

Handout #3: Positive Guidance Techniques

Positive Guidance: The Key to Classroom Management

1. Use the Safety Rule

Basic rules and limits are necessary within the early childhood classroom. Children feel more secure if they know what behavior is acceptable and what behavior is unacceptable.

- Caregivers respectfully explain reasons for rules and expectations on a routine basis so children understand their purpose.
- Children and caregivers use the Safety Rule to decide on appropriate behavior for themselves and others.

2. Use Positive Verbal Guidance (Responsive Language)

Children often forget what constitutes appropriate behavior from one day to the next and from one situation to another. They need frequent reminders of the rules; if corrective action is necessary, adults should be clear but non-accusatory.

3. Responsive language utilizes positive verbal guidance that is respectful towards children, labels and validates children's feelings, and clarifies rules and responsibilities. Responsive language gives reasons and explanations to children. Adults actively listen to children and respond in a sensitive manner.

4. State rules in positive terms.

Tell children what to do instead of what not to do. Try to eliminate "stop," "don't" and "no" from your statements to children (except to keep a child safe in an emergency).

- "Please walk" rather than "Don't run."
- "Eat your food" rather than "Don't play with your food."
- "Sit down flat so other children can see" instead of "Don't stand up."

5. Make requests and give directions in respectful ways.

- "When you are finished eating, please throw your napkin and cup in the trash can."

6. Validate children's feelings.

- "I know that it is hard to wait for a turn. But other children want a turn too."

7. Clarify classroom rules and give reasons for the limits.

- "Walk to the bus so that you stay safe and don't fall."
- "Use a quiet voice in the hall so you don't disturb the other classes."

8. Model the Behavior You Want a Child to Follow

All young children benefit from a visual model of what to do, but this is especially important for children with developmental or language delays. Couple the **modeling** or demonstration of proper procedure, with direct explanation—otherwise children may not imitate the desired behavior themselves at a later time.

Show the child exactly what you want while giving verbal directives.

- "Put your backpack under your seat like this."
- "After you dry your hands, throw away the paper towel right here."

Verbal descriptions of desired behaviors are especially needed when the adult wants to model resisting temptation or delaying gratification.

- "It's really hard for me to wait for a turn on the swing. I want to run up there right now, but I will wait until Sarah is done."

9. Reinforce Appropriate Behaviors

The most effective method of managing children's behavior is through the application of positive reinforcement. When teaching a new behavior, it is best to reinforce every time the behavior occurs. New behaviors require immediate and continuous reinforcement to be learned and maintained. For more complicated behavior, it is important to reinforce small steps. For example, to reinforce a child who is cleaning up the block area, which to her appears to have about a million blocks spread all over the floor, ask the child to put five blocks on the shelf, and then praise her. Don't wait until the entire job is completed.

- Behaviors that are followed by positive reinforcement are likely to be strengthened and repeated.
- Use **social reinforcers** (smiles, praise, pat on the back, wink, OK sign) and **activity reinforcers** (engaging in a special activity as a reward for desired behavior). **Tangible reinforcers** (stickers, stars, prizes) should be used only for short periods of time when other types of reinforcement fail to work with a particular child.
- Use **effective praise**: praise that is selective, specific, and positive.

Effective praise is more likely to provide meaningful feedback and foster healthy self-esteem. Ineffective praise may actually lower children's self-confidence, inhibit achievement, and make children depend on external praise.