

Practice Note 6 | May 2010
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Behaviour guidance

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 understanding and learn skills that will help them learn to manage their own behaviour.

What the regulations say about behaviour guidance

Regulation 41(e) of the *Children's Service Regulations* 2009 requires that a behaviour management policy is available for inspection at a children's service at all times the service is open for the care or education of children.

Developing a behaviour guidance policy

The development of a behaviour guidance policy encourages services to think about and develop strategies for daily practice and to respond to challenging behaviours. The policy will guide staff members to plan and carry out daily practices that help children learn to guide their own behaviour and to respond to challenging behaviour. The policy will also provide parents and guardians and children themselves with information about the ways the service approaches behaviour guidance.

What is behaviour guidance?

Behaviour guidance is an integral part of the educational or recreational program in a children's service. Staff members are guiding children's behaviour through their interactions and communication at all times.

Behaviour guidance consists of a variety of ways that adults help children learn to guide or 'self manage' their behaviour. This contrasts with the more traditional 'behaviour management' or 'discipline' approaches that generally imply an adult 'managing' children's behaviour or using punishment, or any discipline which is unreasonable in the circumstances, to control them.

The policy and strategies for behaviour guidance adopted by a children's service may impact either positively or negatively on children's behaviour. This means that the

way staff members approach behaviour guidance in their daily practice has a major impact on children's learning outcomes.

Why behaviour guidance?

The importance of the early years in a child's development and learning is well documented. These years are a time for critically important brain development, when much of its 'hard wiring' occurs. The experiences and relationships children have during the early years, plus their nutrition and health, can greatly affect their development.

Everyone who comes into contact with children has the opportunity to make an impact and positively influence their learning. It is therefore extremely important when developing a behaviour guidance policy to approach children's behaviour in a positive way and give clear guidance. Behaviour guidance based on positive mutually respectful relationships between adults and children is most likely to influence behaviour in constructive ways. The absence of a warm and trusting relationship with an adult will often result in the child resisting direction from that adult.

The importance of effective and appropriate behaviour guidance practices cannot be overstated. Both the behaviour guidance practices and the educational or recreational program need to meet the developmental and individual needs of each child. The programming principles outlined in the Practice Notes on the educational or recreational program relate closely to behaviour guidance practices and principles. When these principles are reflected in daily practice, children have a safe, secure and developmentally appropriate experience.

Some points about behaviour guidance

There are many aspects of behaviour guidance which apply to different components of children's services.

Behaviour guidance:

- is integral to the educational or recreational program
- is all the ways adults support and guide children to learn acceptable behaviour
- encourages children to reflect on their actions and the impact those actions have on themselves, others and the environment around them
- demonstrates respect for children
- is based on knowledge of children's development and learning in general
- is based on an understanding and knowledge of each child, including background, culture, community and family
- is proactive and positive
- recognises the child's strengths
- does not use any form of corporal punishment or any discipline which is unreasonable in the circumstances to change children's behaviour
- does not involve making judgements about children and families.

When a child does not respond to daily behaviour guidance strategies, it is essential that staff members consult with parents about developing specific behaviour guidance strategies. There may be times when additional professional assistance and external support are needed to help a child.

Role of the child

It may be appropriate, at times, to involve children in decision making and discussions about their behaviour. However this must be done sensitively with careful forethought. Some examples of inappropriate conversations with young children regarding their behaviour include demanding answers to questions such as 'Why did you do that?' and insisting that children apologise for their behaviour.

Role of the adult

Adults play a critical role in guiding children's behaviour. They support children to find positive ways to express their wants, needs, views and feelings. Children's wellbeing depends on adults understanding the child's behaviour and responding appropriately. Children who lack a sense of self-worth or have low self-esteem are often more likely to behave in challenging ways. Children also may at times display challenging behaviour when they are having difficulty in expressing their wants, needs and a range of emotions or when they are not getting enough attention from adults.

Children are also likely to misbehave when their needs and interests are not being met.

Children who feel valued and who observe and experience respectful and caring relationships between children and adults will generally learn to behave in respectful and caring ways with other children and adults.

Adults who model positive attitudes, behaviour and appropriate use of language help children to learn socially acceptable ways of behaving and interacting with others. Children find acceptable ways of resolving problems when they are supported by responsive adults. This does not mean, however, that challenging behaviour will never occur, as children are constantly learning new ways to manage their own behaviour.

Children need support from the adults in their lives to interpret and express their needs in ways that are appropriate to the situation and environment. Children's ongoing behaviour depends largely on adults' responses. When practices are based on respect, knowledge of children's backgrounds and communities, their self-esteem and confidence will improve and they become more skilled at managing their own behaviour.

Mixed age groups

Guiding behaviour in groups where children vary greatly in age requires careful thought and planning. Older children are more able to negotiate their own rules and the consequences of not keeping the rules, whilst younger children need clearer guidelines and boundaries. A behaviour guidance policy will set clear guidelines for staff members as they respond to and guide children's behaviour.

Related Practice Notes:

- Understanding children's behaviour
- Challenging behaviours
- Strategies to guide children's behaviour
- Developing a behaviour guidance policy
- Unacceptable practices - discipline and punishment