

# Guiding Children's Behaviour

## Introduction

Information shared in this INFOsheet promotes strategies and techniques that assist in meeting requirements of the Community Care and Assisted Living Act and the Child Care Licensing Regulation. As described in the Child Care Licensing Regulation, licensed child care settings are required to have a written discipline policy. Please refer to the Guiding Children's Behaviour Handbook [www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/ccf/child/index.html#publications](http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/ccf/child/index.html#publications) for a more detailed explanation of the guidance practices.

## Guiding Children's Behaviour

Positive strategies that encourage self-guidance are based on the value and belief that children can learn impulse control to help them develop self-discipline, responsibility, positive capabilities and attitudes. Guiding children's behaviour is an ongoing process; it is a long-term goal that parents, caregivers and professionals have for children. Children become self-disciplined as they learn appropriate and acceptable behaviour patterns. Guiding children's behaviour is done while appropriate behaviour is occurring, as well as before, during, and after socially unacceptable behaviour is displayed. While there are a wide variety of theories and approaches related to guiding children's behaviour, **the goal remains constant – to assist children in developing respect, self-control, self-confidence and sensitivity in their interactions with others.**

### A. Child Development

Adults who recognize that growth in children entails both experimentation and making mistakes are more likely to be accepting and patient with socially unacceptable behaviours. It is important for adults to have reasonable expectations, which are consistent with each child's developmental abilities. By nature, children differ in terms of their activity level, distractibility, and sensitivity. Caregivers who take the time to offer developmentally appropriate verbal explanations and guidance help children gain confidence, competence, and social problem-solving skills. Expectations for behaviour vary greatly from family to family, and from culture to culture. Knowledge about a child's background and respect for different value systems will help caregivers respond sensitively to varying child rearing approaches.

### B. Environment

The environment refers to all that surrounds a child. This includes both physical and social elements. Caregivers who are knowledgeable about the ways in which environments influence behaviour can plan their settings accordingly. It is important that sufficient space is available for the program, that it is aesthetically pleasing, planned, and organized contributing to an environment which promotes good mental health and diminishes the potential for problems. Adults who are committed to nurturing and guiding young children create an atmosphere, which fosters trust, security, and comfort. An adult's verbal and physical communications skills are critical in modeling the behaviour they wish children to learn.

Schedules, routines, and transitions serve as a framework from which children gain trust, security, and order. While these can be flexible to some degree, they must provide children with clear guidelines about what is expected. Meeting children's needs throughout the day requires that time be appropriately balanced between active and restful periods, individual and group activities, and child initiated/adult initiated content.

### C. Guidance Strategies: Prevention

Prevention oriented strategies "set the stage" for a positive atmosphere and maximize opportunities for desirable behaviour. They include:

#### a. Establishing Clear, Consistent, & Simple Limits

Limits are statements of what behaviour is appropriate. They should be clearly related to the safety and protection of self, others, and the environment. For example: "Inside we walk."

#### b. Stating Limits in a Positive Way, Rather Than in a Negative Way

Phrasing limits in a positive way focuses on what to do, rather than what not to do.

For example: "It's time to put the blocks away." *Rather than:* "Don't leave the blocks on the floor."

#### c. Focusing on the Behaviour, Rather Than on the Child

When caregivers focus on a child's behaviour, rather than on a child's character, they preserve a child's integrity and offer positive guidance for learning. For example: "When you grab the truck, it makes Sam angry." *Rather than:* "You should be ashamed of yourself for grabbing the truck."

#### d. Stating What is Expected, Rather Than Pose Questions

In matters of routines, limits, and expected behaviours, it is important to state, rather than to ask. While there are many opportunities for children to make choices, offer these options only when they are appropriate. When there is not a choice, make a clear statement of what is expected. For example: "It's time to tidy up now." *Rather than:* "Do you want to tidy up?"

## Guiding Children's Behaviour

### e. Providing Choices

Providing choices is also a valid prevention strategy for young children, which often avoids power struggles.

For example: "Do you want to put your pants on first, or your shirt?" *Rather than:* "Get dressed now."

### f. Allowing Time for Children to Respond to Expectations

Children react more favorably when they are offered cues and warnings. This helps them to anticipate or prepare for change.

For example: "In five minutes, it will be time to clean up." *Rather than:* "Get that cleaned up now."

### g. Reinforce Appropriate Behaviour, With Both Words and Gestures

When children are doing well, it is important to acknowledge this through words or gestures. Positive reinforcement helps children build self-confidence and encourages them to repeat desired behaviours. For example: "Thank you for taking turns with Kathy. That's called being kind." *Rather than:* "You good girl."

### h. Ignore Minor Incidents

Adults who work with young children need to develop tolerance for a certain amount of noise, clutter, and attention seeking behaviour. As long as children's activities are not infringing on the rights of others, it is often best to "take a breath," rather than to speak.

### i. Encouraging Children to Use You as a Resource

Children feel a greater sense of comfort and trust when they know that the caregiver or parent is there to protect, guide, and help them. For example: "If you're not sure what to do, ask, and I'll help you." *Rather than:* "That's hard for you, so I'll do it."

## D. Guidance Strategies: Intervention

Inevitably there will be occurrences of inappropriate behavior, it is at these times, adults will need to intervene. The following intervention strategies, or a combination of these strategies, will help ensure that guidance is supportive, rather than punitive.

### a. Gain a Child's Attention in a Respectful Way

Apart from situations where physical danger is imminent, adults should approach children individually, state their name, get down to the child's eye level, and use a calm, controlled voice. In situations where children may be losing self-control, the closeness of an adult can often help calm them.

### b. Remind

To clarify and reinforce limits, simple reminders are helpful to young children. For example: "The bikes stay on the bike paths." "Sand stays down."

### c. Acknowledge Feelings Before Setting Limits

In order that children perceive adult guidance as supportive, it is important for them to know that their feelings are recognized and understood. When limits are preceded by an acknowledgement of feelings, children will be less likely to respond in a negative way. For example: "You look really angry. I cannot let you hurt Scott."

### d. Redirect or Divert When Appropriate

When adults redirect children's activity, they assume responsibility for solving a problem which children have been unable to resolve through other guidance strategies. As much as possible, children should be redirected towards activities that are in line with their needs. For example: "I can see you really need to be outside. Let's get our coats."

### e. Model Problem-Solving Skills

When children face discouraging or frustrating situations, it is natural for them to lose control. As parents and caregivers anticipate this, they can offer verbal and/or physical assistance which models problem solving.

### f. Offer Appropriate Choices

When clarifying expectations or reinforcing limits, caregivers can offer a simple choice. The choice should be posed in a non-threatening and non-punitive way.

For example: "You can sit quietly at the circle, or you can choose a quiet activity like a puzzle. You decide."

### g. Use Natural and Logical Consequences

A statement of natural consequences simply clarifies the inevitable or unavoidable outcome of a behaviour. For example: "When you forget to put your picture on the shelf, it's difficult to find it when it's time to go home." A statement of logical consequence clarifies an adult-arranged outcome of behaviour. For example: "Yes, I can see that the paint spilled. Here is a sponge for wiping it up."

### h. Provide Opportunities for Children to Make Amends

Rather than demand a superficial apology, adults should offer genuine opportunities for children to restore relationships after an incident of hurt or harm.

#### South

201 – 771 Vernon Avenue  
Victoria, BC V8X 5A7  
Ph: (250) 475-2235  
Fax: (250) 475-5130

#### Central

528 Wentworth Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Nanaimo, BC V9R 3E4  
Ph: (250) 714-0424  
Fax: (250) 714-1182

#### North

Suite 200 - 1100 Island Hwy.  
Campbell River, B.C. V9W 8C6  
Ph: (250) 287-2818  
Fax: (250) 286-3486