STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING POSITIVE BEHAVIORS:
Modifying Activities & environments

WHAT IT IS:
Modifying Activities and Environments is a set of techniques used to improve children’s on-task behaviors. Techniques include (1) planning engaging and developmentally appropriate activities, (2) things teachers can do to increase engagement during tasks, and (3) organizing the classroom to minimize distractions and maximize children's active engagement in activities.

WHY IT WORKS:
When children are in well-organized classrooms and engaged in interesting activities they are more likely to learn critical school readiness skills and experience success in the classroom—this helps maintain their positive self-esteem. Also, children are less likely to show challenging behaviors if they are actively engaged. Children who are sometimes impulsive and inattentive have a harder time remembering expectations in the moment, may more quickly lose interest in activities, may have a harder time persisting on difficult tasks, or may become distracted more easily than other children. Adapting activities so that they are developmentally appropriate, highly interesting, and allow for individualization, as well as organizing the classroom to minimize distractions increases engagement for all students.

WHEN IT MAY BE USED:
Modifying Activities and Environments should be used when a child or children are displaying low levels of task engagement, including behaviors such as inattention, impulsivity, and/or low persistence.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE:
- Jason has been hiding under the table and kicking when the class is working on puzzles. The teacher considers that the task may be too difficult, so she gives Jason a slightly simpler puzzle.

- Multiple students have been running from one end of the classroom to the other and have been having trouble staying in their designated center. The teacher rearranges the furniture so there are no wide-open spaces and areas of the room are clearly defined.

- Tasha loses interest quickly during math-related activities. The teacher notices that she is able to stay engaged for about 5 minutes but the activity usually lasts 10 minutes. The teacher shortens the activity for Tasha so that she can end the activity feeling successful.

Copyright © 2013 by The Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA. www.lookconsultation.org
**WHAT ARE THE STEPS/TO-DO’S:**

**Plan activities that maximize engagement.**
- Vary topics, activities, and materials from day-to-day. Consider children’s interests/strengths when choosing materials.
- Balance activities that are higher-energy (requiring movement) and lower energy (sitting).
- Restrict large-group, teacher-led activities to less than 20 minutes.
- Create activities that incorporate choice.
- Plan developmentally appropriate activities (i.e., not too hard OR too easy for your students).

**Actively engage students within tasks.**
- Provide opportunities for children to get involved.
  - For example, ask open-ended questions, provide choices, have children act things out or lead the group in a discussion, or prompt children to speak to peers.
- Monitor engagement level so you know who is struggling and needs extra support.
  - Expect that children will **not** all have the same level of interest or persistence for a certain activity.
- Provide additional support within activity.
  - For example, ask a question to re-engage, give a cue, move closer to the child or relate the activity to their interests.
- If children are losing interest or finishing early, you may need to adapt the activity!
  - Adjust the difficulty of the activity (i.e., simplify or add challenge).
  - Cut the activity short.
  - Provide an alternative activity. If a child finishes or loses interest in an activity before other children, find another activity for the child to do rather than having him or her “sit and wait” for the rest of the class to finish.

**Organize the classroom to minimize distraction.**
- Reduce wide-open spaces.
- Redirect “traffic patterns” in a way that clearly tells the children where to go (for example, footprints on the ground, arrows pointing the way, shelves creating a clear pathway).
- Clearly define boundaries and off-limit spaces (for example, stop signs on restricted materials like the teacher’s computer, shelves blocking art supply closet).
- Make sure classroom materials are well organized. Limit the amount of materials you put out at once, and make sure they are organized and easy to navigate so that children can access independently.
  - Remove or cover distracting materials. For example, move toys/books or peers that distract a child in Circle or seat times.
- Be strategic with seating arrangement and/or line order.
  - Place a distracted child closest to a teacher or TA in Circle or when lining-up.
  - Place a child next to peers who are engaged with tasks and with whom they get along.