

Developing a behaviour guidance policy

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The term 'behaviour guidance' is used throughout these practice notes to reflect current thinking about the most positive and effective ways to help children gain understandings and learn skills that will help them to learn to manage their own behaviour.

Children's Services Act 1996 (Victorian Act) and Children's Services Regulations 2009 (Victorian Regulations)

Regulation 41(e) requires that a policy on behaviour management is available for inspection at a children's service at all times that the service is caring for or educating children.

A behaviour management policy ensures the children's service has appropriate behaviour guidance strategies that all staff members follow, and ensures the service uses appropriate discipline, as required by section 28 of the Victorian Act.

Why develop a behaviour guidance policy?

Developing a behaviour guidance policy gives management, staff members and parents the opportunity to work together with a common goal of identifying approaches and strategies for daily practice in behaviour guidance.

The aim is to support children to develop skills and understandings to participate fully in the program and to enjoy the experiences and opportunities offered in the children's service.

A behaviour guidance policy will provide information to families about the service's approach to behaviour guidance and assist staff members in their interactions with children in order to help them learn to regulate their behaviour.

Effective behaviour guidance policies share the following characteristics:

- guidelines are clear and practical
- emphasis is on consistency and appropriateness of practices
- goals, values and procedures related to behaviour guidance demonstrate respect for children's rights
- information is given to staff members and families about how the children's service meets the needs of children with challenging behaviours
- a commitment to ongoing evaluation and assessment of behaviour guidance approaches and strategies.

Points to consider in developing a behaviour guidance policy

Each children's service will develop its own behaviour guidance policy that suits the unique characteristics of the service. This will include the communities in which the children live, their culture and their families. In developing a behaviour guidance policy it is important to consider that it:

- reflects the statement of principles or philosophy developed by the children's service
- is built around positive behaviour guidance principles
- includes explanations and examples of a range of behaviours
- acknowledges the close connection between the program and implementation of behaviour guidance principles
- reflects current research and thinking about child learning, development and behaviour guidance
- highlights the importance of partnerships between staff members, families and children whilst acknowledging their different roles

- encourages staff members to reflect critically on their beliefs and practices related to behaviour guidance
- acknowledges diversity and difference, taking into account the communities, cultures and families represented in the service and their influence on children's behaviour.

To ensure the behaviour guidance policy covers all features, the policy should also:

- Outline strategies and procedures for daily behaviour guidance practice, including behaviour that is appropriate for age.
- Outline strategies and procedures for children who exhibit challenging behaviour such as consistent aggressive behaviour towards other children or adults.
- Encourage, where appropriate, the development and implementation of an individualised plan in consultation with the child's parents and other professionals. At times, when appropriate, the child may also be included in the development of an individualised program.
- Outline the process to be followed if an adult notices staff members engaging in inappropriate discipline practices in the children's service. Including this as part of the behaviour guidance policy will reassure parents that there is open and transparent communication between the children's service and families as well as providing staff members with clear guidelines.
- Include processes for accessing and referring to specialised support services.
- Detail support available for staff members, including support from other staff within the service, specialised support and relevant professional development opportunities.
- Contain provisions for the policy to be reviewed and evaluated regularly.

The behaviour guidance policy needs to be developed to incorporate all children in the context of the daily educational or recreational program as well as focusing on individual children who exhibit challenging behaviour.

Effective behaviour guidance policies are developed in consultation with families (and children where appropriate). Collaboration and partnerships between staff members, families and children will ensure every one involved is committed to and understands the policy. A behaviour guidance policy that is developed collaboratively will ensure that the rights of children, parents/guardians, staff members and management are respected through the clear expression of goals, values and procedures related to children's behaviour.

Further information

Further information for parents and professionals on a range of topics, including behaviour guidance, can be found at www.raisingchildren.net.au and at www.education.vic.gov.au.

Related Practice Notes

- Behaviour guidance
- Understanding children's behaviour
- Challenging behaviours
- Strategies to guide children's behaviour
- Unacceptable practices – discipline and punishment