

Tackling Inappropriate Language, Separation Anxiety & Attention-Seeking Behaviors

Key Webinar Takeaways from Drs. Lauren and Kyle



Bad Language

As jarring as it may be to hear a swear word come from a small child, they are saying it because they've heard it elsewhere. It could be from the adults in their lives or something they heard in TV or movies. The best way to prevent it is to buffer exposure to such language. If a child uses a curse word, it is best to pause before giving the cursing immediate attention, which would unintentionally reinforce the word. Try to determine why your little one used the word. If they're having big feelings, help label the emotion: "I think you're angry and hurt because you hit your toe on the step." Suggest alternate language like, "aw, biscuits!" (from a popular blue dog) or something funny like, "cheesy potatoes." Make sure the adults all know the alternative language, and try not to let a bad word slip. •

Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety is a normal developmental behavior and reflects a strong connection to parents and caregivers. While infants, toddlers and preschoolers have different developmental

reasons for this behavior, the best way to handle it is consistent across all early childhood ages. One, ensure that drop-offs take place when the child is not overly hungry or tired. A well-rested and well-fed child is less stressed and transitions easier. Two, make drop-offs short, consistent and steadfast. Have a simple routine such as giving your child a hug, telling them you will be back this afternoon and then leaving. Maintain the same routine and do not return to the classroom after you've dropped them off. This only makes the separation anxiety worse and can trigger a heightened emotional reaction. •

Attention-Seeking Behaviors

Every child desires attention, and some young children will seek this through any means available. This may include hurting others, tantrumming, overly dramatizing "injuries," whining or defiance. This behavior is communication, and your child is seeking attention for a reason. Do they have an unmet need, such as hunger or sleep? When possible, ignore the attention-seeking behavior and then provide overt, strong attention for positive behaviors. For example, after ignoring a child throwing blocks across the playroom, give them lots of praise for the positive behavior when they pick up the toys and put them away. Help label emotions for you child and ask how they feel. Talk about how to show these feelings in more appropriate ways. If there are consequences, keep them consistent. "We cannot break our crayons even when we are angry. You broke your crayons, so we'll have to put away your art supplies until you're ready to use them properly." •