



Positive Guidance Techniques

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Use the Safety Rule

Basic rules and limits are necessary within the early childhood classroom. Children feel more secure if they know what behavior is acceptable and what behavior is unacceptable.

- Reasons for rules and expectations are respectfully explained on a routine basis so children understand their purpose.
- Children and teachers use the Safety Rule to decide on appropriate behavior for themselves and others.

Use Positive Verbal Guidance (Responsive Language)

Children often forget what constitutes appropriate behavior from one day to the next and from one situation to another (Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 1999). They need frequent reminders of the rules; if corrective action is necessary, adults should be clear but non-accusatory. **Responsive language** utilizes positive verbal guidance that is respectful towards children, labels and validates children's feelings, and clarifies rules and responsibilities. Responsive language gives reasons and explanations to children (Stone, 1993). Adults actively listen to children and respond in a sensitive manner.

State rules in positive terms.

Tell children what to do instead of what not to do. Try to eliminate "stop," "don't" and "no" from your statements to children (except to keep a child safe in an emergency).

"Please walk" rather than "Don't run."

"Eat your food" rather than "Don't play with your food."

"Sit down flat so other children can see" instead of "Don't stand up."

Make requests and give directions in respectful ways.

"When you are finished eating, please throw your napkin and cup in the trash can."

Validate children's feelings.

"I know that it is hard to wait for a turn. But other children want a turn too."

Clarify classroom rules and give reasons for the limits.

"Walk to the bus so that you stay safe and don't fall."

"Use a quiet voice in the hall so you don't disturb the other classes."

Model the Behavior You Want a Child to Follow

All young children benefit from a visual model of what to do, but this is especially important for children with developmental or language delays. Couple the **modeling** or demonstration of proper procedure, with direct explanation—otherwise children may not imitate the desired behavior themselves at a later time.

- Show the child exactly what you want while giving verbal directives.
- "Put your backpack under your seat like this."
- "After you dry your hands, throw away the paper towel right here."
- Verbal descriptions of desired behaviors are especially needed when the adult wants to model resisting temptation or delaying gratification.
- "It's really hard for me to wait for a turn on the swing. I want to run up there right now, but I will wait until Sarah is done."

Reinforce Appropriate Behavior

The most effective method of managing children's behavior is through the application of positive reinforcement. When teaching a new behavior, it is best to reinforce every time the behavior occurs. New behaviors require immediate and continuous reinforcement to be learned and maintained. For more complicated behavior, it is important to reinforce small steps. For example, to reinforce a child who is cleaning up the block area, which to her appears to have about a million blocks spread all over the floor, ask the child to put five blocks on the shelf, and then praise her. Don't wait until the entire job is completed.

- Behaviors that are followed by positive reinforcement are likely to be strengthened and repeated.
- Use **social reinforcers** (smiles, praise, pat on the back, wink, OK sign) and **activity reinforcers** (engaging in a special activity as a reward for desired behavior). **Tangible reinforcers** (stickers, stars, prizes) should be used only for short periods of time when other types of reinforcement fail to work with a particular child.
- Use **effective praise**: praise that is selective, specific, and positive.

Effective praise (called "encouragement" by Hitz & Driscoll, 1988) is more likely to provide meaningful feedback and foster healthy self-esteem. Ineffective praise may actually lower children's self-

confidence, inhibit achievement, and make children depend on external praise (Katz, 1993; Kohn, 1993; Kohn, 2001). (See figure below)

Comparison of Ineffective and Effective Praise

Ineffective Praise

Is given indiscriminately and tends to be discounted by children—every child is given a "good job" star at the end of the day regardless of her behavior that day

Is general—overuse of pat phrases, often delivered mechanically

"Good job."

"Great."

"You're such a nice boy, Joshua."

Makes negative comparisons or encourages competition between children

"Tommy, you are the best runner!"

"You are the best helper in the class."

Uses evaluative words like "good" or "beautiful" or focuses on the end product

"What a beautiful picture."

"You are a good reader."

Relies on external rewards or approval of teacher

"You took turns with the tricycle today. Here is a sticker."

"I like the way you worked together."

Effective Praise (Encouragement)

Is selective—directed to an individual child or small group contingent upon performance of desirable behavior

Is descriptive and specific—provides explicit feedback about the behavior being encouraged or the rule reinforced and delivered with a natural but enthusiastic tone of voice

"You put all the lids on the markers. Now they won't dry out."

"Kaniesha, you remembered to raise your hand before talking. That way two people weren't talking at the same time and I could hear what you had to say."

"Joshua, I noticed that you shared the trucks with Troy today."

Avoids comparisons or competition; compares children's progress with their past performance rather than other children

"Tommy, you run so fast now."

"You helped Max clean up all the puzzles."

Focuses on improvement of process rather than evaluation of a finished product

"You painted a long time using lots of blue paint."

"You are learning to read lots of words!"

Links children's behavior to their own enjoyment and satisfaction or to the effect on another person

"You took turns with the tricycle today."

You and Sammy had lots of fun playing together."

"You must feel proud of how you worked together."

"Look at Cindy's face. She looks happy that you shared some play dough."

Sources: Hitz & Driscoll, 1988; Katz, 1993; Kohn, 2001

Ignore Non-Disruptive Inappropriate Behavior

Children who behave inappropriately often receive the most attention from adults. Children who chronically misbehave are usually convinced that the only way they can get attention is through negative actions. While some behaviors cannot be ignored (unsafe or hurtful actions), some simply annoying ones can be safely overlooked. By ignoring these behaviors, the child will eventually see there is no gain in using that language or that behavior, and it may not be repeated.

- Limit attention to children who are used to negative responses from adults.
- "Catch the child being good" and then use effective praise when children are engaging in desired behaviors. Too often children get attention for inappropriate behaviors and are left alone when they are playing appropriately or when things are quiet and controlled in early childhood settings.

Offer Choices

Offering choices gives children some control over their own behavior, shows respect for them as individuals, and encourages independence. When children are given options to choose from, they are more likely to cooperate and meet classroom expectations.

"It's time to clean up the house area. Which will you put away, the dishes or the dolls?"

Redirect and Offer Acceptable Substitutes

- Give children acceptable alternatives rather than telling them what they cannot choose.
- Privately (quietly so just that child can hear) remind the child of the classroom rule and then redirect by offering an alternative or giving a choice.

"Mohammed, it's not safe to pull the rolling pin away from Mariah. Mariah is using that rolling pin right now. Pick another toy until she is done."

"Bobbie is sitting there, Susie. Remember, there is only one child on a carpet square. You need to find another seat. Tomorrow you can have a turn sitting next to me."

"Blocks are for building. You can make a house or a barn or a road for the trucks."

- When necessary, remove the child from the problem area and redirect to another activity.

"Julie, you're having trouble sharing the blocks. I can't let you hurt other people by pushing. It's not so crowded at the water table. I think you might have fun there. We have some new toys there. Let's go to the water table."

Facilitate Problem Solving with Children

Children can be taught a problem-solving process to resolve interpersonal conflicts. Below are ways teachers can help children to work through five steps to problem solving:

- What is the problem?
- What can you do?
- What might happen if . . . ?
- Choose a solution and use it.
- Is it working?

Use Logical Consequences

Logical consequences make an obvious connection between children's behavior and the disciplinary action that follows. As logical consequences are being carried out, adults remind children of the rule and why the consequence is necessary. They do so matter-of-factly, without humiliating or threatening children. Logical consequences are reasonable, respectful, and related to the behavior.

Logical consequences typically take one of three forms:

1. Rehearsal of a desired behavior

"Ruben, I can see you didn't wash your hands before you sat down for lunch. You need to keep yourself safe and wash away germs before you eat. Please go wash your hands now and then come back to the table."

2. Restitution—making amends for misbehavior

"Jeffrey, I cannot let you draw in the book. We need to take care of books and keep them safe. You need to get an eraser and erase the pencil marks. Would you like some help?"

3. Temporary loss of privilege

"Alex, I reminded you that it wasn't safe to splash your friends at the water table. You will have to find another place to play today. Tomorrow you can play again at the water table if you remember the Safety Rule."

When a new consequence is being applied or a situation is new for a given child, give one clear reminder or warning before applying the consequence.

"Remember, the ball must stay in the play yard. If you throw the ball over the fence again, you will have to play with something else."

Once a rule and its consequence are well-known to the children, the consequence should be stated and applied in a matter-of-fact way immediately following an infraction, without blame, criticism, or extended discussion. Primary grade children can be involved in determining the consequences for behavior. One first-grade group developed the following consequences (Letts, 1997).

Problem	Consequences
Noisy during	Practice walking, sitting in auditorium

assemblies

Hitting or bullying
others

Stay back from the assembly
Private "tutoring" after school to learn and practice alternative
skills
Social contract with student, parents and principal

none[bio]none

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