

## What Is It?

Sometimes children use challenging behaviors to communicate that a task is too hard or that they don't understand a direction. Teaching young children other ways to request help can be an important strategy to build self-confidence, teach problem-solving and reduce challenging behavior.

## When to Use It

- Anytime, as this is an important skill for all children. It is particularly useful when a child is just beginning to show signs of frustration. Simply asking, "Do you need help?" or saying, "Say, 'Help, please,'" can remind a child that adults are there to help.
- Within a behavior support plan as a "replacement behavior" that the child can use in situations that typically result in challenging behavior.
- When a child engages in challenging behavior to avoid a difficult task or direction.
- When a child frustrates or tires easily. Adults can gradually build up a child's stamina or independence with new or challenging tasks.
- During activities where an adult can provide embedded instruction for learning the request during natural routines (e.g., opening a milk carton, zipping a coat).

## Steps to Implementation / How to Do It

<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Identify the function of the challenging behavior. This strategy is most effective when the function is to avoid or end a difficult or undesired task or activity.
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Decide how you will teach the child to ask for help (e.g., verbally requesting, pointing to a symbol, using sign language, using an AAC device). This response should be something the child already knows how to do and is relatively easy for the child.
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Remind the child that they can ask for help and model the request prior to beginning a difficult task.
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Observe the child carefully during difficult tasks. Prompt the child to ask for help before the challenging behavior occurs. This can happen in one of two ways:  -If the child tends to get frustrated after a certain period of time, observe for the longest period of time the child engages in the activity before a challenging behavior occurs. This is known as the critical time period. Prompt the child to request help before reaching the end of the critical time period. Adults can model, provide explicit instruction, or use prompting strategies to teach the child to appropriately request help.

## Teaching a Request for Help

	-If there are no patterns in how long the child engages in an activity, look for signs of frustration (expression changes, sighing, looking away, using materials in ways other than intended, making noises or talking more, etc.). Remind the child they can request help when you see beginning signs of frustration.
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Honor the child's requests for help. Immediately provide assistance when the child asks for help (i.e., the adult stops to help the child when the child appropriately requests help even if the adult believes the child may not need help).
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Reduce the number of prompts or reminders you offer as the child is successful in requesting help over several opportunities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. Encourage more independence and longer persistence with the task (i.e., lengthen the time they persist at the task prior to providing help) as the child is successful in asking for help with minimal prompting and challenging behavior remains low.

### Example

*Molly, a 3-year-old with Down syndrome, frequently engages in tantrums during snack time. She screams, gets up, knocks away the serving dishes during family-style dining, grabs others' available food, and smears food around the table with her hands. The behavior support team conducts a functional behavior assessment and hypothesizes that Molly engages in tantrums to avoid serving herself food (using utensils is hard for her). The team decides to use a requesting response strategy, among others, to teach Molly how to request help from her teacher, Kay. They decide that Molly should use the ASL sign for help and approximate the verbal word "help." They select this response because Molly is capable of performing both of these skills independently.*

*After collecting baseline data, the team determines that Molly can engage in the mealtime routine for 2 minutes before demonstrating the challenging behavior. Kay sits beside Molly at the table. When the serving tray reaches Molly after approximately 1 minute 30 sec, Kay checks in with her. Kay provides Molly with attention and assistance with the serving tray. She helps her serve herself and pass the tray to the next child. After several sessions where Kay provides Molly with help after 1 minute and 30 seconds of the snack routine, Kay begins to teach Molly how to appropriately request help. After 1 minute and 30 seconds, Kay verbally prompts Molly and says, "If you need me, sign Help and I'll be right there." Then Kay models the sign and physically prompts Molly to sign by gently moving Molly's hands together. When Molly signs help, Kay immediately provides her with help.*

*Over the next few opportunities, Kay slowly fades her prompts. She starts by increasing her proximity to Molly and using a visual prompt (e.g., Kay signs to cue Molly). When Molly signs, Kay immediately reinforces Molly by saying, "Yes, Molly. You need help?" Eventually, as Molly becomes more independent and successful in asking for help, Kay fades out all prompts. While using this strategy, Kay does not respond when Molly screams or gets out of her seat. If the challenging behavior continues to occur while fading the prompts, Kay increases the level of prompting to support Molly in using the appropriate communicative response to request help.*

## How to Increase Effectiveness

- If the child begins to request help before help is needed (and there is no challenging behavior), positively acknowledge the appropriate request for help and then establish an additional requirement before the request is honored (“Great job asking for help, please try one more time and I’ll be over there to help you.”).
- Look for opportunities to teach the skill of requesting for help. You can do this by selecting an activity the child knows how to do and that the child typically engages in appropriately for at least some period of time.
- Teach this strategy in combination with antecedent interventions that prevent challenging behavior from occurring.
- Reinforce the new behavior consistently as the child first begins to learn the skill.
- Help the child learn to use this skill appropriately across different settings, activities, and people. However, be careful to not overuse the strategy so that children become reliant on adult help. As the child is successful in requesting help, encourage their efforts and help them break difficult tasks into smaller steps.

## Resources

Dunlap, G., & Duda, M. (2004). [Functional communication training](#).

Center for the Social Emotional Foundations of Early Learning. (n.d.). [Teaching your child to cooperate with requests](#).