



Child Priority

Guides to Speech and Action

Dear Parents,

We like parents to know how we handle situations at school with children. All our teachers are trained extensively with our philosophy. These ideas and guidelines may also be helpful information to parents.

Here are a few guidelines:

A good teacher provides children opportunities for reasoning, independence and exploration. It is encouraged with questions, comments, an enriched environment and allowing kids to do things for themselves. "Give the minimum amount of help so the child may gain the maximum chance to grow in independence, but give the child the help they need." Our philosophy is one where teachers are always kind and respectful of children, especially in the tone of our voice. New teachers tend to speed up their voices and ask too many questions when a slower, softer speech and adding some giggles will have a calming effect on your classroom. The words and tone we use are patient, nurturing and we think every moment as a "Teachable Moment." Taking the time to work things out with kids or between kids will have a positive influence on your future classroom dynamics. Although sometimes you may feel you're unsure about intervening in a situation, ask yourself, "What is the message to kids if I do nothing?" Kids may think it's 'ok' to splash everyone at the water table; it's 'ok' to run down the hall; it's 'ok' to hit others. We want kids to feel safe and comfortable at school so that learning and having fun is their number one priority. Our number one Priority is always the health and safety of each child.

1. State suggestions or directions in a positive rather than a negative form.

Kids hear what you say in the first 8 seconds. If you always tell kids what not to do they may never know what you want them to accomplish. Examples:

"Use your walking feet down the hall" vs. "Don't run in the hall."

"Get a towel and dry your hands" vs "Stop washing your hands"

"I will hold the shovel while you climb" vs "Don't climb with a shovel"

"Try filling all the containers with blue water" vs. "Don't splash in water table"

"What is your idea about building with the Legos" vs. "Don't throw the Legos"

Redirection is most effective when consistent with the child's interests

A teacher will be more successful in changing the child's behavior if the attempt to turn the child's attention to an act which has equal value or outlet. Example: If a child is throwing a ball dangerously near a window, we can suggest a safer place to throw it. She states it in a way that says what to do first and follows with the explanation. "Throw your ball toward the tree. It's too close to the window"

Effective redirection often requires imagination. Example: Two kids are on our climber and have a rope. They notice one of the teachers nearby and one of the kids calls out, "We are going to tie you up and put you in jail." The teacher responds, "Oh you are wanting to catch

something. I wonder if you could catch a big fish from up there with your rope? It would take some strong muscles to pull one up.” The boys attention is diverted to fishing. Effective redirection faces the situation and guides the behavior.

2. Give a child a choice only when you intend to leave the situation up to him/her

Choices are legitimate! But way too often kids are given choices where a yes or no answer is expected and the adult isn't expecting a "NO". The adult may feel the child is being disobedient. Examples:

“Do you want to go home now?” “Do you want to wear a coat?” “Do you want to clean-up?”

It is important to be clear as to whether one is really offering the child a choice before asking a question. Many a power struggles have been created by one little question.

Make it a positive statement when it's not a choice: “It's time to go home”, “Find your coat and put it on”, “Clean-up time or Pick-up time”.

3. Your voice is a teaching tool.

Use words and a tone of voice which will help the child to feel confident, reassured and well-liked.

All of us have known parents and teachers who seem to feel that the louder they speak, the greater their chances of controlling behavior. We may also have observed that these same people often have more problems than the parents and teachers who speak more quietly but are listened to. A quiet, firm manner of speaking conveys confidence and reassures the child. It may be necessary to speak firmly, but it is never necessary to raise one's voice. The most effective speech is simple, direct and slow. Decreasing speed is more effective than raising pitch. It is also a good rule never to call or shout across any play area, inside or outside. It is always better to move nearer the person to whom you are speaking and kneel down at their level. Children as well as adults grow irritated when shouted at. Your words will get a better reception if they are spoken face to face and at the child's level. Speech conveys feelings as well as ideas. Children are probably very sensitive to the tone quality, the tightness in a voice, for example, which reveals annoyance or unfriendliness or fear regardless of what the words may be. The teacher sets a pattern, too, in her speech as she does in other ways. Children are more likely to use their voices in loud harsh ways if the teacher uses her voice in this way. *Giving kids the time to focus on materials and develop their attention span means the teacher does not have a constant conversation going on over the heads of the children. Do not have a conversation with other parents and/or just describing what everyone is doing.* We are trying to increase a child's attention span. It would be like having a radio or tv playing in the background while you are trying to write a paper. I would encourage a teacher to use singing what to do or instructions when the group is picking up or getting ready to go outside or washing hands. Its clever and effective way to guide kids.

4. Avoid trying to change behavior by methods which may lead to loss of a child's self-respect, such as, shaming a child or labeling their behavior “naughty” or “selfish.”

It takes time to learn constructive ways of guiding behavior. First, as the teacher, discard any gestures, expressions or tone of voice that may imply the child should be ashamed of themselves or feeling fearful or guilty. A teacher is approaching these situations as a “teachable moment.” If we believe that there are reasons why a person behaves as s/he

does, reasons why patterns of reacting are established, we will not blame the individual for their behavior. We may see it as undesirable or unacceptable, but we don't label the child as mean, bad, selfish or a bully. This response does not help us reach a goal we have for kids which is building self-esteem. Children can be helped if we accept them and try to make it possible to find some success rather than if we judge them because they do not meet our standards. This is not to say that you will have your own feelings about certain situations and certain children's behaviors. Buttons will be pushed! There is nothing like a preschooler who constantly cries, doesn't make progress separating from mom, constantly hits other kids to get their way, says "NO I won't do it!", takes materials from other kids, secretly says mean things to other kids, tattles on everybody and is disrespectful of kids, teachers and materials, etc. etc.. So I guess this paragraph is about looking within as to what are your triggers and how can you consistently and positively guide kid's behavior? Tricky, but I would suggest trying not to take their behavior personally. It's their issue and you are there to help.

Example: Tommy, an active child with a short attention span who often acts destructively, sits down and starts to put a puzzle together. He whines when a piece does not fit in the first place he tries and throws the piece on the floor. The teacher says, "Does it make you mad when it doesn't fit right away?" She puts into words the feeling he appears to have, thus indicating her acceptance of it and of him. This may help him to relax. She reaches down and gets the piece and passes it to him and says, "Turn the puzzle piece around to see how it may fit." He completes the puzzle successfully. She says, "That's great. You did it." She doesn't reprimand him for throwing a piece on the floor or expect him to pick it up. He is not ready to meet such an expectation. He is frustrated, but learning ways to cope. It is more important for him to have success. This situation is different from a child who throws materials in anger or at another child or throws materials and laughs. Then definitely the child would need to pick up the thrown item themselves most likely with guidance.

Guides in Action

- 1. Give the child the minimum of help in order that s/he may have the maximum chance to grow in independence.** This means, describing, pointing or showing a child where they can get a sponge, a cup, scissors, markers, paper etc. when they ask for something. Then the next time they can get it themselves. Your rooms should be set-up so that every area is child-friendly. If you do not want kids to use a material it should not be in their reach. Kids like to solve problems and figure things out. Verbal guidance may be enough help. When more help is needed, perhaps opening containers in their lunch, start the process and then hand it back to them to finish. Ex. Bananas, ziplocks, Tupperware. Have scissors available on the table (if appropriate) to open snacks. Start the zipper on their coat, but let them zip it up. Give lots of positive encouragement and feedback. The more the kids grow in independence the less overwhelmed the teacher feels. Remember to use few words with directions as kids will get overwhelmed with too much instruction. Please read bathroom procedures posted in children's bathroom. There are all kinds of ways to help a child help himself if we take time to think about them, such as letting him help to turn the door knob with us, so that he will get the feel of how to handle a door knob. Loosen the ties on his shoes and have him put them on. Show kids how to lay their coat on the floor and flip it over to put it on. Zip up their own lunch, pour

their own water at snack, tell them where to find scissors, towels, blocks, or anything he is asking for. Children like to solve problems, and it is hard to estimate how much their self-confidence is increased by being asked how they might solve a problem. Remember though to not deny kids asking for help. They need to know they can count on you as well as themselves.

2. **Why is sharing NOT enforced?** (Or do we just state it differently?) No one likes to share, not kids and not even adults. Why do we use that word or enforce it if it just causes problems. If I would say, "let me browse through your text messages." Your response would probably be, "no I don't think so." I could say, "Well we are supposed to share, right?" and you would say, "hmmm not my cell phone." Kids feel the same way about anything they are playing with or may have brought to school. Another reason why personal items, toys, blankets, lunch boxes are kept in their cubby. So now you are saying that all the kids must be able to use all the toys in the classroom. That is fair, but how you go about it will ensure your success. It's really just semantics. You would like all the materials to be available to all the kids. If you have a child interested in playing with a baby or a car, would you make them stop because another child wants the toy and they must share? Hopefully not. I like to say that your first move is to observe for a second. Can the kids resolve this on their own? And it may just be a second. If you choose to do nothing and it escalates then the message to the kids is this is an unfair and possibly unsafe place to be. Soooo your next move is to diffuse the situation by stating what is happening. "Oh Tommy you are using that car on the road you are building, right? And Owen are you wanting a car to use?" Now you are mediating and not taking sides. Saying "give it back right now because he had it first!!!" helps no one. As a child, I am either learning to be a tattletale and not stand up for myself or to be sneaky with taking things. Both kids involved want satisfaction. A teacher's goal is to help kids play, communicate, learn and have fun together. As a teacher, you may need to hold onto the item until everyone is satisfied with the final outcome. Or you may need to offer some suggestions, such as, "I think we have more cars on the shelf." A lot of times helping with the "sharing" comes down to prevention before the kids arrive to play in your classroom. Are there enough cars, babies, puzzles, blocks, dinosaurs, funnels, eyedroppers, paint brushes etc. to allow children to focus on play? A teacher can encourage kids to say, "I am using this baby right now, but when I am done you can have it." Rather than saying you should "share", a teacher can guide kids to more appropriate behavior with specific language. "Oh Jamie is thinking she wants to look at that book. Can you let her know when you are finished? Or let her know you both could look at it together if that sounds fun."

3. **Why insisting kids say "I'm sorry" doesn't work for kids?**

Until you are about 6 years old, you really do not have much empathy for others. You are very egocentric and you want what you want! If another child has something that looks desirable, and I am 3 years old, I'm going to get it. It may take grabbing it, it may take a push or it may even take me hitting you to get it. If you step in front of me in line, I am going to

push you with all my strength so you know I don't like that! I do this because it's a gut response and I haven't learned another way yet. People just say don't do it, but no one has guided me to learn what I should do. Now if the teacher says that wasn't nice and say you're sorry, I probably will do it. I won't mean it, but it's the fastest way to move on with my agenda and the adult seems satisfied that it was resolved. So what should a teacher do in place of the obligatory "I'm sorry?" You are going to state what happened and role model empathy. Position yourself between the two kids as a mediator and not on anyone's side. Allow the child who was hit to say they didn't like that. You may say, "I bet that hurt! Did you want Robin to hit you?" Child: "no". You: "Oh tell her you didn't like to be hit." You are being specific about what happened. You are also teaching the child to stand up for themselves with words. Your goal would be for kids to feel empowered with words and know they do not need to be a victim. The other child will most likely feel justified in their actions. For kids, it's important to learn there are others way to get what they want or to help with their frustration, this must be a learning moment for them as well. Adult role: 1) State the issue: "Robin are you wanting a baby to take care of?" Child nods yes "And Olivia, you are taking care of this baby?" other child nods yes. State it in a way that adds validity to the child's play. I wouldn't say, "So you both want a DOLL?" Because now I am guiding their future play as to how they will be handling the babies. 2) I now can see if they will solve it on their own or if I need to give a couple suggestions, such as, "Do you need a babysitter", "I am seeing some babies in the baby bed that may need to be fed, Robin do you want to check on them?" "Robin and Olivia, when you both have babies, let me know if they can eat real crackers." Your goal is to bring the two girls together to play, give them skills to communicate and redirect them back to a fun play. If all else fails, and Robin only wants that baby, go back to the old reliable, "Olivia, can you let Robin know when she can take care of the baby, maybe when you go shopping?" You are guiding kids, giving choices and helping with a resolution that all parties are satisfied with.

4. How do we avoid power struggles at all costs and allow kids to grow in independence?

Try to always think of your ultimate goal? You want the child to: help pick-up, wear a coat outside, throw their snack cup and napkin away, come to group time, pack up their lunch, wash paint brushes etc. etc. etc. I always state back what kids have said, "Oh you don't want to wear your coat outside?" It's always a better idea to give choices or have them check out the school rules. We have an outdoor thermometer and if it's lower than the red line then a coat must be worn, otherwise, they can try without. Another example is a child who says, "I am not picking up!" If you start saying "yes you will" or "this is what everyone is doing and so will you!" Then welcome to the power struggle! One of the reasons a power struggle benefits no one is that someone has to win and someone has to lose. Your goal is to help kids communicate and negotiate. "Ok so you do not want to pick up in the blocks. You could wash tables with the green sponges or put the playdough in the bucket?" That works 80% of the time and the child feels they have been heard and the teacher is reaching the goal of kids helping pick up the room. Quick reminder: Only offer a question that requires yes or no if you are not willing to accept the answer. "Are you ready to go home?" NO "Are you ready to pick-up the puzzles?" NO "Are you going to put on your coat?" NO Make it a statement so it becomes guidance rather than a choice. "Put your coat on so you are ready to go outside." "Use your walking feet" "Keep your hands on your lap so you can hear the story" "Look at Miss Pam because you are going to want to hear this"

___ And if you are the supportive teacher at group, the success often depends on you. The leader is guiding the group, but as the supportive teacher, and remember we work as a team, you are refocusing kids individually. You are quiet, observant and mobile at times. Your eyes are on the group of kids and not the leader, except for a few cues she may give. You are gently rubbing kids backs, whispering in their ear, "Look at Miss Pam, she is showing you something very interesting or you are going to want to hear this!", and/or repositioning them to best be a member of the group.

5. Balance making models in art medium for children to copy with open-ended art

Young children need an avenue of expression. Art is valuable because it is a means of self-expression. A child's language is limited, but his feelings are strong. In dough, sand, mud, at the easel, through finger paints and collage, s/he expresses feelings for which they have little language. If models are presented art is no longer a form of self-expression. They will be less likely to be creative and more likely to be limited to trying to copy. Art then becomes only another area where they are striving to imitate the adult who can do things much better than they can. Notice what happens to a group at the dough table when the adult makes something. The children watch and then ask, "Make one for me." It isn't much use to say, "You make one for yourself." They can't do it as well and feel the adult is uncooperative. The ineffective teacher is the one doing all the work. Most of them will drift away from the table. The skillful teacher will avoid getting entangled in "pattern making" under the guise of being creative art. The effective teacher may sit at the dough table, for example, feeling the dough, patting and rolling it as children do, but she will not "make" anything. A variety of hands-on materials will be available for kids to explore and construct their own creations: paper, markers, crayons, glue, many collage choices, wood pieces, paints, scissors, etc.

When a model to copy is offered the expectation is not creativity or self-expression. It is skill oriented. Helping kids with skills is all part of the classroom as well. Children are learning to cut a line, develop fine motor muscles and follow a direction. Balancing the two concepts of creativity and skills in the classroom can only benefit a child's growth.

6. Make your suggestions effective by reinforcing them when necessary

Sometimes it is necessary to add several techniques together in order to be effective. A verbal suggestion, even though given positively, may not be enough in itself. "It time to come in for lunch," may need to be reinforced by another suggestion such as, "I'll help you park your wagon," if the child is reluctant to leave her play, and then reinforces by actual help in parking. A glance at the right moment, moving nearer a child, a verbal suggestion, actual physical help are all techniques, and one must judge when they are to be used, Give only the minimum help necessary but give as much help as may be necessary. When several children are playing together, some will accept suggestion more readily than others for different reasons. Success with one child will reinforce one's chances of success with others. It is wise to consider which child to approach first when one wishes to influence a group. One of the most common faults of teachers or parents is that of using too many words, or giving two or three directions when one would have been sufficient. Example: "Ok let's pick up the playground, go inside, wash hands and eat lunch!" Remember kids hear what you say in the first 8 seconds and then develop a protective "deafness" to too many words. The best guidance allows kids to hear what to do rather than what not to do. "I'm hungry are you? Let's put the trucks in the shed." It's also better to add different

techniques together until one is successful rather than to depend solely on words.

Example: When getting kids to come in off the playground, use a fun game, the orange slide for kids to slide down near the gate, a hula hoop at the gate and a song. Kids feel like they are joining something fun and not necessarily leaving all the fun behind. Helps to avoid the power struggle!

7. Forestalling is the most effective way of handling problems. Learn to foresee and prevent rather than mop-up after a difficulty.

We are all aware that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” This is true in working with children. The best strategy depends on foreseeing and forestalling rather than mopping-up operations. Learning to prevent problems is important because, in many cases, children do not profit from making mistakes. The child who approaches others by doing something annoying may only learn that people don’t like him/her and this may become on-going. He/she may learn acceptable ways of approaching others if the teacher, observing that s/he is about to go up to a group and knowing what s/he did previously in a similar situation, offers some guidance. She may say to s/he “If you’d like to play with them, you might knock first or ask Michael if s/he needs another block,” or some other suitable suggestion. The teacher may also move into the situation to give more support or interpret to the group what the intentions are of the child. The teacher is not solving the problem, but helping guide the communication. The next time the teacher may want to observe to see if the child is successful before intervening to allow the child the satisfaction of being successful. Under a skillful teacher a group functions more smoothly because of all the things that never happen. Effective guidance depends on knowing how to foresee and prevent trouble by proper timing of help as much as on knowing what to do when trouble occurs.

Setting up a successful classroom for kids to play and learn is essential. Each area must have enough materials and space to allow several kids to work. Also, stage the area so it looks inviting. Imagine yourself, even as an adult, playing there for at least 15 minutes. Is there enough to do? If I want one of the following, (baby, eyedropper, car, paintbrush, book, dress-up clothes, shovel, funnel, bucket, bicycle, ball etc.) and so do three other kids, is there enough? What happens if not enough is available? Conflict! So use PREVENTION. Remember kids are not having thoughts of, “Hey I will ride this bike for five minutes and then give it to Tommy.” Wouldn’t they have more fun if they each had a bike and that’s where the friendship began? If you are so determined they ‘share’, let them all look through your purse. ☺

8. When limits are necessary, they should be clearly defined and consistently maintained.

There are some things which must not be done. There are limits beyond which a child cannot be allowed to go. The important thing is to be sure that the limits set are necessary limits and that they are clearly defined. Much of the difficulty between adults and children which is labeled “discipline” exists because of confusion about what the limits are. In a well-planned environment there will not be many “no’s” but these “no’s” will be clearly defined and the child will understand them.

We are very likely to overestimate the child’s capacity to grasp the point of what we say. Our experience is more extensive than the child’s. Without realizing it we take many things

for granted. The child lacks experience and if s/he is to understand what the limits are, these limits must be clearly and simply defined. It is always best to set the limit in the situation where it will occur. As children are ready to go out the door for a walk the teacher says, "Follow me and stay together." As you head on the hike you may also add, "Use your walking feet." And start playing the game, "And you walk and you walk and you walk and you stop!" Use some prevention by placing the kids that may try and run ahead at the back with the other teacher as additional information may be needed for that child. The teacher must be the one who is responsible for limiting children so that they do not come to harm or do not harm others or destroy property. Children will feel more secure with adults who can take this responsibility. They will feel freer because they can depend on the adult to set limits for everyone's safety. Rule of thumb for stepping in and setting limits:

- a) Someone could get hurt or is getting hurt, physically or emotionally
- b) The energy is getting loud and out of control
- c) Children are running away from the group
- d) A child's creation or property is being damaged or destroyed
- e) Children are screaming and or running in the classroom or down the hall
- f) A child is taking materials from another child by force
- g) A child's behavior is aggressive towards another child.
- h) And so on and so on.....

The message here is give the guidance in a positive statement that last less than 8 seconds. Remember kids hear what you say in the first 8 seconds and then selective hearing sets in so make it count. In addition, if you choose NOT to redirect an inappropriate behavior then the message is "it's ok to do it" and to other kids it says, "This may not be a safe place."

9. **Use the most Strategic positions for supervising in the classroom and outside on the playground.** Sometimes you may observe an inexperienced teacher with her back to most of the children as she watches one child. On the other hand, the experienced teacher, even when she is working with one child, will be in a position to observe at a glance what the other children are doing. She is always alert to the total situation. Katherine Read writes, "Turning One's back on the group may represent, consciously or unconsciously, an attempt to limit one's experience to a simpler situation. It is quite natural that one should feel like withdrawing from the more complex situations at first, or that one should take an interest in one particular child because other children seem more difficult to handle. It is a natural tendency, but one should guard against it. It is important to develop skill in extending one's horizons. Observation of the total situation is essential to effective guidance. It is essential if the children are to be safe. It is important to develop skill in being aware of all that is happening in your classroom instead of only one part of it if you plan to make the most of opportunities for helping children." Safety requires teachers who are alert to see that all areas are supervised inside/outside and not just focusing on one area. The teacher who is reading to children, for example, may encourage a reluctant child to join the group by a smile, gesture or invitation. A teacher may also notice a child who is ready for a change of activity before s/he becomes disruptive to the others children's play.

Sitting at a child's level rather than standing over them is another technique for improving the effectiveness of one's supervision. One is often in a better position to help a child when at the child's level. It is also important to recognize that being at the child's level offers children the opportunity to stay focused on their play rather than looking up to hear or talk to the teacher or adult. Think how it would be to be working on a project with constant talking over your head? ☺ Its positive reinforcement that all adults in the classroom are involved with children and not available for chatting.

Where one stands or sits is important in preventing difficulties. Being able to see the entire room or playground where you position yourself is crucial. When a teacher becomes aware of a problem or growing concern, she should move quietly and easily near the tension. Moving too quickly alerts other children that there is something to be worried about, plus giving a suggestion from across the room isn't as likely to be accepted.

If a teacher is swinging kids on our tire swing and is positioned near the fence. Her only line of supervision is the tire swing and fun ride. If you are sitting at the art table in a room facing the sink, the whole room is behind you. Same rule applies for lunch table/snack table positioning. Are you sitting where you can see the most children? Take time to glance around often in the room or playground to observe all situations and count kids through-out the day. That's what we call Strategic Supervision!

10. The health and safety of the children are a primary concern.

The skillful teacher is constantly alert to the things which affect health and safety such as lunches are not shared, kids wash their hands after using the bathroom and before eating, tissues are used and kids cough into their elbows. Coats, hats, gloves, boots, snowsuits are worn based on weather. Kids are brought inside if it's raining, lightening, thundering, too hot or cold or too windy. Equipment is in good condition and age-appropriate for kids. Small curriculum materials are not used by kids under three. The playground is checked regularly for possible broken equipment. Notify Vanda if a piece of equipment needs attention. Intervention is used to prevent biting, hitting, pushing and verbally mean behavior. We have zero tolerance for bullying. We as teachers know that preschool-age children, 2 ½-5 yrs., are continually learning the tools to socialize, communicate and problem-solve, but we want to guide them in a safe environment. We are skillful teachers and our watchfulness to the health and safety of all the children in our care is our number one Priority!

**Thanks for reading and for caring,
Vanda**