



An Overview of Positive Guidance Sandhills Children's Center

Melissa O'Connor M.ED

From the earliest stages of life, children look to caring adults for safety, support, and guidance. A child's daily interactions with peers, adults, and the environment shape self esteem, behavior, and reactions in social situations.

What we do...

Adults who care for children have the responsibility of guiding children toward appropriate behaviors in a warm and supportive environment. Guiding children's behavior involves finding positive solutions to reinforce desirable behaviors. The goal for children is to learn self regulation. This occurs when children make appropriate behavior choices across different settings with little or no reminders. Teachers may not see a child reach self regulation since they need years of opportunities to interact with adults and peers in order to learn how to respond, react, and behave in social situations.

What we don't do....

It is only natural to focus on a child's misbehavior and want to do something to stop it. However, punishment and some forms of "discipline" are NEVER permitted. This includes yelling, ridiculing, all forms of physical punishment (spanking, pinching, biting), "time out" for a set/extended period of time, obstructing a child's view from activities, threatening, controlling children through fear, and any other behavior that degrades or humiliates a child. Punishment may temporarily decrease an undesired behavior. However, it has many negative side effects and is only effective when the punisher is present. Therefore, it does not lead to self regulation and generates strong negative emotions.

Guiding young childrens behavior requires a rational and knowledgeable approach which has far more impact than control.

WHY? WHY? WHY? WHY? WHY? WHY? WHY? WHY? WHY?



Young children often do not have the vocabulary to tell how they are feeling, but they show adults through behavior. For example, a child smiles to show happiness or hits because of frustration. Adults must consider what they know about the child in order to find out the reason(s) behind the behavior(s).

Why a Child may “Misbehave”

- *Inappropriate Expectations For a Child’s Developmental Level-* Each stage of child development has unique characteristics, needs, and behaviors. A young child may become frustrated after sitting too long or may become bored if activities are not appropriately challenging.
- *Environmental Causes-* Room arrangement, schedule, availability of materials, and the quality of the social emotional environment impacts behavior. For example, open area indoors encourages a child to run while lack of duplicate materials causes conflict. Children who feel safe & supported are more likely to seek an adult for help with a problem.
- *Lack of Clear Guidelines-* Children need to know what is expected and why through simple, logical guidelines that are consistently reinforced and posted for all to view. A few guidelines are needed to promote safety and sense of community while preventing injury.
- *Inconsistent Messages-* Adults may tell a child that a behavior is unacceptable on one occasion, but react differently the next time the behavior occurs. Different expectations at different times conveys an unclear message of what is acceptable and what is not.
- *Family Stress or Major Change-* Children often do not understand a change in routine or are unable to make sense of parental divorce. A new sibling, one parent out of town, or a move to a new house can be upsetting to a child.
- *Special Needs or Illness-* Sensory deficits cause overstimulation where children feel overwhelmed and unable to manage noise, colors, or movements. Other children may have allergies or an illness that causes irritability, tiredness or frustration.
- *Attention-* Let’s face it.... Children enjoy attention! Positive or negative will do!

Principles of Guiding Behavior

1. Tell children what they can do instead of what they cannot do.

Give children safe limits they can understand. Positive statements offer clear & explicit instructions. Avoid, "You know better!"

2. Protect and preserve children's feelings that they are lovable and capable.

Recognize their feelings without accepting their actions. "I see that you are angry. I can't let you hurt others."

3. Offer children choices only when you are willing to abide by their decisions.

"Are you ready to rest?" This is not a good question when a child is overtired and resting is next in the routine. "Would you like to play with dinosaurs or paint?" This is a better question since both options are available.

4. Change the environment instead of the child's behavior.

Ensure that materials and furniture are accessible to children. Avoid open areas indoors. Be sure children are near water during messy activities.

5. Work with children instead of against them.

Offer simple rules and clear choices. "We cannot throw toys in the classroom because someone may get hurt." "You can throw beanbags in this basket or wait to play ball when we go outside."

6. Maintain your authority calmly and consistently. Allow children to safely experience the natural consequences of their behavior.

Adult- "She is unsure about playing with you because she is afraid you will hit her again." OR "I see that you spilled your milk. Get a paper towel and let's clean it up"

7. Set a good example. Speak and act only in ways you want children to speak and act.

Model positive interactions with children and other adults. Use language, body language, and facial expressions that you want children to repeat. Use correct grammar.



Emphasize the Positive!

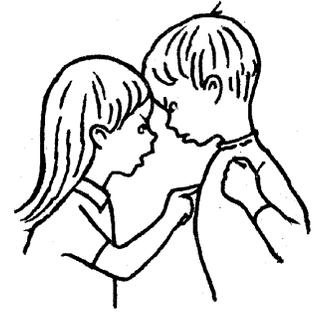
Speaking positively requires practice! Change each negative statement into a positive.

1. Don't talk with your mouth full!
2. Don't hit him!
3. Don't run!
4. Do not speak to me that way!
5. Don't leave the toys all over the floor!
6. Don't spill your milk!
7. Stop playing with your food!
8. Don't be mean to your friends!
9. Stop climbing on the furniture!
10. Stop throwing blocks!

Telling children what they can do instead of what they can't naturally tells children that a specific behavior is unacceptable while providing an acceptable alternative that children can apply in the moment and in future situations. Think about the difference in the tone of voice when statements are stated positively. For example, "Don't walk in front of the swing!" becomes "Walk around the swing."

* Take this activity one step further and provide a brief reason for the desired behavior. Simply add "because" after each positive statement and finish the sentence. For example, "Walk around the swing so you don't get hurt." Expressing feelings can also be modeled. "I feel worried when you walk in front of the swing because you may get hurt."

Children in Conflict



We hear them shouting and we come running. Then, we hear, “He said, he did” or “She said, she did.” Too often adults want to jump in and tell children how the conflict will be resolved. Instead, here are some strategies that will help children become problem solvers:

- **Stay calm.**
Get down to the children's level and talk to them calmly.
- **Let them know you understand their feelings.**
Describe what you see that they're feeling. Don't ask questions until children are calmer.
- **Find out information.**
Ask "what" questions to find out what happened to make them upset. With infants and toddlers, or children with language delays, observe children's actions and describe the problem as you see it.
- **Repeat what you have found out.**
Use clear statements to retell what you heard them say.
- **Ask for ideas to solve the problem.**
Have the children offer ideas and solutions to the problem. With infants and toddlers, or children with language delays, describe the choices or the solution that you see happening. Ask simple 'yes and no' questions.
- **Stay close by for support.**
After the children agree to the solution, stay close at hand to be sure things stay calm.
- **Praise them for playing well together.**
Reinforce positive behaviors so they are repeated.

When Children Hurt Each Other

- Give attention to the hurt child first. Model empathy. Giving instant attention to the child who hurt may reinforce the negative behavior.
- Ask children to state the problem. For younger or nonverbal verbal children state the problem for them to hear.
- Ask or offer a solution while acknowledging feelings
- Ask the child who hurt to do something to help the injured child feel better. Younger or nonverbal children will need suggestions(get a tissue, band aid, or a gentle pat on the back).

Saying, “I’m sorry” has little meaning to a young child. To mean, “I’m sorry” a child must have an understanding of how the other person feels. This is why adults model empathy and encourage an action to show how sorry looks. Adults can make a child say, “sorry”, but cannot make a child feel sorry. Adults must use caution so children do not learn that a single word is all that is needed to fix a problem.

Environment & Strategies are Key



A safe, well organized environment can prevent many behavior problems for children of all ages. A child's environment should be free of safety hazards while having interesting items within reach for children to explore. An open area indoors is beneficial for a crawling infant, however, it may invite a toddler or preschooler to run. Therefore, an environment should be created with the needs of the child in mind while having age appropriate expectations.

ENVIRONMENT

STRATEGIES

INFANTS

Safe areas to roll over pull up & crawl.

Redirect, offer acceptable substitutes.

Interesting items with a variety of textures & colors to explore with senses.

Positive statements to reinforce feelings of security.

Predicatable environment where needs are met.

Model & reinforce desired behaviors.

TODDLERS

ENVIRONMENT

STRATEGIES

Interesting items with a variety of textures & colors to explore with senses.

Positive statements to reinforce feelings of security & desired behaviors.

Items for to encourage pretend play.

Offer choices.

Predictable routines

Model problem solving.

Warnings before transitions.

empathy, & cooperative behaviors.

An environment that promotes independence.

Ignore nondesruptive behaviors.

Simple rules focusing on safety & kindness.

Point out logical consequences

Reasons for requests.

Preschoolers

ENVIRONMENT

STRATEGIES

Materials that promote creativity, pretend play, independence, and cooperation.

Model empathy

Reinforced desired behaviors.

Warnings/explanations to changes in routine.

Facilitate conflict resolution.

Rules and logical consequences.

Consistentcey

Opportunities for peer and small group interactions.

Facilitate cooperative play

Opportunities to solve problems/conflicts.

For all ages

The Greenspan Floortime Approach is a system developed by the late Dr. Stanley Greenspan. Floortime meets children where they are and builds upon their strengths and abilities through creating a warm relationship and interacting. Floortime promotes the development of the whole child to include social/emotional skills, which supports self regulation.

In Floortime, an adult engages in a child's interests, forms a connection, and challenges he/she to be creative, curious, and spontaneous—all of which move her forward intellectually and emotionally. (As children get older, Floortime essentially morphs into an exciting, back-and-forth time of exploring the child's ideas.)

- Follow your child's lead, i.e. enter the child's world and join in their emotional flow;
- Challenge her to be creative and spontaneous; and
- Expand the action and interaction to include all or most of her senses and motor skills as well as different emotions.

As you do all this, while staying within her focus, you are helping her practice basic thinking skills: engagement, interaction, symbolic thinking and logical thinking. To master these skills requires using all these senses, emotions, and motor skills.

The Greenspan Floortime Approach™ .

<http://stanleygreenspan.com/>

BE A SUCCESS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Be positive. Show or tell children what they CAN do. Cut down on the use of the word “no” and other negative directions.

Enjoy yourself and enjoy children. Pleasure is contagious-let children “catch” fun from you.

Adjust schedules so that children are not overtired or too hungry. Alternate active times with quiet, restful ones. Provide daily exercise.

Supervise in an informal, loving, but constant way.

Understand child development so appropriate expectations are in place. Don not expect too much too soon.

Create an environment with plenty of open ended materials.

Change the environment to keep it safe and interesting.

Enforce rules clearly, briefly, consistently, and politely. Have a few important rules that children can manage.

Smile and say something positive whenever possible. Complimenting desired behaviors will reinforce them.

Scoldings and punishments are not effective in the development of self regulation.

Adapted from: “Be A Success as a Disciplinarian of Very Young Children;” J. Brickmayer, Cooperative Extension Associate, Cornell University.