

Guiding children's behaviour in child care

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Guiding children's behaviour can be challenging for both families and child care professionals. For children, learning to take control of their own emotions and responses, and understanding how their behaviour impacts on others is a life long learning process. It is important that families and child care professionals work together to support children to develop these skills. Guidance is most effective when child care professionals and families develop joint strategies for guiding children's behaviour which can be implemented both at the service and home. Appropriate strategies are guided by the service's policies which should explain and support the practices used in the service.

Why does children's behaviour need to be guided?

Each child is unique and they have different temperaments. Some are active while others are quiet; some adapt easily to change while others resist or react uneasily to change. Some give clear signals about what they want and need while others are harder to read. A sensitive behaviour guidance approach requires awareness of the uniqueness of each child when supporting them to develop positive and prosocial behaviour.

There are many factors that contribute to children's behaviour. These factors include programs and routines, equipment and resources, the physical environment, interactions between children and between adults, adequate rest, nutrition and any medical conditions affecting the child. Factors outside the service such as the family environment, birth of a sibling or moving house can also affect children's behaviour.

Children will require different levels of support and adult intervention at different times. A toddler who is not yet able to verbalise and uses biting as a way of exerting some control over their environment will need a different level of understanding and support to an older child who demonstrates inconsiderate behaviour by interrupting other children's play as a way of gaining attention.

However, all children have a great capacity to learn and need opportunities to practice their problem solving and negotiation skills and they can be supported to find a way and come up with their own solutions. Each situation is seen as a 'teachable moment' where children can learn, develop empathy, understand the consequences of their behaviour and actions and build their own strategies for responding to challenging situations.

Adults need to support children by anticipating where they may have difficulties, preventing situations from occurring, reminding children of what they can do and creating a supportive environment which is inclusive and accepting of

What is the difference between discipline and guiding children's behaviour?

- A guidance approach to supporting children's behaviour is a two way learning process that involves both the child and the adult. It is not something that adults 'do' to children.
- Discipline is often a one way adult directed approach to controlling and managing children's behaviour.
- The behaviour guidance approach recognises that a child displaying inappropriate or inconsiderate behaviour at times is 'normal'.
- The guidance approach emphasises that the motivation for behaving considerately comes from within the child.
- The discipline approach often involves adults having power and control over situations. In this approach the motivation for children to behave appropriately comes from external factors such as desire for praise or reward and/or fear of being caught and punished.
- The guidance approach is always empowering and respectful of children.

individual differences and capabilities. This would be no different to what child care professionals do to support children in any other area of learning. It requires time, patience, active listening skills and a commitment to supporting children to problem solve rather than simply directing their behaviour and actions.

How should children's behaviour be guided?

Developing positive relationships with children is the most powerful tool that child care professionals have guiding their behaviour. For guidance to be successful it must occur within a positive relationship. It is the day-to-day interactions that lay the foundations for the child's development of self, attitudes, values and behaviour patterns.

In your service you should see child care professionals:

- being consistent, fair and understanding and supporting and guiding all children's behaviour positively
- recognising that their own values and stresses will affect how they respond to children's behaviour.
- setting an example by being in control of their own emotions, being clear about their expectations and giving positive instructions
- minimising circumstances that may lead to challenging behaviour occurring by ensuring that there are enough resources to engage and challenge children and that the program meets individuals' needs and interests
- ensuring that noise levels do not interrupt purposeful activity and that individual children's needs for food, sleep/rest, quiet and active play are accommodated
- assisting children to understand why certain behaviour is not acceptable and providing opportunities for them to consider other strategies for dealing with difficult situations
- listening attentively to children, showing genuine concern and providing them with the option of voluntarily removing themselves from the situation/activity until they are ready to return
- sensitively and actively involving families in developing joint strategies to support children who have behavioural issues.

It is important to note that shouting, belittling, labelling, humiliating and/or isolating children are never acceptable strategies for guiding children's behaviour.

The importance of policies

All child care services should have a policy on guiding children's behaviour. The policy should clearly state the approach that child care professionals will take to help children move

towards positive and considerate behaviour. The policy should have been developed and/or reviewed in consultation with families within the past 18 months. Having an effective policy on guiding children's behaviour is important as it:

- gives child care professionals and families an opportunity to discuss their ideas and to develop shared understanding about what is expected, how issues will be addressed and the strategies that will be used to respond to inappropriate or inconsiderate behaviour
- provides a guide for daily interactions and outlines the reasons for these
- supports families by providing clear expectations of the different roles, rights and responsibilities of children, families and child care professionals
- helps to ensure that all children are treated fairly and that they are supported to develop and practice their problem solving and negotiation skills and to interact positively with their peers.

Working collaboratively with child care professionals

Developing a shared understanding between families and child care professionals about how children are seen and how their behaviour is viewed and managed is important. This helps to create consistency in the behaviour guidance strategies used at the service and at home which will make these more effective. This can help children to self-regulate as they know and can predict which behaviour will be acceptable and which is not.

Conclusion

By working together and recognising that challenging behaviour is a normal part of each child's development, families and child care professionals play an important role in supporting children to develop their social skills in ways that are responsive to individual children's strengths and interests ■

References and further reading

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