NOTICING AND RECORDING CHILDREN'S CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR: UNDERSTANDING THE "WHY" BEHIND WHAT YOU SEE

Teacher Implementation Checklist

STEP 1: DESCRIBE THE BEHAVIOR CLEARLY

Before collecting data, I can describe the problem behavior in clear, specific terms.

□ I describe what the behavior LOOKS LIKE, not just a label
(Example: "falls to the floor and cries loudly" instead of "throws a fit.")

□ My description uses words that anyone watching can understand and recognize

□ I can clearly tell when the behavior IS happening and when it is NOT

STEP 2: WRITE DOWN WHAT YOU OBSERVE (ABC DATA)

□ I watch and write notes during the part of the day when the challenging behavior most often occurs

□ Each time the behavior occurs, I record:

- □ A (Antecedent = what came before): What was happening, or what was said or asked, RIGHT BEFORE the behavior
- □ B (Behavior = what the child did): Exactly what the child DID — describe it so anyone watching can see it
- □ C (Consequence = what happened next): What happened RIGHT AFTER — what did the child GET or GET AWAY FROM as a result?

□ I note the date, time, activity, and anything else going on that day that might be relevant (e.g., background factors such as: missed breakfast, had a substitute)

□ I keep notes over SEVERAL DAYS before deciding what the pattern means

□ I can clearly tell when the behavior IS happening and when it is NOT

STEP 3: LOOK FOR A PATTERN

After several days of notes, I look back and ask myself:

□ Does the behavior happen more during certain activities or times of day?

□ Is there a pattern in what seems to COME BEFORE the behavior?

□ Is there a pattern in what happens AFTER the behavior?

- □ Does the child seem to GET something after the behavior?

(such as attention from a family member or friend, a favorite toy, or something that feels good)

- □ Does the child seem to be trying to GET AWAY FROM something after the behavior?

(like something that feels too hard, being told to do something they don't want to do, or something that bothers or upsets them)

□I can point to which activity or part of the day the behavior happens most

STEP 4: MAKE YOUR BEST GUESS ABOUT WHY THE BEHAVIOR IS HAPPENING

A best-guess statement (also called a hypothesis) is your educated guess about WHY the behavior is happening, based on the patterns you noticed in your notes.

□ I think about all the possible reasons (functions) the behavior might be serving for this child:

- □ Getting attention from an adult
- □ Getting attention from a peer
- □ Getting a toy, item, snack, or activity
- □ Getting a certain feeling in their body (something that feels good — things like rocking, spinning, or touching textures)
- □ Getting away from a task or direction they find hard or unpleasant
- □ Getting away from something that feels overwhelming, scary, or uncomfortable

□ I write my best-guess statement using simple, everyday language:

"When [what came before], [child's name] [what the child did] in order to [get / get away from something]."

Example: *"When asked to clean up, Mia cries and falls to the floor to get away from cleaning."*

□ My best-guess statement is based on a pattern I notice over time — not just one or two incidents

□ I am ready to share my notes and best-guess statement with my team, the child's family, or a behavior specialist

REFLECTION / NOTES

- What pattern did you notice in your data?
- What is your best guess about WHY the child is doing this behavior? What need might it be meeting for them?
- Are there times when the child is tired, hungry, or off their normal routine when the behavior seems to happen more?
- What questions do you still have? Who can help?

Adapted from Meadan, Ayvazo, & Ostrosky (2016); Park & Lynch (2014); Wood & Ferro (2014).