

Guiding Children's Behaviour

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Creating an inclusive environment for all children in care can be very complex. When behavioural issues arise, we often tend to focus on the inappropriate behaviour and search for immediate quick fix solutions. This quick fix solution is often highlighted when a child with a disability is being included in your group. We know that there is no A - Z fixit plan but we do know that including a child and recognising the level and type of support needed is complex. The plan requires involved team work as well as practical and realistic ideas to achieve outcomes.

Guiding children's behaviour involves adults providing discipline in order to guide them into taking responsibility for their actions, develop respect for self and others and become a valued member of the group. Discipline here does not refer to punishment but guidance, direction and consequences for behaviour. Boundaries and limits are a part of life and children need them in order to keep themselves and others safe. It is important to develop guidelines with the children using positive language in order to encourage ownership and understanding.

Effective discipline is planned. Good guidance is part attitude (i.e. not labelling children, distinguishing between the behaviour and the child, inviting not demanding respect) part style, part good humour, part support and giving it your best shot.

The development of strategies occurs over a period of time with re-assessment of rules and limits established within the service. Depending on the skill level of each child the rules and limits are not necessarily changed, but presented and reinforced in ways that enable children to understand and take part in the process of enforcing the rules and limits. This process is an integral component in the development of children's social skills, communication and being a valued member of a group.

In approaching behaviour guidance it is important to put each child and their behaviours in context and respond according to your knowledge of the child and situation. It is important to be creative in your approach and open to learning from the child and yourself. The ultimate goal of behaviour guidance is to support children to learn to be thoughtful and considerate in relation to both themselves and others.

Food for Thought

- ❖ Children who feel happy and positive about themselves act happy and positive
- ❖ Children's behaviour is linked to their age and development, not their character
- ❖ Prevention is better than cure
- ❖ Children who don't get attention by being "good" will get it by being "bad"
- ❖ Children often do things because they are interesting and no matter what you do to distract them they will be drawn back to what interests them
- ❖ When adults give children time with them to talk, play, feel close, children feel valued and secure
- ❖ Adults can get too involved with their own duties and often use "controlling" language. No/don't do this/like an army major

What's Wrong with Physical and Verbal Punishment?

- ❖ It can make children fearful
- ❖ It can teach children inappropriate behaviour
- ❖ It can hurt children's feelings
- ❖ It makes carers upset too
- ❖ It can break the trust between children and carers
- ❖ It can create tension
- ❖ At its worse it can be permanently damaging to children

Suggested Strategies

- Review your service's policy and procedures on behaviour management and ensure that all staff and parents are aware of what processes will be undertaken. Set clear and fair limits and enforce them consistently. These limits need to be developed through policy and procedures and it is important that all staff have input into them to feel confident to follow through.
- Consult with parents on the issues in a pro-active approach by seeking their support and input.
- Spend some time observing the overall social relationship behaviour of the child as well as the response of the other children. Children with behaviour problems often do not have satisfactory interaction skills with peers.
- Consider your responses, to the child's behaviour and the words you use. Are they negative or angry?
- Become an effective role model by developing a warm and nurturing relationship with children.
- Model a wide range of assertive and pro-social behaviours.
- Create environments with sufficient space that are likely to encourage social interaction
- Design the environment where children can help themselves when choosing activities.

- Plan activities in which children can practice co-operating, sharing and helping and point out advantages of behaving this way.
- Give thought to transition times between activities.
- Provide adequate resources to reduce conflict but not so many materials that children have no need to share.
- Choose materials that celebrate diversity.
- Choose books and stories that support pro-social and non-violent themes.
- If using time-out, explain and demonstrate the rules and procedures of time-out and the reasons for its use and guard against excessive use or the misuse of time out.
- Help children understand and deal with their strong feelings. First use discussion and story time by talking about their feelings e.g. "Does that make you mad? What do you want to do when you are mad?". Encourage children to label their own feelings and tell each other how they feel. Use pictures and stories/puppets to support children in discussing feelings.
- Provide children with time to practise their listening skills.
- Avoid simply providing extra resources or routinely assigning turns.
- Set guidelines about toys from home.
- Recognise a child's right to choose not to share e.g. objects from home.
- Teach children to speak directly to each other rather than through the teacher
- Plan to provide special time with each child or with only two children at a time. Having two children helps create the opportunity for individualised attention as well as helping children gain an understanding of thinking of others

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