

Guiding Children's Behaviour

What is Behaviour Guidance?

Guiding children's behaviour is an important part of the relationship that you build with the children in your care. Building a good relationship with a child has many aspects. It involves caring about the child, respecting the child and his rights, trusting the child and teaching the child to be responsible for himself.

The way that you deal with behaviour problems or difficult behaviours will affect how the child feels about himself, how you feel about yourself, and it will influence the atmosphere of your home. Your role as a caregiver is to guide the child, and to help him learn to control his own behaviour. When we guide children, we need to tell them in a positive way what it is we want them to do. This takes patience and caring.

Caregivers must practice behaviour guidance techniques that assist the child to grow and develop as a healthy individual.

Caregivers must ensure that the following forms of behaviour guidance are **not** used by any adult, child, or group of children.

- ✓ corporal punishment (i.e. spanking, slapping, tapping, etc.)
- ✓ deliberate, harsh or degrading measures that would humiliate a child or undermine a child's self respect
- ✓ deprivation of a child's basic needs, including food, shelter, clothing and bedding
- ✓ confinement by locking exit doors or permitting a child to be locked in a house without adults present
- ✓ use of a locked or lockable room to confine a child who has been withdrawn from others

Participation in any of the above mentioned forms of behaviour guidance will result in termination of the Agreement to Provide Home Child Care.

Note: If a parent tells you that you may spank or use any other form of physical or emotional punishment, you must tell them that these methods are not allowed and will not be used by you or anyone else in your household.

Guiding Children's Behaviour

How Do I Set The Stage For Good Behaviour?

Good behaviour guidance practices start the first day that the child enters your home. It is very important to get to know the child and understand his feelings. A new child needs to know that he is welcome but he also needs to know the rules or limits of your home. He needs to know where he can play and where he cannot. He also needs to know the routine about mealtime, playtime, and other activities. The child will need to be reminded of the rules from time to time. Children who understand you and your home should settle in well and will be likely to cooperate with you. Good behaviour guidance is more than "getting the children to do what I want."

Our aim should be to promote the development of each child's self-control through encouraging:

- good feelings about himself
- his competence
- friendly actions toward the people around him

Good Feelings About Himself:

Children feel good about themselves when they are allowed to make their own decisions and choices. The choices offered to children must be appropriate to their age and stage of development and the caregiver or parent offering the choice **must** be prepared to honour the choice once the child has made the decision. Appropriate opportunities for choices may include:

"Do you want dessert?"

"Would you rather do finger-painting or play with the train?"

"Would you like to pass out the napkins today?"

These are appropriate choices because it is all right if the child chooses to refuse. It is important to honour choices when choices are given, and it is equally important to give **no** choice when there is no valid opportunity to make one. Examples of a "limited choice" or "no choice" situation may be:

"It's cold outside today. If you want to go outside, you will need to put on your sweater."

- OR -

"It's cold outside today. Do you want to wear your blue sweater or your green jacket?"

Guiding Children's Behaviour

It is important to allow a child to experience the natural consequences of his decision. For example, a child who chooses to skip snack must wait until lunchtime to eat. Abiding by decisions once they are made helps teach children to make responsible choices.

Feeling Competent:

Children feel good about themselves when they feel competent or when they feel they are able to do things well. Children who feel competent are better able to take control of themselves because they see themselves as being effective and strong. They feel "I can handle this!"

Positive self-esteem comes from praising appropriate behaviours as well as from the ability of a child to acquire and develop meaningful skills and competencies. It really doesn't matter **what** a child is skilled at, as long as it contributes to the child's perception of himself as being a capable person who is in control! Great Lego-builders, terrific finger-painters, awesome bracelet-makers, and super sandcastle-creators all have important skills that make them feel competent and worthwhile.

Friendly Actions Toward Other People:

Another way of helping children develop inner control is to instil in children a sense of what is right and wrong. Children best develop this conscience when there is an affectionate, nurturing relationship between the adult and child, and when a child is given a reason why he should or should not do something. For example:

"I can't let you hit Polly with the block. It hurts too much."

"We always flush the toilet so it is fresh for the next person."

"We have to put the candy back. We didn't pay for it. We always have to give the clerk money when we take something. That's how the people who work here earn money to buy what they want."

This type of explanation gives a "person-oriented" reason for behaviour and encourages children to think of other people's well being. A child is a person who is growing and learning. His behaviour is his way of telling us how he understands the world around him.

Guiding Children's Behaviour

What Practical Things Can I Do To Make It Easier For Children To Behave In Acceptable Ways?

Reward Behaviour You Want To See Continued; Don't Reward Behaviour You Wish To Discourage

Sometimes, ignoring negative behaviours and rewarding positive behaviours through hugs, smiles, kind words and the occasional treat may help eliminate some of the negative behaviours.

It is important to take assertive action toward aggressive behaviour. Behaviours such as hitting and fighting **do not** go away when ignored. Angry children may feel better if they hit another child or take their toys away so we need to intervene and remove the pay-off and redirect them to more acceptable ways of dealing with their anger.

Be Persistent

It takes time for behaviour to change so don't give up! Children can and will learn if you gently stick to it!

Supervise Carefully

Try to have a clear view of all children and be in the same room with them. Have them come with you to the kitchen as you prepare lunch or a snack. The more you see, the more you can guide what is going on.

When Trouble Repeats Itself, Analyze the Situation and Try to Change it

If kids are having difficulty managing - try to see if there is something you can change. Perhaps you need more space to play, more or different toys, a change in routine or expectations more appropriate to the child. Perhaps the children are doing the best they can under the circumstances and only you can change those circumstances.

Emphasize The Positive

Tell children what they **can** do, rather than what they **can't** do. Try saying "Please stay out of the puddles", rather than "Don't get your feet wet".

Guiding Children's Behaviour

Warn Children Ahead of Time

Children adjust to changes easier if they are warned ahead of time and allowed a few minutes to wind down and change gears. Try saying, "Lunch is almost ready." "When this puzzle is done we'll go wash our hands" or "There's time for two more slides and then we'll go inside for lunch".

Set Up Your Home For Child Care

Have enough room for the ages and numbers of children in your care by re-arranging furniture or making use of larger rooms. Put things away that you don't want children to touch, and have toys accessible for children to play with. A low shelf allows them to choose their own toys and put them away independently. It is important to understand the age, capability and interests of the children in your care.

Have As Few Rules As Possible But Make The Ones You Do Have Stick

Rules are important and necessary for children because they help make children feel secure; they increase their ability to learn inner controls, and are necessary for safety. If there is not a good reason why a rule **must** be followed, perhaps it isn't necessary to always be trying to enforce it. For example rules around not hurting yourself or others or destroying property are important and **must** be dealt with. Rules about saying "please" or "thank-you" can be **encouraged** but not insisted upon or made a big deal about. Make certain that the children understand the rules and limits of your home.

Plan Ahead

Try to anticipate when the children will become bored or disinterested in what they're doing and look for ways that will help the play continue to flourish. Perhaps you can add another toy or game or different craft material to what they're doing or offer a suggestion that will help the play continue longer. This will also lengthen their attention span as well as keep them happily occupied!

Keep The Day Interesting

A variety of activities is fun and interesting for the children and keeps them busy in productive ways. Vary the **pace** of activities too, some active and some quiet things to do. This requires planning and sensitivity but is well worth the invested effort.

Guiding Children's Behaviour

What Practical Things Can I Do When Undesirable Behaviour Occurs?

Sometimes there are situations that require a caring adult to step in to help a child control his or her own behaviour and to help him find actions that are socially acceptable. The focus of this "help" should be on teaching children appropriate ways of solving their own problems. Bit by bit children will learn to manage their own behaviour.

The following strategies will help you deal with undesirable behaviour when it does occur.

Know when to step in → Parents and caregivers are sometimes unsure of when they should intervene and when they should let children work the situation out. A good rule of thumb is that children should not be allowed to hurt other people, themselves, or to destroy property. If it appears as though someone or something is at risk - step in!

Take action before the child does → Avoid letting a situation go from bad to worse. If it seems likely that the children are going to need some help at some point, it is more effective to step in before trouble starts, rather than after the situation explodes.

Keep your own emotions under control → Children learn attitudes by observing other people, especially the adults around them. Therefore, it's important for caregivers and parents to provide a model of self control. Children are very frightened by intense anger in adults. It helps to remain calm by saying "Let's wait a minute until we both calm down - I feel pretty upset by what just happened." Remember it's not just you and this child involved - the others in your home are onlookers and are affected by what they see.

Remember, you don't have to make decisions on the spot → In the heat of the moment, it is easy to make poor judgments that you might regret later. Taking time to get control of your own feelings allows you to think rationally about what to do next.

Know what your flash points are → Different behaviours make different people angry. Being really aware of what irritates you can help you control your response. You can remind yourself to make a special effort to keep your emotions under control and be fair and reasonable when a child behaves in that particular way.

Guiding Children's Behaviour

Settling fights → Encouraging a child to talk about what they want and how they feel goes a long way toward settling disagreements. Try to be fair to each child and deal with them firmly. It is important to be non-judgmental especially if you haven't actually seen what's happened.

When a child has hurt another child, he should be allowed to help make that child feel better. This helps the child see the consequences of his actions and allows him to relieve guilt feelings by doing something kind.

Let the punishment fit the crime → Permitting a child to experience the natural consequences of his/her actions is often an appropriate "punishment". For example, a child who angrily rips a book is expected to help mend it or a child who throws all the blocks around must help put them away. It's not necessary to be unpleasant or "preachy" when doing this, just allow the child to experience that logical outcome of his/her behaviour.

When the encounter is over, forgive and forget - don't hold a grudge → Children usually do not hold a grudge when treatment is fair. Caregivers should also be willing to wipe the slate clean. Children who are generally viewed as "bad kids" have difficulty overcoming that image or establishing more positive relationships. Children who are more "difficult" really need adults to make every effort to concentrate on the child's positive qualities. Children often live up to adults expectations; whether positive or negative. Give every child the opportunity to live up to your **positive** expectations.

Notice when children do things right → Let children know you are pleased with their good behaviour! They will share in your pleasure, and this recognition will lead to them repeating the behaviour you are rewarding through praise.

Guiding Children's Behaviour

What Do I Do When Children Continue To Misbehave?

Children don't always stop doing what they're doing just because their parent or caregiver tells them to or redirects them to another activity. The following six steps provide a practical plan of action when a child **continues** to misbehave.

- Step 1 Warn the child and redirect him** if he will accept redirection. For example, you might warn a child that if he continues to throw sand he will lose the privilege of playing in the sand box; then suggest some other interesting things he could do with the sand instead of throwing it. The child's own behaviour is up to him; but if he chooses to continue, you will carry out your warning.
- Step 2 If necessary, remove the child from the situation and keep him with you.** Warn only once. If he persists in doing what he has been asked not to do, act calmly and promptly.
- Step 3 Take the time to describe his feelings** in an understanding way, but clearly and firmly state the rule and the reason for it. Don't "preach" or rub it in too much. Don't talk too much.
- Step 4 Have the child take the responsibility for deciding when he is ready to return to play.** Put the child in command of himself by saying "When you can keep the sand down, tell me, and then you can go back and play." Some children will say they are ready, but others may need your help. When the child looks ready you could ask, "Are you ready to go back now?" then "Good! What would you like to do for fun?"
- Step 5 Finally it is important to go with the child and help him be successful** when he does go back, so that he has the experience of substituting acceptable behaviour for unacceptable behaviour. It may take him a few minutes to really get interested again. Be sure to congratulate the child when he is doing well, perhaps saying, "Now, that is the way to do it. I'm proud of you!"
- Step 6 What to do if the child repeats the behaviour.** Occasionally, the child may go right back to throwing sand when he returns. At this point, firm action is necessary. Repeat the steps, but this time have him remain with you until he can think of something acceptable to do, but do not permit him to go back to the sandbox. You might say "What you did (be specific) shows me that you haven't decided to obey the sandbox rules, so you'll have to come and sit with me until you can think of somewhere else to play. You've lost the

Guiding Children's Behaviour

privilege of playing in the sandbox for now." Speak calmly and matter-of-fact. Avoid sounding moralistic or "nasty-nice." This will just prolong bad feelings.

In any difficult situation, the Home Child Care Caseworker is just a phone call away to discuss **any** behaviour issues. Remember parent/caregiver cooperation is an important part of guiding children's behaviour. Children's behaviour changes for the better when all the adults in their lives care enough to cooperatively help them establish self-discipline and self-control.

Tips for Handling Common Situations With Children

The Child Becomes Angry

It May Mean The Child:

- Is not successful in doing something important to the child personally.
- Has been told **stop, no, and don't** too many times.
- Is being made to do something he or she doesn't want to do.
- Feels frustrated from too many demands by adults.

So Do Not:

- Become angry.
- Allow a tantrum to become extreme.

You Might Try:

- Remembering anger is normal and may be expected.
- Observing when the child gets angry and at whom the anger is targeted.
- Observing if the child is able to express anger in acceptable ways.
- Providing a safe outlet for the child's feelings such as vigorous play, punching bag, or finger painting.

Guiding Children's Behaviour

The Child Refuses to Eat

It May Mean The Child:

- Is showing the normal decrease in appetite that occurs about age 2 1/2 when growth slows down.
- Is not hungry.
- Doesn't feel well.
- Dislikes a particular flavour or texture. (Children's tastes are stronger than adults).
- Is imitating someone.
- Is trying to be independent.
- Is trying to get attention.

So Do Not:

- Make a scene.
- Reward or bribe the child to eat.
- Threaten the child.
- Punish the child for not eating.
- Force the child to eat.

You Might Try:

- Being casual and calm.
- Making food interesting and attractive.
- Enjoying food with the child.
- Introduce new foods a bit at a time and only along with favoured foods.
- Helping the child learn to feed and serve himself.
- Serving small portions.
- Serving rejected food in a new way.
- Involving the child in preparation of food.

Guiding Children's Behaviour

The Child Won't Share

It May Mean The Child:

- Is too young (under 3 years of age).
- Needs experience in owning and sharing.

So Do Not:

- Snatch from the child.
- Scold the child.
- Tell the child you do not like him or her.

You Might Try:

- Loving the child and helping the child feel secure.
- Being a fair umpire in children's squabbles.
- Observing the situations in which the child has **difficulty** sharing.
- Being sure the child has things that are just **his** or **hers** - allowing children to experience ownership.
- Having enough materials for each child.

The Child Has Fears

It May Mean The Child:

- Has a feeling of strangeness, such as encountering something for the first time.
- Needs the closeness of an important adult and wants to know where the person is.
- Has had a previous painful experience.
- Has some feelings of guilt or lack of love.

So Do Not:

- Shame or threaten the child.
- Make the child go toward the thing that is feared.

You Might Try:

- Reassuring and comforting the child.
- Telling or showing the child where the important adult is.
- Observing the situations that frighten the child.
- Preparing the child for new situations.
- Spending extra time with the child.
- Teaching the child caution for real danger.

Guiding Children's Behaviour

The Child Can't Fall Asleep

It May Mean The Child:

- Is learning a new routine.
- Does not feel sleepy.
- Feels afraid.
- Does not feel comfortable.
- Wants attention.
- Is interested in other things.

So Do Not:

- Completely darken the room.
- Reward or bribe the child.
- Threaten the child.
- Put the child to bed as punishment.
- Tie or restrain the child.
- Disrupt the entire nap time.

You Might Try:

- Planning a napping chart that carefully places children in the room.
- Avoiding over-stimulation near nap time.
- Reading, singing, or playing with the child before putting the children to bed.
- Playing soft background music.
- Seeing that the child's needs are met before going to bed.
- Tucking the child in a cot or mat with true affection.
- Allowing the child to look at books or play with quiet toys.
- Offering assurance that you will wake the child up (before snack, when the others wake, first, or whatever is important).
- Putting the child back to bed kindly but firmly.
- Planning quiet activities for children as they wake up so they don't just lie on the cot.

Guiding Children's Behaviour

The Child Uses Foul Language

It May Mean The Child:

- Doesn't know any better.
- Is imitating someone.
- Is trying something new, or making a joke.
- Is trying to get attention.
- Is letting off steam.

So Do Not:

- Show embarrassment or shock.
- Get excited.
- Scold or punish the child.
- Over-emphasize the incidents.

You Might Try:

- Ignoring the child.
- Observing when foul language is used.
- Offering a substitute for the word.
- Teaching the child new, extra long words.
- Suggesting another, healthy outlet.

Guiding Children's Behaviour

The Child Steals

It May Mean The Child:

- Wants something.
- Is ignorant of property rights.
- Is imitating someone.
- Has unsatisfied needs.
- Has hostile feelings.

So Do Not:

- Scold or shame the child.
- Punish or reject the child.
- Humiliate the child.

You Might Try:

- Being kind and understanding.
- Observing the frequency of stealing, the objects taken, from whom the child steals, and the reaction when caught.
- Showing respect for the child's possessions.
- Helping fill the child's needs and discussing why a person cannot have or do some things.
- Letting the child own things to get a sense of **mine** and **yours**.
- Helping the child make friends.

Guiding Children's Behaviour

The Child Hurts Other Children or You

It May Mean The Child:

- Is too young to understand.
- Is inexperienced.
- Is angry.
- Has troubled feelings.

So Do Not:

- Get angry.
- Punish or hurt the child.
- Force the child to say, "I'm sorry."
- Make the child feel badly by shaming or ignoring the child or withdrawing love.

You Might Try:

- Attending to the hurt child first and involving the child who did the hurt in the comforting.
- Observing when it happens, how often it happens, who is hurt, and what happened before the hurting.
- Helping the child feel loved.
- Quietly separating the children.
- Diverting their attention.
- Taking the hurting objects away, calmly and firmly.
- Begin teaching the child that hurting is not something to do.

Guiding Children's Behaviour

The Child Destroys Things

It May Mean The Child:

- Is curious.
- Does not understand what to do.
- Has had an accident.
- Finds the materials are not sturdy enough.
- Finds the materials too difficult and frustrating.
- Feels excited or angry.
- Feels jealous, helpless, or bored.

So Do Not:

- Scold, yell or shout.
- Tell the child that he or she is bad.
- Punish the child.

You Might Try:

- Examining fragile items together to satisfy the child's curiosity.
- Removing destructible and broken things from the play area.
- Providing a different place for play or reorganizing the environment to discourage destruction.
- Teaching the child the difference between expendable items and valued items.
- Giving the child an opportunity to pound, mess up, and tear the expendable items.
- Involving the child in determining the need for repair or in repairing.

Guiding Children's Behaviour

The Child Sucks Thumb or Fingers

It May Mean The Child:

- Enjoys the physical sensation.
- Uses thumb sucking to relax.
- Has troubled feelings.

So Do Not:

- Force or restrain the thumb or finger with mitts, guards, or ties.
- Use bad tasting lotions.
- Punish the child.
- Make fun of or shame the child.
- Coax or bribe the child.

You Might Try:

- Relaxing and realizing that it rarely lasts and is not serious.
- Giving the child more love and attention.
- Observing when the child sucks the thumb or finger.
- Discovering what the child wants or needs and supplying it.
- Explaining to a school-age child the possible damage to teeth and mouth.
- Helping a school-age child break the habit by saying gently, "Show me your pretty smile," or by using an agreed upon reminder (child's name, hand on shoulder, or word such as "smile").

Guiding Children's Behaviour

The Child Demands Attention

It May Mean The Child:

- Has been directed by adults or entertained by TV and is therefore inexperienced in independent creative play.
- Has an interest in you.
- Is tired, not feeling well, or hungry.
- Feels left out, insecure, or unloved.

So Do Not:

- Ignore or isolate the child.
- Shame the child.
- Scold or punish the child.

- Attending to the child's physical needs.
- Showing interest in the child as a person.
- Observing when the child demands attention.
- Providing interesting things for the child to do.
- Praising the child for effort and success.
- Sharing yourself with the child.

The Child Is Jealous

It May Mean The Child:

- Feels replaced by a new person in the family - baby, stepparent, or live-in adult.
- Has been unfairly compared to other children.
- Has been given unfair treatment or favouritism.

So Do Not:

- Shame the child.
- Ignore the child.

You Might Try:

- Giving warmth, love, and understanding.
- Discussing the child's feelings one-to-one.
- Observing how the child copes with jealousy.
- Promoting good feelings about who the child is and what he or she can do.

Guiding Children's Behaviour

The Child Bites

It May Mean The Child:

- Is still trying to put everything in the mouth (toddler).
- Is teething and needs objects or harder foods to chew on (toddler).
- Is using biting instead of words to communicate (toddler).
- Does not understand that biting hurts (toddler).
- Feels frustrated and has not developed other, more positive coping skills (preschooler).

So Do Not:

- Bite the child back.
- Encourage another child to bite the child.
- Make the child bite soap.
- Force the child to say, "I'm sorry."

You Might Try:

- Providing close supervision of the biter and being ready to step in to protect other children.
- Comforting the victim first. Tell the biter that biting hurts. Involve the biter in comforting the victim by bringing a cool wet towel to put on bite.
- Providing an object to bite, such as a pillow or chewy toy.
- Observing when the child bites, who the victim is, and the child's reaction after biting.
- Helping children use words to cope with frustration.
- Thinking about your time schedule, equipment, activities and guidance techniques. Are they creating or reducing stress for the children?
- Informing parents of the problem, stressing how typical biting is, and describing your plan to handle the problem.

Adapted from "Young Children", a National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) publication.