Challenging Behavior Quick Guide

CAMS for Early Childhood • Set Kids Up for Success

A quick reset for looking beneath behavior and responding to the skill or need underneath it.

Pause Before You React

Take one breath. Make sure everyone is safe. Remind yourself that behavior gives us information.

Ask What Happened Before

- What was happening right before the behavior?
- Was there a transition, demand, conflict, or sensory trigger?
- Was the child tired, hungry, overwhelmed, or seeking connection?

Look for the Missing Skill

Consider communication, waiting, flexibility, impulse control, emotional regulation, problem solving, or social skills.

Respond

- Keep your words short and calm
- Set the safety limit clearly
- Offer a replacement behavior
- Give a simple choice when possible
- Reconnect after the child is regulated

Document Patterns

Record the situation, what happened before, what the child did, what adults did, and what happened next. Look for patterns instead of isolated incidents.

“Connection first. Correction second.”

Notes