

A photograph of a teacher and two young girls sitting at a table in a classroom, playing with colorful blocks. The teacher is smiling and looking at the blocks. The girls are focused on their play. The background shows a typical classroom setting with desks and chairs.

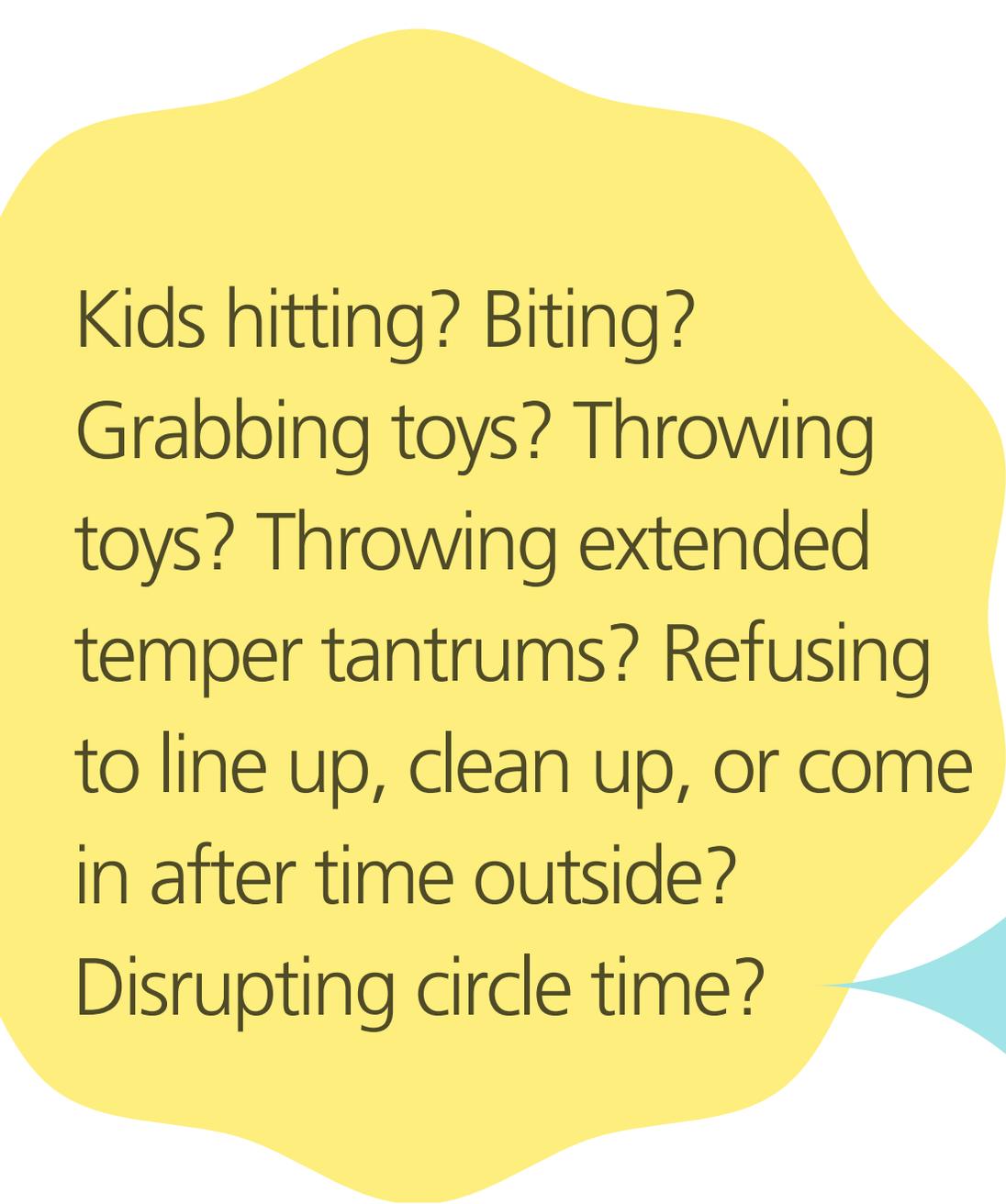
# THE NO MORE CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR CHEAT SHEET

**9 powerful strategies that  
you forgot, underuse, or  
never learned**

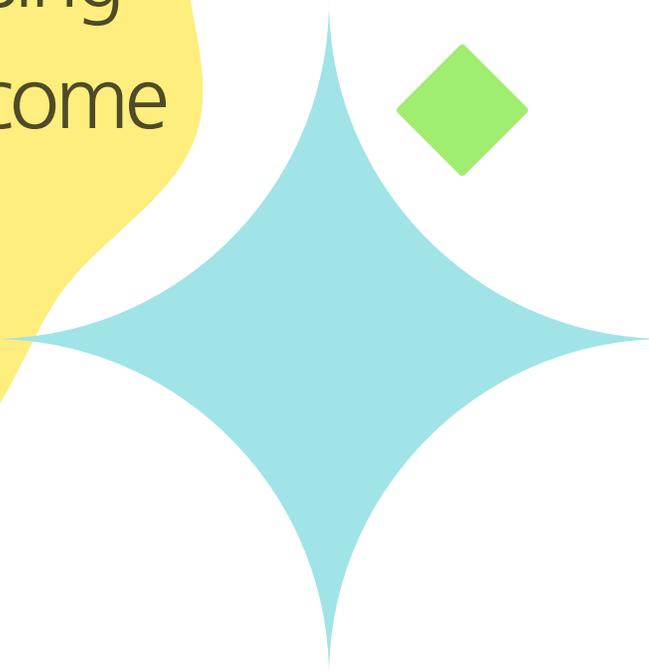
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Kids hitting? Biting?  
Grabbing toys? Throwing  
toys? Throwing extended  
temper tantrums? Refusing  
to line up, clean up, or come  
in after time outside?  
Disrupting circle time?



## I've got you covered.

This cheat sheet will give you – or remind you of – simple yet powerful strategies that, if used consistently, will enable you to eliminate a lot of difficult behavior before it even starts. I'll explain why each strategy works, share some examples, and help you decide whether and how to use each one in your classroom to help your kids. **Let's dive in.**

#1 Make Magic

#2 Invite Verbal and Physical Interaction

Till Their Arms Fall Off

#3 Captivate Them with a Puppet

#4 Sing Your Directions

#5 Let it go

#6 Inspire With What Comes Next and a

Focus on Let's Let's Let's

#7 Play With the Child That Challenges

You Most

#8 Build on His or Her Interests

#9 Help Each Child Make a Friend

**CHEAT SHEET**



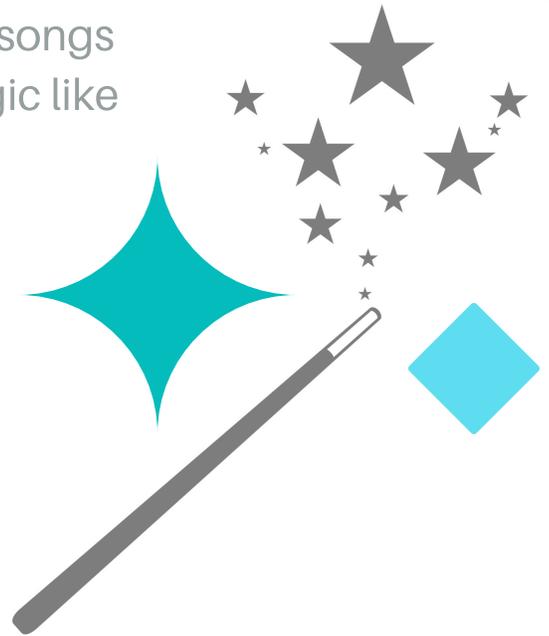
# #1 Make Magic

Trouble at circle time? What do you do or can you do that will delight children? What makes them squeal with glee? Maybe you read a story with a character that breathes fiery dragon breath and for a moment everyone seems in sync. Paper Bag Princess? Maybe it's the Slippery Fish song. Or, the game Doggie, Doggie, Where's Your Bone?

Young children have a huge propensity for the pretend. Dragons and dinosaurs and scary places. Acting things out and pretending to fly. For sparkles and butterfly wings. Unusual words and silly things. When we sing a song, read a book, or use a game that infuses pretend elements we can create moments where the class comes together, feels the magic.

# #1 Make Magic

When I was a preschool teacher I found that the “Tiger Hunt” from Bert and Ernie’s Greatest Hits was pure magic for getting everyone to behave at circle time. Now there’s also a “Dragon Hunt” you can buy on iTunes. These creative drama activities teach children to follow directions and bring the group together. Kids ask for these songs over and over again. Can you add more magic like this into all teacher-led activities?



Use this strategy if:

your circle time is generally a field day for challenging behavior.

If the child challenging you most likes dragons or ninja’s or bears or anything pretend.

How to start:

Think about what delights **you** at circle time? How can **you** have fun? What imaginary characters/ideas/scenarios does the child who challenges you most enjoy?

# #2. Invite Verbal and Physical Interaction Till Their Arms Fall Off

(okay, not really)

I learned this from Helen Wheelock, who teaches interactive oral storytelling. It's brilliant. Invite verbal and physical interaction during a story or the calendar using two prompts:

- Say a phrase and then say, "let's all say that," inviting them to repeat it
- Do a movement and say, "let's all do that," inviting them to copy your motions For example, "Today is Tuesday,' lets all say that...'today is Tuesday!" Then, "Tuesday' is dance class day!" and as you dance a little, "...let's all do that!" Some children will copy and/or repeat. More will over time.



# #2. Invite Verbal and Physical Interaction Till Their Arms Fall Off

(okay, not really)

Use this strategy if:

you are struggling during circle time and have a child that calls out or grabs toys off the shelves. Use it to channel her energy and the whole class will love it!

How to start:

Ask yourself what phrase in a book you can ask the children to repeat and what motion you can introduce and ask them to copy?

# #3 Captivate Them with a Puppet

Do you have a class puppet? This is a puppet that only you use and it sits on a special shelf, out of reach from the children. This cannot be a puppet that you let the children play with. I'm partial to magical pretend creatures – dragons and monsters. You can use just an ordinary puppet from the dramatic play area but he or she shall never henceforth return to dramatic play!!!! Because he needs to be special.

When I was a preschool special education teacher I used Booga Booga, a monster puppet. She brought magic to our circle time daily. Children who were reluctant to come to the rug or fell out in full on tantrums came running over as soon as she came out. As I told stories about how she was scared to come to school the children developed a very special relationship with her that engaged and motivated them. She leaves circle time if its too loud, but mostly everyone is willing to be very quiet so as not to upset her.



# #3 Captivate Them with a Puppet

Use this strategy if:

it sounds a little bit scary  
and/or interesting to **you!**  
If you like it they will like it.  
There's just no predicting  
which kids this will help,  
but help some it will.

How to start:

How can you use a puppet  
to transition the children to  
center time? How can you  
use a puppet to grab the  
children's attention at the  
beginning of circle time?

# #4 Sing Your Directions

Use this strategy if:

it resonates with you, you like to sing, or you had ideas brewing as soon as you heard the example above. What a joyous way to spend the day together.

How to start:

Take a song that you sing regularly and use that tune - or just a repetitive chant - to create songs for any time of the day that's a trouble spot (start with one).



# #5 Let it go



Brandon won't clean up during the clean up song.  
I say: let it go. I know.

This is a controversial suggestion.  
You can take it or not. Let me explain.

In the short run it won't eliminate the problematic behavior of refusing to clean up. But it does eliminate your problem. You just created a little less stress for yourself.

# #5 Let it go

## Use this strategy if:

Brandon is new in your class or is a toddler. Give him time! Also use this especially if you think he's attention seeking.

## How to start:

Think about what behaviors you can ignore. Refusing hand washing: no. Refusing to clean up: yes. Short term solution to help you break out of negative patterns.

Plus, it keeps Brandon from further entrenching himself in the role of the kid who doesn't follow directions. These kids, the non-direction followers, we all know their outcomes are not good. Expelled from preschool. Less likely to make friends and succeed academically in kindergarten. More likely to drop out of high school.

This is a short-term fix to be used in conjunction with other strategies. However, if Brandon was after your attention and you start acknowledging the children that are cleaning, soon may hear, "Ms. Ida I'm cleaning blocks!" I've seen this happen over and over when I was a special ed teacher, floating between several Head Start classrooms.

# #6 Inspire With What Comes Next and a Focus on Let's Let's Let's

None of us like being told what to do. Saying, "let's clean up" or "let's go to the bathroom." Creates a sense of we. Instead of you telling them what to do, we are doing this thing together. It's friendly and supportive. I know you are the adult and they should listen and respect you. But try this. It works.

Unless it doesn't work. Sometimes it doesn't. If the child in question - or all of them - respond better when you give a clear and firm direction - and there is certainly cultural variation to these things - then just skip this one and move on to strategy #7. But for some classes, some teachers, and some educational philosophies this, "let's," approach fits right in and dramatically increases compliance with directions!

One of my workshop participants told me she switched to saying, "Let's go read Brown Bear...don't forget to use the bathroom first!" to a child who didn't want to go to his mat. It worked like a charm.

## Use this strategy if:

you know a child doesn't like being told what to do or if the child is in a "no" phase. Focus on what comes next and keep your attitude upbeat!

## How to start:

Think about the child who challenges you most. What are this child's interests and how can you use them to motivate him/her to transition to the next activity?

# #7 Play With the Child That Challenges You Most

If a child is acting out during centers – grabbing or throwing toys – they probably need help learning to play. I have worked with countless children – directly or in the classrooms of teachers I have worked with – that stopped using problematic behavior or used it much less once we helped them play successfully with other kids.

I do this using “improv-based play support”. In improv anything anyone says or does is an “offer”. Throwing a toy on the floor, rocking a baby, making repetitive noises, lining up cars, are all “offers.” As improvisers we work to accept and build on offers.

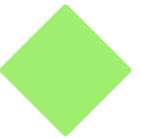


# #7 Play With the Child That Challenges You Most

One teacher said, “Roberto doesn’t play he just watches the class pets.” To accept this “offer” she got out her “animal-watching-hat” and magnifying glasses. This became a beloved game of theirs. Roberto would bring her the hat to initiate. Eventually other children joined in and she was able to prompt and encourage interactions between them. By accepting Roberto’s “watching the pets” offer and building on it a whole new world of social play opened up for him.

Imitate children’s use of materials and slowly try extending the play to see if they will copy you. Play like you’re an older preschooler. Over time you’ll make offers that help children build on one another’s offers and then you’ll back out (don’t rush this!)

Want to learn more? Google “Improvisational Play Interventions” and get to an article I wrote for the NAEYC journal, *Young Children* – its free and downloadable.



## Use this strategy if:

this child moves from one activity to the next during center time. If you realize the child doesn’t really have genuine friends or consistent play partners.

## How to start:

Just sit down to play and look for “offers” that you can mirror or creatively build on it? If you don’t know what on earth you could possibly build on observe the child more closely. There’s something there. Promise. It can be the simplest of things.

## #8 Build on Interests

Accepting and building on children’s “offers” is not just something you can do when you enter the child’s play but you can use this idea to plan your activities. Rafael flits from one activity to the other, never focusing for more than a few minutes, *except when he’s at the Lego table?*

We want to broaden his horizons but let’s also let him choose Legos on certain days or maybe indulge him in doing so every day for two weeks straight and build till his heart’s content. Why? First, we want to immediately break this pattern of him wandering and you two getting into a power struggle. Especially if he ends up hitting or taking toys. We don’t want children practicing these unwanted behaviors. Second, we want him to develop his attention span and practice sustained engagement. So, he’s learning to sustain engagement and over time we will help him transfer this ability to other activities.



# #8 Build on His or Her Interests

Next, how can you build on Rafael's Lego interest to expand his activities? Possibilities:

- Clear out the plastic food and put Legos in the house area. New and novel but also requires higher ordered thinking to transform Legos into food – great for all!
- Bring Lego structures to the table and invite children to draw pictures of them (or vice versa). Eventually encourage children to dictate stories about the structures.
- Take a favorite storybook to the Lego table and invite children to make something they see in the story or imagine where a favorite character lives and make that.



Your target child may not jump into the new activity right away. Time, my friends, time.



## Use this strategy if:

this child moves from one activity to the next during center time. If you realize the child doesn't really have genuine friends or consistent play partners.

## How to start:

Just sit down to play and look for "offers" that you can mirror or creatively build on it? If you don't know what on earth you could possibly build on observe the child more closely. There's something there. Promise. It can be the simplest of things.

# #9 Help Each Child Make a Friend

When children form true friendships with at least one peer all sorts of good things follow. They're busy playing so they're less likely to fall out on the floor! They're motivated to learn conflict negotiation to sustain the positive experience they are having with a friend.

Some ways I have helped foster friendships between children:

- ◆ Have children hold hands during transitions or games and assign the child who needs support to a consistent easy going peer who has strong social skills
- ◆ Consistently ask Amanda to initiate with Briana in various ways
- ◆ Sit them together at lunch
- ◆ Take the two of them on a special errand when your counts are low
- ◆ Entice them to be special table-washing-helpers and give all directions to Briana through Amanda (here's a towel, here's some napkins...)

# #9 Help Each Child Make a Friend

Be creative. How can you nurture a connection between these two? Choose a peer who's block tower Briana usually smashes (maybe she wants to play with her?), someone she talks about, or just someone who you know will readily accept your prompts.



Use this strategy if:  
even if you think it's not the  
answer. Ideally along with #7.  
I've seen it eliminate challenging  
behavior by getting in the back  
door again and again.

How to start:

Remember getting through hard  
times in your life because of a  
good friend who made all the  
difference? Having a good friend  
changes everything.

This will help.

9 strategies. Some you never knew? Some you forgot? Are there some you underuse?

Don't get overwhelmed. Pick one or two that you think best suit your current circumstances and try them. Stick with them. Tweak how you use them daily based on the response you get.

Accept that the child's use of challenging behavior means they need your help and need to learn new things. You want to help this child, right? And you have strategies to do so!

## You got this.

Want my help putting the strategies into action?

Contact me for info on how we can work together at [barb@transformchallengingbehavior.com](mailto:barb@transformchallengingbehavior.com).

Let's do this.

*Barb*



# About Barb

Barb O'Neill, Ed.D.

Speaker. Consultant. Trainer. Online Course Creator.

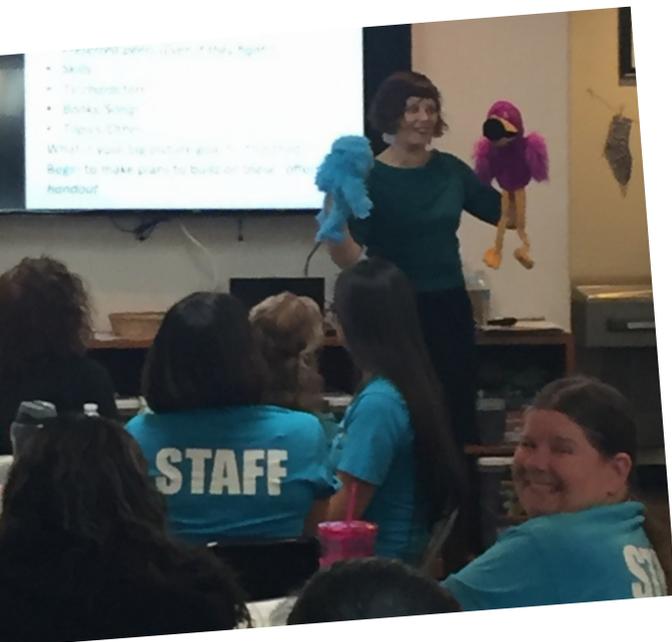
I've been **in the early childhood field for 25 years**. I've been a toddler teacher, preschool teacher, special ed teacher and a special education itinerant teacher (SEIT). I've worked in Head Start, college lab schools and neighborhood child care centers.

I was a **professor for 8 years**, at Brooklyn College, City University of New York and then at California State University, Fresno where I also directed the **Joyce M. Huggins Early Education Center, a Reggio-inspired program**. I've researched and published on much of what I teach.

I've been through **NAEYC accreditation** and **QRIS reviews**.

I'm a certified **Pre-K CLASS Observer** and **Trainer**.

I hold a **M.Ed. in Early Childhood Special Education** and an **Ed.D. in Early Childhood Education**, both from **Teachers College, Columbia University** in New York City.



# My Approach

I teach the tried and true strategies and can help with behavior plans. But the magic happens when we tap into children's propensity for play.

I offer pre- and in-service trainings, comprehensive consulting packages, customized webinars, and online courses. I'm also available for speaking engagements at your upcoming early childhood conference.

Everything I do is based on the Transform Challenging methodology, which offers a unique blend of play and theater arts based strategies along with current research and recommended practices on mindset and beliefs, social-emotional learning and practices to support children with disabilities.

This methodology aligns well with the CLASS observation tool as well as the early learning standards of most states. I can address these explicitly in trainings when desired and customize trainings so that teachers understand how the challenging behavior prevention strategies align with the standards *for your state*.

# My Approach

I have used these approaches in my own classroom, studied and published on many of them when I was a professor, and now have the honor and joy of sharing them with professionals like you. Struggling with children who don't listen? Who hurt their peers? Who hurt you?

Let's help these children learn to self-regulate. To communicate their wants and needs appropriately. To play cooperatively with peers. To follow directions. To live harmoniously.

If you are interested in working together or have questions please get in touch!

*Barb*

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