STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING POSITIVE BEHAVIORS: CUES AND VISUALS

WHAT IT IS:
Cues are quick verbal or non-verbal reminders of an expected behavior. Visuals are materials that teachers can use throughout the day to help children remember what they should be doing.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE:
- **Class-wide:** A teacher teaches classroom rules using visuals, verbal cues, and modeling. For example, she has a picture card (visual) for every class rule. Each morning, she briefly reviews the rules with the children and has children model the behavior for each other. Before recess, she points to the pictures for “sharing” and “safe hands” to quickly remind children of what she wants to see when they are playing outside together.

- **Individualized:** Cory’s teacher sees him touching his peers in the hallway. She taps Cory on the shoulder, puts her hands behind her back and wiggles her hands like a “duck tail” to remind him to keep his hands behind his back in the hallway.

WHY IT WORKS:
Classroom rules and expectations are complicated! Certain rules always stay the same such as no hitting and no biting, but others change based on the situation. For example, jumping, running, and yelling are okay outside but may not be okay inside the classroom. It is easy for children to become confused about what they can do when. Even when children know the rules, they often forget to apply them in the moment (for example, using an inside voice even when they are excited to answer a question during circle time; touching peers when they are excited in the hallway). Cues and visuals work because they quickly and efficiently remind children what behaviors are expected of them.

WHEN IT MAY BE USED:
Teachers should use cues and visuals liberally to replace lengthy, time-consuming explanations and corrections. Once children understand the meaning of the cue or visual, it should be used immediately before they are expected to show a behavior(s). Cues and visuals are effective on the classroom level and also for providing individual support to children having a particularly hard time remembering what they are expected to do in the moment.
WHAT ARE THE STEPS/TO-DO’S:

1. Identify the behaviors that you expect children to display.
   - Focus on the positive! For example, if you want children to stop touching their peers during Center Time, the behavior you expect is “hands to self.” Or if a child is often off-task during Circle Time, focus on the behaviors you want to see (“look at the teacher” and “listen”).

2. Choose and create the cues and visuals you will use. Make your own with classroom photographs or drawings or use existing templates (link provided below).

3. Teach children the meaning of the cues and visuals before using.
   - A picture card with hands on it will not mean anything to the children if you have not taught them that the card means you want them to “keep hands to yourself”! And pointing to your ear will not let children know you want them to listen unless you have explained it’s meaning!

4. Give the Cue or Visual (class-wide or to individual).
   - Use immediately before the expected behavior. For example, waving a “sit” cue card before going to the lunchroom is not effective. Rather, hold up the sign once you actually get to the lunchroom as a reminder of the behavior you expect and then again if an individual child is standing throughout the meal.
   - When giving cues or visuals class-wide, follow up with extra cues or visual for individual children as needed.
   - When giving cues or visuals to individual children, try not to draw attention or single them out (for example, use a hand signal to tell a child to “sit” rather than interrupting the story and redirecting him in front of peers). When using visuals, let the child see AND touch them.

5. Reinforce children who use and respond to cues or visuals by showing the expected behavior.
   - Remember to keep referring to the cues and visuals in your classroom. Cues and visuals are only effective if you use them! If you create a visual and hang it in your classroom but do not use it, it will not be meaningful for children. In order for cues and visuals to work you have to create the cues and visuals, teach children what behaviors are associated with the cues and visuals, and consistently use the cues and visuals. Steps 1 & 2 alone are not enough. And be sure to periodically review the rules and expectations associated with the cues and visuals you are using in your classroom.

- For more information and resources for how to apply this strategy:
  - http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu
  - http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/do/resources/teaching_tools/ttyc.htm

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