a new food or getting buckled in the car seat.

The first step you must take to help your child learn a new behavior is to determine if she wants something or wants to avoid doing something.

### Try This at Home

**Observe.** Pay careful attention to what is happening when your child displays challenging behavior. Keep a chart to see repeated patterns in behavior. What happens before the behavior starts? What happens after?

**Track.** Keep track of when the behavior occurs. Do you always see the behaviors just before nap time? Perhaps your child is tired and you can change your routine to include errands in the morning and quiet, at-home activities before nap time.

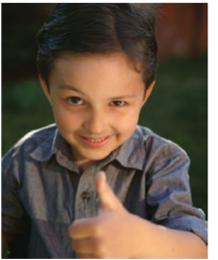
**List.** Brainstorm ideas about what your child is trying to get, or avoid doing, by using challenging behavior. The more you watch your child, the more you will be able to narrow your list down to a few possible reasons why the behavior is occurring.

**Teach.** Once you have an understanding of why your child chooses to use a challenging behavior, you can teach him a new way to behave in that situation. Pick a time outside of the situation when you can:

» **Roleplay:** Use puppets, trains, dolls or other toys to act out the new skill with your child. For example, you can make the doll say, "I really want to play outside. I want to open the door and run, but Mommy says I need to wait for her. I won't scream. I will say 'Hurry up Mommy. I am ready to play.'"

» **Read books:** Children often tell you how they are feeling when they are trying to guess how others are feeling. Ask your child questions about a character in a book as a way to start to talk about your child's own behavior. For example, "That little girl doesn't want to go to bed. I wonder why?"

» **Talk about the situation ahead of time:** Sometimes, children simply want to know about what is planned ahead of time or to be included in the planning. Parent schedules are busy and you often need to get things done quickly. However, quick transitions can feel overwhelming to young children. If you take a few minutes to include your child in the plan, you will likely see a dramatic decrease in challenging behavior. For example, you could say, "We are going to get in the car and go to the store when you finish this puzzle. Would you like to pick a special toy to bring with you to the grocery store?"



### Practice at School

Teachers are detectives too! When a child uses challenging behavior at school, teachers watch to see what caused the behavior and then teach the child a new way to communicate. For example, Ethan is playing with cars alone when Jacob tries to grab a car from him. Ethan hits Jacob and grabs his toy back. Jacob cries. Ethan was frustrated that a friend was taking a toy from him before he was done and used hitting as a way to tell Jacob that he wanted his toy back. The teacher might say to Ethan, "You looked frustrated when Jacob took your toy. Next time, you can use your words and tell him 'It's busy. I'm still using this toy.'" Teachers can also use puppets to reinforce the skill of saying "it's busy" during circle time or during other activities throughout the day.

### The Bottom Line

It can be fun and rewarding to figure out what your child is thinking and why! The more familiar you are with how your child reacts to everyday situations, the easier it is for you to teach him appropriate ways to deal with challenges like frustration, stress and fatigue. Children who learn how to manage these situations feel more confident and are less likely to use challenging behavior to communicate their needs.



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# How to Plan Activities to Reduce Challenging Behavior

Brooke Brogle, Alyson Jiron & Jill Giacomini

Unfortunately, there is no “Guidebook for Parents” that tells you exactly how to raise children who behave perfectly at all times. Each child and family is unique, which means that there is no one solution or strategy that is going to work for everyone, every time. However, while it isn’t magic, simple planning ahead can work wonders to help improve your child’s behavior. You can plan activities to teach your child important skills such as sharing, taking turns or handling disappointment. You can also plan ahead to prepare your child for new events in her life such as changes in her schedule, a road trip, a new baby or a visit from grandparents.

For example, Abby is three years old and is usually happy at preschool where she loves to draw and play with the doll house. However, at home when Abby plays one-on-one with another child, she often ends up throwing toys, screaming “Mine!” or crying. What can Abby’s mom do? Instead of always “managing” these outbursts, she can intentionally plan activities to teach Abby the skills of sharing and taking turns. She can also plan activities that give Abby an opportunity to practice these new skills.

we share our toys. I know how special doggy is to you. We could put doggy in a safe place and you do not have to share her.”



**Hope for the best but plan for the worst!** If you know that your child might have problems when playing with other children, stay nearby so that you can intervene if needed. You might also provide two sets of an identical toy (e.g., two bubbles or two balls) and then offer a change in location to play to diffuse difficult situations.

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### Try This at Home

**Tell your child exactly what to do.** Telling your child to “share” or “be nice” does not actually tell her what she should be doing. For example, if Abby throws her toys, her mom can say, “Abby, toys stay on the floor or on your lap.” If Abby hits her friend, her mom can say, “Hands down. Hands are for playing, eating, and hugging. Use your words. You can say, ‘I am angry. Help please.’”

**Use a Visual Schedule.** A visual schedule will help her to understand what is expected. To learn more about visual schedules, read the *How to Use Visual Schedules to Help Your Child Understand Expectations* handout in the Backpack Connection Series.

**Practice, practice, practice.** Intentionally create situations where she can practice the desired behavior. For example, Abby’s mom can help Abby learn to take turns while playing with her sister or an older friend. She can ask Abby’s sister to “help teach Abby to take turns” while playing with one doll. Abby’s mom provides the toy and reminds the girls to take turns when playing. The girls can practice the skill of sharing during their time together. Catch your child being good! When your child is using the desired behavior, you can encourage her by responding with enthusiasm. For example, “Wow, I saw you share the sand toys at the park with those two girls. What a great friend you are!”

**Prepare your child before an event.** For example, Abby’s mom can say, “Abby, your friend Ella is coming over to play today. When friends come over,

### Practice at School

School offers many opportunities for children to practice social skills and learn emotional vocabulary. Teachers can set up art or quiet activities where children have the opportunity to practice sharing, learning to wait and taking turns. As children interact with each other, teachers provide positive language. For example, “Abby, I see that you are pointing to the red marker. You can tap Jacob on the shoulder and say, ‘Can I have a turn?’” After the interaction, the teacher provides the children with encouragement. For example, “Way to go! Class, Abby and Jacob are working together. They are sharing and taking turns!” Teachers can also use daily schedule changes to teach the skill of handling disappointment. For example, “Oh no, Miss Marcie is not here today. We won’t be able to go to music. I am really disappointed. What should we do?” At this point, the children can learn to problem-solve and come up with a positive solution.

### The Bottom Line

Much of the frustration that parents experience can be avoided by planning ahead and teaching children a desired behavior before a difficult situation occurs. When you are unprepared for your child’s challenging behavior, such as whining or temper tantrums, you might respond with anger or in other ways that make the situation worse. Remember that you are in control of the daily schedule and routine. If your child is having problems with activities such as play with others, drop-off at school, or bedtime, you can plan activities that will give her the opportunity to learn the social skills she needs. Planning ahead can reduce challenging behavior such as meltdowns, whining and temper tantrums and increase desired behavior such as flexibility, using words and patience. Planning activities that teach skills such as sharing and taking turns will provide her with the tools she needs to increase self-esteem and be successful in school and life.



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