

FIVE TIPS FOR GUIDING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR

National Network for Child Care's *Connections Newsletter*

Elaine Goodwin, Ed.D.
Parent Education Coordinator
Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C), Dekalb, IL

"How many times have I told you?"

"Can't you see I'm trying to ...?"

"You are a real troublemaker!"

"That's enough - I've had it!"

Do any of these sound familiar? Guiding children to behave in appropriate and acceptable ways is challenging for many adults. There are no quick, easy answers because every child is unique. Differing temperaments, personalities, needs, growth patterns, home environment, and family settings affect children's lives. The following five points should be part of your general plan to guide children's behavior.

PROMOTE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR

Both parents and caregivers who use positive reinforcement find it a "self-fulfilling prophecy." Children become what we expect of them. Be very specific about the compliments and praise you give. This lets the child know exactly what behavior, actions, and words you liked. For example, "I really like the cooperation I saw between June, Steve, and Siron in cleaning up the dress-ups." Or, "I really appreciate how well you listened to the directions for this activity. It helped things to run smoothly." Or, "I noticed how helpful you were to Terrence today outdoors. I know he appreciates that, and I do too." The child is then more likely to repeat the positive behavior.

Caregivers can build a child's self-esteem in many other small ways. Share hugs, smiles, and kisses. Tell a child s/he is important to you. Praise a child within the earshot of others. Give a child your undivided attention. For those children who seem to get your attention for their misbehavior only, try shifting the focus of your attention. Try writing down a list of the things you like or appreciate about that child. Give that child at least as much attention for his or her positive behavior as for misbehavior.

EXPECT CHILDREN TO OBEY

Be very clear about rules and expectations. Give children an option unless there is a question of personal safety or health, when there is destruction or aggression involved, or when, you as the adult, decide the situation calls for prompt action. Demonstrate your confidence by using short, clear, positive statements. Use a tone that says you expect compliance.

MAINTAIN FAIRNESS AND CONSISTENCY

Deal with challenges in a matter-of-fact, calm manner. Consider the child's age and "normal" behavior for this age range. Learn about developmental stages of children and their accompanying physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs. For example, it is unrealistic to expect a child who is 18-months-old to do much sharing, since toddlers, by their nature, are very self-centered.

Communicate rules and their consequences in words that children understand. When a child breaks a rule, follow through with a fair, appropriate, and meaningful consequence right away. When you are fair and consistent in your response to misbehavior, the child's sense of security and knowledge of right from wrong will be reinforced.

ALLOW THE EXPRESSION OF FEELINGS

Allowing a child to express his or her feelings does not mean allowing such inappropriate expressions as hitting or hurting others. Sometimes, providing quiet time along with a favorite toy or blanket will help a child to relax and calm down. Some children express anger, resentment, and frustration by pounding with a hammer on a pegboard, punching an old pillow, kicking a soccer ball in the backyard, creating a picture, or using self-talk with their stuffed animals. Offer to take a walk with the child or to read a story together. These activities may help diffuse strong feelings of anger or frustration. It is important to provide a range of acceptable avenues for children to release these very strong, yet natural emotions.

THINK AND PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

Look past today's difficult moments. Remember that your goal is for the child to achieve self-discipline. When problems do arise, step back from the scene if you can. Count to ten, or do whatever helps you maintain your composure and your perspective. Keep in mind the example you set through your own behavior. The way in which adults treat children and each other in your program serves as a model for children. For example, the use of phrases like, "Thank you," "Please," or "Can I help you?" should be a part of everyone's routine behavior.

Guiding children's behavior is a major commitment from caregivers. Progress may seem slow at times. Regression and setbacks are likely to occur. Through it all, keep your sense of humor, and remind yourself of your successes and of the important role you play in caring for children.

DOCUMENT USE/COPYRIGHT

National Network for Child Care - NNCC. Part of CYFERNET, the National Extension Service Children Youth and Family Educational Research Network. Permission is granted to reproduce these materials in whole or in part for educational purposes only (not for profit beyond the cost of reproduction) provided that the author and Network receive acknowledgment and this notice is included:

Reprinted with permission from the National Network for Child Care - NNCC. Goodwin, E. (1994). Five tips for guiding children's behavior. In Todd, C.M. (Ed.), *Day care center connections, 3(6), pp. 1-2. Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service.**
