Understanding Children's Behaviour

Self-Guided Learning Package

About Self-Guided Learning Packages

Self-Guided Learning Packages can be completed in your own time and convenience and offer an alternative to attending training sessions. This package aims to develop skills and knowledge that will be valuable to you in providing quality education and care programs. Packages are often used for professional development by staff teams, networks and other groups of children's services professionals. You can work through the package with colleagues by reading the package together, discussing the information and collaborating to complete the one assessment task.

Gowrie Victoria Leadership and Learning Consultants are available to support you while working through the package. Feel free to phone or email if you require any assistance completing the tasks within the package. Phone 1800 103 670 (freecall) or (03) 9347 6388 or email psc@gowrievictoria.org.au

Understanding Children's Behaviour

You have chosen to complete the 'Understanding Children's Behaviour' package. The aim of this package is for the learner to understand the environmental, contextual and individual influences on children's social development and behaviour. By completing this package the learner will be able to:

- Identify the causes of challenging behaviours
- Identify appropriate strategies to positively guide behaviour
- Have increased knowledge relating to the development of social skills
- Appreciate the importance of relationships and positive interactions

Introduction

Essential elements in understanding and responding positively to challenging behaviours in children of various ages include:

- Support for children's rights;
- Understanding of child development and specifically the development of social skills
- An appreciation of the influence of socio-cultural contexts;
- An understanding of the impact of relationships and environments on children's behaviour; and
- An awareness of individual children.

Educators working in children's services need to use a positive guidance approach in their daily interactions with children, and appropriate positive strategies in responding to challenging behaviours.

The EYLF, FSAC and the VEYLDF describe how the primary influence on children's learning and development comes from their own families, communities and cultural background. It follows that if educators work in partnership with families, they will be able to provide more relevant and meaningful experiences for children's development.

Understanding children's behaviour is closely linked to the EYLF, the FSAC and the VEYLDF, amongst other early childhood teaching and learning frameworks including anti-bias curriculum, inclusion, child protection, building relationships and positive interactions.

Positive Guidance Approach

A positive approach to understanding and responding to challenging behaviours in children requires a respect for children and their rights.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child states 'that the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality, and solidarity'

As such, the Convention on the Rights of the Child challenges educators to consider how to respond to and support children with behaviours that challenge them.

Families and educators all need to be involved in adopting a positive approach to helping children understand and acquire social skills, as well as teaching children about the consequences of particular behaviours. Moreover, adults play a pivotal role in teaching children about socially acceptable and responsible behaviours.

It is important that educators are aware that learning about pro-social behaviour and acquiring social skills is not easy. A testament to this is reflected in the fact that many adults are yet to master such skills themselves. In thinking about this, educators begin to view children's behaviour as trial and error or 'mistaken behaviour' rather than intentional behaviour or 'misbehaviour'.

Behaviours that educators deem to be challenging may in fact be experimental, and as such can be understood as the child exploring the world around them and learning what it means to be an individual in relationships with other individuals. It is important to remember that there is always a trigger or catalyst for behaviours adults deem to be 'inappropriate'. In determining an appropriate response to these behaviours it is helpful for educators to try to understand the triggers and what the child, through the behaviour, may be attempting to communicate to us.

The ways in which educators respond to mistaken behaviour will affect what the child learns from this experience. A guidance approach to challenging behaviour nurtures positive relationships and can enhance the child's learning and development. This approach teaches children the skills to get along with others as well as how to express strong feelings in socially acceptable ways. Alternatively, negative or punitive responses to challenging behaviours can damage relationships and ultimately lead to withdrawal, aggression, anxiety and a loss of interest in learning.

In guiding children's behaviour, the focus is on assisting children to attain self control under conditions which guide their development and foster their self esteem.

In children's services, importance should be placed on:

- Building positive relationships between educator and child;
- Reducing the likelihood for inappropriate and mistaken behaviour;
- Encouraging children to come up with their own solutions to conflict; and
- Fostering teamwork and collaborative partnerships with families and other significant adults.

Spending time getting to know children and showing genuine interest in their lives helps to build positive, meaningful and nurturing relationships. The ways which educators respond to children with behaviours that challenge us should be based on and utilise this relationship, in order to ensure the child feels safe, respected and supported.

Stimulating, interesting and strength based environments means that children are more likely to be engaged, stimulated and actively involved, thus reducing the likelihood of inappropriate and/or challenging behaviour occurring.

Respectful and healthy relationships with families ensure an exchange of meaningful information which results in a better understanding of individual children. Building a sound relationship with families also enables educators to positively work with families when issues relating to a child's behaviour arise.

Self Help Question 1

Complete the following sentences:

A healthy relationship between educators and families is one that is …

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Having a healthy relationship with families is important because …

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

It is also vital that educators understand various biological and environmental factors that impact on behaviours, including:

- Temperament and personality;
- Health and well-being;
- Communication and physical development;
- Cultural and family context;
- Parenting styles; and
- The quality of care environment, both physical and social, in which the child is raised.

In responding to challenging behaviours, it is important that educators consider and understand:

- The child's social and emotional development;
- Environmental factors that may trigger 'inappropriate' behaviours; and
- The child's individual characteristics, such as their temperament.

Self Help Question 2

Describe an instance in which an adult may demonstrate socially inappropriate or inconsiderate behaviours?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Identify what may have contributed to these behaviours.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Describe an instance of a child displaying behaviours that you considered 'inappropriate' and identify what may have contributed to these behaviours.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Are there any differences in the way in which we interpret and respond to the behaviour of adults and children? Why? Why not?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Social and Emotional Development

Whilst children are all individuals and develop at their own rate, there are stages of skill development that typically occur during certain ages. Being aware of these stages can assist adults to have appropriate and reasonable expectations of children.

In order to understand children's behaviour it is helpful to have knowledge of children's social and emotional development. In observing children's behaviour and development it is also important to remember that children learn and develop at different rates and that this is not always sequentially.

It should also be noted that children's development will be affected by a range of factors including the context in which they live, for example socio-economic background, culture and access to early childhood programs. An Educators ability to scaffold children's learning with sensitivity to these factors will directly contribute to the child's development.

'Cultural competence is much more than awareness of cultural differences. It is the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. Cultural competence encompasses:

- *Being aware of one's own world view*
- *Developing positive attitudes towards cultural differences*
- *Gaining knowledge of different cultural practices and world views*
- *Developing skills for communication and interaction across cultures'*

(Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, 2009, p18).

Included below are behaviours that may be evident in children within particular age groups:

Birth - 3 months:

- watches faces;
- makes eye contact;
- enjoys physical contact and cuddles;
- smiles spontaneously ;
- communicates distress by crying, for example when hungry.

3 months - 6 months:

- recognises familiar people by voice and smile;
- shows a preference for familiar people ;
- makes sounds to attract attention;
- is comforted when picked up;
- enjoys being with others who are familiar to them;
- cries when other child cries.

6 months - 9 months:

- responds to other peoples' smile and laugh;
- loves to be held close;
- becomes anxious when separated from carer;
- will protest when unhappy;

- may be frightened by loud and unfamiliar noises;
- enjoys watching other babies and young children;
- enjoys simple games with familiar adults.

9 months - 12 months:

- shows affection to adults and favourite objects;
- is likely to display separation anxiety;
- displays a range of emotions;
- may have more fears than younger children;
- begin to display likes and dislikes;
- responds to own name;
- shows toys to others but is hesitant to share;
- may show frustration and stubbornness;
- displays signs of independence.

12 months - 18 months:

- smiles at mastery of goals;
- distinguishes self from others;
- reacts to emotions displayed by others;
- reacts to separation from parent;
- laughs at incongruous events, such as wearing a bowl as a hat.

18 months - 2 years:

- tends to be impulsive;
- has not mastered rule recognition;
- resists adult control – the 'no' stage beginning;
- likes to be near adults who are familiar to them;
- attempts to do things for themselves;
- alternates between clinging to adult and resisting them;
- needs a sense of security - rules and rituals;
- tends to be messy, for example with food;
- may display 'tantrum' behaviours;
- laughs at incongruous labeling, such as calling a nose an ear.

2 years - 3 years:

- begins to monitor own behaviour, for example 'hot', 'no',
- defends own possessions – 'mine';
- begins voluntary separation from parent, for example running on;
- explores the environment;
- more confident in familiar situations but may be shy in unfamiliar situations;
- seeks more independence and control;
- may become easily frustrated;
- can be resentful of attention shown to other children by families;
- enjoys being the centre of attention in family group;
- will initiate play and entertain self briefly;
- says 'please' and 'thank you' when reminded;

- may develop sudden fears;
- engages in solitary and parallel play;
- may push other children - just like objects.

3 years - 4 years:

- beginning to be aware of and obey rules;
- resists help and takes pride in own achievements;
- relates best to one adult at a time;
- separates easily from parent in familiar surrounding;
- is beginning to say 'please' and 'thank you' spontaneously;
- may encounter difficulty with change and transition times;
- begins to share possessions with others;
- takes turns with direction;
- engages in interactive play, associative and imaginative play.

4 years - 5 years:

- is usually compliant and will follow defined rules;
- understands boundaries, for example to stay in the yard;
- displays confidence and assertiveness;
- will ask for assistance if deemed appropriate;
- is persistent and may attempt new activity many times;
- engages in cooperative play;
- is able to share and take turns;
- shows concern and sympathy for others in group;
- likes silly jokes, nonsense and rhyming words.

5 years - 6 years:

- is becoming more independent and in control of own behaviour;
- understands rules in a game, including the rules of fair play;
- likes competitive games;
- has a strong sense of family and home;
- enjoys play with peers rather than alone;
- often prefers to play with children of same sex;
- often asks permission before doing something;
- asks serious questions and wants be taken seriously;
- can be reasoned with;
- laughs at multiple meanings of words.

6 years - 9 years

- participates in well established rule-based games with peers;
- likes to win at games; may not be able to lose cheerfully;
- is becoming more influenced by peers;
- continues to prefer to play with same friends of the same sex;
- starts to form more sustained friendships;
- begins to be more responsible;
- resolves conflict without seeking adult intervention;

- develops an understanding of strengths and interests of other individual children

9 years - 12 years

- more aware of own identity;
- increased awareness of self within the group;
- influenced by school and friends about what is important;
- wants to fit in with peers;
- becoming self conscious;
- can become critical of self and others;
- able to understand other person's point of view;
- able to resolve social problems and conflict, for example fights with siblings and friends;
- begins to interact more with the opposite sex;
- wants to assert independence;
- wants to be treated like an adult.

Self Help Question 3

Think of an example of 'challenging' behaviour that you have encountered in your work with children. Describe it below:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Reflect on some of the developmental expectations outlined above. How does an understanding of typical development assist you in understanding and responding to the behaviour described above?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Individual Characteristics

All children have their own individual characteristics and it is important to understand each child's temperament, activity level, and interests, as well as any special rights or environmental conditions that may impact on their behaviour.

The development of strong relationships with families and children can help educators understand children better and makes working with them more meaningful and positive. It is important to gather all relevant information that may assist you in understanding and responding to children with challenging behaviours. For example:

- Have there been any major changes in the child's life recently?
- Have there been any major changes in the child's routine recently?
- Is the family currently experiencing undue or unfamiliar stress?
- Has the child exhibited any new fears at home?

In developing strong relationships with families, educators have a greater chance of remaining up to date with any changes that may impact on the child's behaviour.

'Educators need to recognise that the histories, languages, traditions, child rearing practices and lifestyle choices of families, all need to be accounted for when guiding children's behaviour. They need to provide experiences for children that reflect cultural diversity and to ensure that they have their cultures acknowledged and valued'– EYLF Principle 4: Respect for diversity
(Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, 2009, p14).

Some aspects of a child's personality and circumstances that are relevant to know as educators are listed below. This information can be collected through ongoing conversations with families:

- How active or passive the child is at different times of the day;
- The child's initial response to situations or people - shy and cautious; sociable and eager; fearless and aggressive;
- How long it takes the child to adjust to new situations or people;
- How the child shows interest or disinterest;
- What type of stimulation the child responds to best, for example visual, vocal/auditory, tactile, olfactory/smell;
- How intense this stimulation needs to be;
- What level of energy or affect is displayed in responses;
- How the child responds to frustration;
- How persistent the child is with activities;
- Whether the child prefers easy or more challenging tasks;
- What activities, objects, or people interest the child;
- How the child displays a sense of humour;
- What specific child or family needs to be considered, for example culturally or developmentally.

Self Help Question 4

How do you ensure that you remain up-to-date with what is happening for the children in your centre?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Think of an example of how this knowledge has enhanced your relationship with a child in your centre?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Environments

The environment plays a critical role in children's behaviour. Environments affect how people feel and therefore how they act. Consider the places you might encounter as an adult.

Self Help Question 5
How do you behave in a fast food restaurant?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

How do you behave in a fine dining restaurant?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

How do you behave in a shopping centre?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

How do you behave in a boutique?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Why do you behave the way you do in certain environments?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Environments should fulfil certain basic functions for children. Bailey & Wolery (1989, p56) state 'these include fostering personal identity through stable interactions within a pleasant environment, fostering the development of competence by engaging in a facilitative environment, providing opportunities for growth, fostering a sense of security and trust, and providing a balance of opportunities for social interactions and privacy.'

Physical and social environments

The environment, viewed in both physical and social terms - including personal relationships and interactions, as well as activities and experiences - should reflect the child's development; be warm, caring and safe; and stimulate and encourage skill development. To support children's learning and development the environment should include the following characteristics:

- Be attractive, appealing and interesting;
- Include a balance of busy, noisy areas with quiet, calm areas;
- Take into consideration safety, space, privacy, noise, activity;
- Include learning centres that provoke, excite and inspire;
- Provide sufficient activities and/or materials for all children;
- Offer activities that cover a range of learning and developmental areas;
- Include experiences based on children's strengths, needs and interests;
- Provide opportunities for small group work and individual activities;
- Demonstrate respect, love and attention for all children;
- Demonstrate respect for other people and the environment.

Time and energy spent creating richly engaging and socially responsive environments can reduce the need to spend time and energy dealing with difficult and challenging behaviours.

A carefully planned and well organised physical environment with clearly defined learning centres supports the engagement of children and encourages constructive and cooperative play and learning while reducing the likelihood of inappropriate behaviours occurring.

A positive social environment further encourages behaviour that supports learning and social and emotional development through nurturing relationships, responsive interactions from educators, and authentic and meaningful relationships among educators, children and families.

It is vital that educators aspire to implement positive guidance strategies to foster a positive social environment.

Self Help Question 6

What are some possible responses and/or behaviours you may encounter when the environment is:

1. Purely educator directed?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Provides little or no choice for children?

---

3. Includes provisions of little interest to children and/or that provide minimal challenges?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. What can you do to reduce the likelihood of disruptive or challenging behaviour occurring? ___

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

A Culture of Respect, Inquiry, and Construction of Knowledge

'When teachers work with curious and questioning minds and see themselves not as disciplinarians or mere transmitters of information but as researchers learning alongside children, then new knowledge is always under construction'.
(Curtis & Carter, 2008, p9).

An environment that engages children, delights and provokes their curiosity and involves respectful relationships will help reduce inconsiderate and inappropriate behaviours while encouraging learning and social skill development. Working with children in this way requires the ability to carefully design both the physical and social environment within a grounded philosophy, set of values and pedagogical framework. It involves ongoing reflection of your values, close attention to the environment and relationships.

Building and nurturing positive meaningful relationships is crucial to any program for children, and these relationships amongst and between children, families and educators will support a curriculum that encourages respectful communication, interactions and behaviours.

Building relationships starts from the very first contact educators have with a child and their family. The time, thought and effort invested in orientating families and children to your centre as well as placing importance and focus and getting to know them sends a positive message that you are interested in them, and that they are welcome and valued. This forms the foundation of a respectful and nurturing relationship that continues to grow throughout their time in your centre.

Creating connections and a sense of belonging is a key element to providing quality programs for children and families. A focus on relationships, shared learning and shared responsibility rather than rules, encourages children to learn about each other as well as the world around them.

'In early childhood settings children develop a sense of belonging when they feel accepted, develop attachments and trust those that care for them. As children are developing their sense of identity, they explore different aspects of it (physical, social, emotional, spiritual and cognitive, through their play and relationships. When children feel safe, secure, and supported they grow in confidence to explore and learn'–
EYLF Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity
(Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, 2009, p22).

The physical environment further supports learning and the development of social skills. The space we create for children should support a sense of familiarity and consistency for young children. It is imperative that environments be organised in such a way as to empower and enable children to be in control of their own learning.

Some opportunities for flexibility is also helpful, especially in the provisioning of materials that are open ended and are able to be used in various ways. Natural environments with plants, flowers, leaves, bark, shells, rocks and other objects from nature engage children's senses and help to provoke a sense of wonder, curiosity and intellectual engagement.

'When babies and young children are relaxed and involved they express wonder and interest in their environments. When they are encouraged and supported to be curious and enthusiastic participants in learning, they begin to develop positive dispositions for lifelong learning.' – Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners' (VEYDF, 2009, p.25).

Creating an environment for children to live and learn requires the ability to see the environment from a child's point of view. In order to evaluate our spaces in terms of child friendliness, Curtis and Carter (2003, p12) suggest reflecting on the following statements from a child's perspective:

- I can see who I am and what I like to do at school and at home;
- There are comfortable places where my family can sit and talk with me or my teacher;
- The natural world can be found here (animals, living things and objects from nature);
- There is something sparkly, shadowy or wondrous and magical here;
- My teacher leaves a special object out every day so I can keep trying to figure out more about it;
- There are materials that I can use to make representations from what I understand or imagine;
- I can feel powerful and be physically active here;
- I can learn to see things from different perspectives here;
- I see my name written or I write my name regularly here;
- I get to know my teachers here.

Some additional reflective questions regarding the environment include:

- Do I feel safe?
- Do I know where to find things and adults I need?
- Is it clean and well organised?
- Can I make choices?
- Can I see what is expected of me?
- Will I have lots of uninterrupted time to complete things I like?
- If I am really interested in something can I do it?
- Will things be in the same place for me to use all day?
- Are there quiet comfortable places for me to spend time in?
- Is there plenty of light, fresh air and space?
- Are there lots of wonderful things to do?
- Do I feel delighted and inspired? (Gibbs, 2007, p31).

'Once you develop a classroom culture to foster respectful relationships and an eagerness to explore the provocative materials available, a repertoire of possible teacher actions will heighten your ability to co-create a curriculum that goes beyond the superficial into the exciting process of constructing knowledge'.
(Curtis & Carter, 2008, p15).

Whilst the above statement makes reference to classroom culture, its relevance to children's services is clear. Educators should work proactively to foster a program which is based on respect, nurtures children and ignites them with a passion to work and play co-operatively, healthy relationships will be fostered.

Self Help Question 7

1. Think of your environment from a child's point of view and answer the following questions:

    Do I feel safe? ☐ Yes ☐ No

    Do I know where to find things and adults I need? ☐ Yes ☐ No

    Is it clean and well organised? ☐ Yes ☐ No

    Can I make choices? ☐ Yes ☐ No

    Can I see what is expected of me? ☐ Yes ☐ No

    Will I have lots of uninterrupted time to complete things I like? ☐ Yes ☐ No

    If I am really interested in something can I do it? ☐ Yes ☐ No

    Will things be in the same place for me to use all day? ☐ Yes ☐ No

    Are there quiet comfortable places for me to spend time in? ☐ Yes ☐ No

    Is there plenty of light, fresh air and space? ☐ Yes ☐ No

    Are there lots of wonderful things to do? ☐ Yes ☐ No

    Do I feel delighted and inspired? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. In thinking about the above, what is one thing you might try or do differently in the next week?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

Strategies for Guiding Behaviour

Positive strategies

There are a number of strategies that can assist in guiding children's behaviour in a positive way. In implementing such strategies, it is important for all educators to work together to ensure a team approach is adopted, where strengths and interests are harnessed, shared responsibility is valued and mutual support and respect demonstrated.

Some strategies will be proactive in assisting children to manage their own behaviour; others will be in direct response to inappropriate behaviour for the purpose of teaching the child to behave in a socially acceptable way.

- Consult with all educators, families and children to determine your service's expectations and responsibilities for considerate behaviour. Children are more likely to act responsibly when they have been involved in formulating guidelines for acting considerately.

- Develop a behaviour guidance policy and review procedures regularly with input from educators and families.

- Ensure all educators, family's s and children are aware of their social responsibilities as a member of the centre community. Make time to talk with children about what these responsibilities are and mean.

- Set clear and reasonable limits and communicate these frequently, including in small group discussions. Mixed or unclear messages are likely to lead to confusion.

- Use team meetings to discuss and reflect on your approach to guiding children's behaviour.

- Where possible encourage consistency between educators and families. Provide information and opportunities to discuss positive approaches to guiding behaviour, for example at parent meetings.

- Use positive comments frequently and specifically when children are behaving in considerate and appropriate ways throughout the day.

- Utilise children's strengths and interests to promote considerate behaviour. Promote success through the provision of meaningful, achievable and motivating experiences.

- Be fair rather than consistent. Children respect wisdom and expertise, not power. Being fair means you are able to change your mind and reconsider a course of action or response based on the current situation and the needs of the children involved.

- Be specific and positive with your requests. For example, say: "Walk inside please" rather than "don't run inside'' Tell children what you want them to do rather than what not to do.

- Follow through - if you ask the child to do something, firmly and calmly persist, offering support and encouragement as required. Always ensure though, that your request is fair and reasonable, based on the current situation and context.

- Acknowledge the child's feelings and differentiate between feelings and behaviour.

- Ensure children have adequate time to prepare for a change of routine. Explain what is happening and help them to prepare for the change. For example, say "We are going to have lunch soon. That means you will need to stop playing. Would like to come back to it after lunch?"

- Don't make promises, bribes or threats that you cannot follow through. This can cause a child to lose trust in you.

- Model appropriate pro-social behaviour. Children observe and imitate. Demonstrate the kind of behaviour you wish the child to develop. Any form of punishment, emotional or physical, teaches inappropriate behaviour damages your relationship with the child and can affect the child's self esteem.

- Learning how to join people in social situations is complex and can be challenging for adults! Assist children to join their peers at play if needed, or join in yourself, to diffuse the situation.

- Only give choices if the child really has one, for example. When there is no choice use a statement rather than a question, for example, 'It's time for us to wash our hands for lunch' rather than, 'Would you like to wash your hands for lunch?'

- Use logical or natural consequences, according to the child's developmental level. For example, if a child throws toys on the floor they are responsible for packing them away. In some circumstances though they may require the assistance and support of an adult to complete this task. Delayed or unrelated consequences have little effect or impact as the child may not relate the consequence to the behaviour and/or may have forgotten about it.

- Use acknowledgement and give specific feedback rather than offering praise when commenting on children's achievements and actions. For example, 'Thanks for packing away, now we have time to read that story you were asking about!' rather than saying 'Good boy'.

- Avoid labelling a child or referring to past incidents. This is humiliating and influences behaviour – a label of 'naughty', 'clumsy', etc. can become self-fulfilling.

- Be positive, loving and kind. It is the behaviour, not the child, that is unacceptable and the child should know this.

- Teach children skills for problem-solving and conflict resolution. Encourage children to co-operate with each other and work together on collaborative solutions. When children are not encouraged to develop and use their own judgement they can become over reliant on adult direction.

Teaching Respect and Consideration

'With support, children establish their own important friendships with other children. They explore their responsibilities and rights and those of others in familiar settings such as the family, groups, the classroom and the playground. They begin to think in terms of other people's feelings and needs, and respond to diversity with respect. Stories and group discussions assist children in talking through conflicts, supporting development of social skills and tolerance for others' – VEYLDF Outcome 2: Children are connected and contribute to their world (Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, p20).

A guidance approach involves teaching children to act considerately toward others, while building a healthy self esteem. As educators of young children, teaching respect is central to our work. This includes assisting children to maintain self-respect and to enhance their skill in extending respect to others.

True respect is shown in genuine acts of kindness, cooperation, compassion, gentleness, patience and consideration. Through our own behaviour we can provide children with examples of these qualities and demonstrate respect for other people.
Throughout the day we can also take advantage of situations, routines, visitors, excursions, and everyday moments, to explain, question and guide children's thinking.

Furthermore, these approaches provide children with the skills to respond thoughtfully and become aware of the impact that their actions and comments can have on others. In moments of conflict we can help children learn to problem solve and negotiate through the facilitation of collaborative problem solving skills.

In facilitating conflict amongst children, Porter (2003, p83) suggests that collaborative problem solving is essential.

This involves six steps:

1. The people concerned agree to talk it over
2. Each person listens to what the other person needs and then says what they need assertively. This might help in telling you where differences lie
3. Together you come up with ideas of what you could do, so that both of you would get your needs met
4. You decide which of the options you will do. Don't choose a compromise which doesn't meet anyone's needs
5. Decide when and how to carry out your chosen solution
6. Once it is in place, check whether the solution is working

Porter cautions us however to remember that collaborative problem solving will not work when a child is in danger, or when there is time pressure to get something done. As such collaboration works best when you can deal with each source of irritation as they arise rather than leaving these to build up.

To ensure an effective outcome consider implementing the following strategies:

1. Find a quiet space to discuss the issues
2. Have key players present
3. Invite the children to articulate the issue at hand
4. Articulate the issue at hand from your perspective
5. Ensure everyone is heard
6. Don't use language of blame
7. Focus on a solution not a cause
8. Negotiate a favourable solution
9. Seek an agreement to move on

This approach will also encourage authentic respect, rather than superficial manners and unthinking compliance. Children can easily learn to say the right words and to use them on command, with no real feeling or genuine concern for others.

A guidance approach teaches children to consider the effects of their actions on others, not to focus on what will happen to them if they act a certain way.

For this reason, the use of rewards and punishment should be avoided. Both strategies are in fact controlling and/or manipulative strategies. They ignore the fact that children will make their own decisions to act in a certain way based on their own needs. In contrast, reinforcement and encouragement are valuable tools in teaching respect and consideration.

The EYLF and the VEYLDF emphasise the importance of 'intentional teaching', where educators are purposeful and thoughtful about the way they interact with children and promote the use of strategies such as modelling, open questioning, shared thinking and problem solving, to support their learning (Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, 2009, p18; Victorian Early Years Learning and Development, 2009, p13).

A guidance approach uses acknowledgement rather than praise to support children and promote a healthy self-esteem and a positive sense of self. When we acknowledge children's considerate

behaviour we comment on what we appreciate, thanking them, and/or helping them to recognise and evaluate their own actions and achievements. For example, when a child says "Thank you" rather than saying "Good girl/boy for using your manners" try 'It's a pleasure' or 'You're welcome!' just as you would to a friend or colleague.

Self Help Question 9

In what ways can you help children demonstrate genuine respect for people and the environment? Give some examples.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Responding to Challenging Behaviour

Challenging behaviours are:

- those that become frequent and intense;
- risk the well being of the child and others;
- impede a child's ability to participate in daily experience.

Examples of challenging behaviours include:

- tantrums;
- screaming;
- hitting;
- kicking;
- biting;
- pushing;
- bullying;
- damaging equipment;
- social withdrawal through anxiety,
- stress or depression.

These behaviours can interfere with the child's learning and development and restrict opportunities for others to learn. Additionally, they can compromise the safety of the child and those around them.

Understanding behaviour

It is important to understand that there is a reason for all behaviour and often it is a simple answer. This may include tiredness or sickness, a new baby in the family, a parent away from home or friendship problems.

Sometimes the structural elements of children's services can be contributing factors in a child's behaviour. These may include a lack of stimulating experiences within the program, a restrictive physical environment, inflexible routines, unrealistic expectations and a lack of educators to respond appropriately to children's needs and interests.

Consideration should also be given to the possible relationship between a child's disability or development and the effect this may have on their behaviour. Educators must exercise care when determining the possible causes of challenging behaviours so to ensure that their response is both appropriate and effective.

This means not being too quick to assume challenging behaviour is a consequence of a child's disability. Not all disabilities will impact on children's behaviour. Neither are the behaviours of children with a disability necessarily a consequence of their disability alone. We are required therefore to exercise caution and sensitivity in these circumstances and work with families to explore possible interpretations and consider appropriate responses

---

Self Help Question 10

What strategies have you found helpful in understanding and responding to behaviours you find 'challenging'?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Responding to 'challenging' behaviour

In order to facilitate considerate behaviour it can be helpful to consider the following:

- Understand that the child may be out of control of their feelings and may need some help to regain control of their behaviour. Soothe and support them or offer them some 'time away' from the situation in order to regain emotional control.

- 'Time away' allows the child to withdraw to a comfortable and peaceful place or activity where they can calm down. Support the child to re-enter play when they are able to do so appropriately.

- Help the child talk about feelings and how and why they might feel and act the way they do. Listen and help them to distinguish between feelings and the behaviour. We cannot tolerate inconsiderate behaviour but we can acknowledge the child's feelings and emotions. For example 'It's ok to feel angry, but it's not okay to hit someone'.

- Remember to consider individual children's development and preferences - redirect younger children without a fuss and discuss choices and effects of behaviour with older children.

- Be aware of any developmental difficulties that could impact on behaviour, particularly speech and language. A child with communication challenges may become frustrated when they are unable to communicate their needs or wants effectively. While this does not excuse the behaviour, it can help you to understand and respond more effectively.

- Observe and listen to the child carefully. When necessary and when time allows, share your observations and interpretations with others - colleagues and the child's parents - in order to be ensure you are responding appropriately.

- Use positive reinforcement to comment on and acknowledge considerate behaviour. This should be something that occurs in private rather than as a public event that manipulates other children to replicate the behaviours we approve of.

- Unacceptable behaviour is rarely about seeking attention. Children can however learn to gain attention through behaviours; particularly if that is the only time they get any attention.

- If challenging behaviour persists you will need to look for the underlying motivation. Their behaviour for example may be to escape or avoid unpleasant situations, to gain attention - positive or negative, or due to the frustration of not being able to express needs and wants or have their needs fully met.

- Significant adults in the child's life should be treated with respect and included as partners in determining possible causes of 'challenging behaviours and considering appropriate responses. Focus on positives, ask for their assistance, and acknowledge them as the experts in regard to their own children.

- In some situations it may be necessary to seek additional assistance and support from external agencies and support services. This action should only be taken in collaboration with the child's parents, in order to ensure you are adequately supported and resourced to assist the child and family.

- Take time to reflect and talk as a team about your roles and responsibilities in promoting considerate behaviour and responding to behaviour that is challenging.

  Consider some of the following critical questions:

  o Are you labelling the child and/or expecting 'challenging' behaviour?

  o Are you losing your temper, raising your voice, blaming the child?

  o Are you being assertive enough or are you being intimidated by the child?

  o Is there conflict or competition among educators?

o   Is there too much inconsistency or too much rigidity among educators?

o   What stresses, problems, or difficulties is the child experiencing and what is your role in supporting them?

Self Help Question 11

Think of a child you know who has displayed consistently challenging behaviour. Which of the approaches above might be useful in responding to that behaviour?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Conclusion

Understanding children's behaviour enables us to both provide an environment that prevents behavioural concerns and supports children to develop pro-social and considerate behaviours. Building and maintaining strong relationships is a key element that supports us in these endeavours. As such, a positive guidance approach allows the child to enhance and develop a healthy self-esteem, self-control and social awareness and responsibility.

A commitment to ensure that all children feel safe, even when we are presented with challenging behaviours, is fundamental. Parent entrust educators to care and educate their children in a safe and nurturing environments. It is important to remember that children thrive in environments that value them as individuals.

The EYLF, FSAC and the VEYLDF describe how the primary influence on children's learning and development comes from their own families, communities and cultural background. It follows that if educators work in partnership with families, they will be able to provide more relevant and meaningful experiences for children's development.

Our professionalism demands from us to work pro-actively with challenging behaviours and remain on a path of continuing to improve our approaches so to ensure the best outcomes for children.

References and Resources

Bailey, D.B. & Wolery, M. (1989). *Assessing Infants and Preschoolers with Handicaps*. New York: Merrill.

Curtis, D. & Carter, M. (2003). *Designs for Living and Learning. Transforming early childhood environments.* St Paul MN, USA: Redleaf Press.

Curtis, D. & Carter, M. (2004). *Learning Together With Young Children. A curriculum framework for reflective teachers.* St Paul MN, USA: Redleaf Press.

Department of Community Services. (2002). *NSW Curriculum Framework for Children's Services: The practice of relationships, essential provisions for children's services.* NSW: Office of Child Care.

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. (2009). *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: For all children from birth to eight years*. Melbourne, Vic: Author.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. (2009). *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*. Barton, ACT: Author.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. (2010). *Educators Belonging, Being & Becoming: Educators' guide to the early years learning framework for Australia*. Barton, ACT: Author.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2010). *My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia - Draft for Consultation*. Barwon, ACT: Author.

Dodd, S. (1994). *Managing Problem Behaviours*. Sydney, NSW: MacLennan & Petty.

Encouraging children's positive behaviour & dealing with children's negative behaviour. (1986). Paper presented at the Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Adelaide, S.A.

Fink, D.B. (2004). School-Age NOTES: *Discipline in School-age Care; Control the climate not the children.* Retrieved from http://www.schoolagenotes.com.

Gandhi, M. (2011). World of Quotes: 187 Famous Quotes by Mahatma Gandhi Retrieved 18/7/11, from http://www.worldofquotes.com/author/Mahatma+Gandhi/1/index.html.

Gartrell, D. (1994). *A Guidance Approach to Discipline*. New York, USA: Delmar.

Gartrell, D. (2004). *The Power of Guidance: Teaching social–emotional skills in early childhood classrooms.* NAEYC Washington, USA: Delmar.

Gibbs, L. (2007). *Guiding Children's Behaviour: Promoting relationships & responding positively to challenging behaviour. .* Sydney, NSW: KU Children's Services.

Gordon, A. & Williams Browne, K. (1996). *Guiding Young Children in a Diverse Society*. Boston, USA: Allyn & Bacon.

Guiding Children's Behaviour in Family Day Care. (2010). Northcote, Vic: Resource and Development Unit of Community Child Care Association of Victoria Inc.

Guiding Children's Behaviour in Long Day Care. (2010). Northcote, Vic: Resource and Development Unit of Community Child Care Association of Victoria Inc.

Guiding Children's Behaviour in Outside School Hours Care. (2010). Northcote, Vic: Resource and Development Unit of Community Child Care Association of Victoria Inc.

Linder, T.W. (1993). *Transdisciplinary Play Based Assessment - A functional approach to working with young children.* Baltimore, USA: Brookes.

Linke, P. (1998). *Let's Stop Bullying.* Canberra, ACT: AECA.

McClellan, D.E. & Katz, L.G. (1992). *Young Children's Social Development: A checklist*. Retrieved 18/7/11 from ERIC Digests http://www.ericdigests.org.

Mitchell, G. & Dewsnap, L. adapted by Cuthbertson, M. (1996). *Common Sense Discipline: Building self-esteem in young children.* Sydney, NSW: Pademelon Press.

Paasche, C., Gorrill, L. & Strom, B. (1990). *Children with Special needs in Early Childhood Settings*. California, USA: Addison-Wesley.

Porter, L. (2001). *Children Are People Too* (3rd Ed.). Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Porter, L. (2003).*Young Children's Behaviour: Practical Approaches for Caregivers and Teachers* (2nd Ed.). Sydney: MacLennan & Petty.

Porter, L. (2011). Guiding Children's Behaviour, Without Using Rewards or Punishments. Retrieved from http://www.louiseporter.com.au/pdfs/developing_responsible_behaviour.pdf

Stephen, H. (1993) *AECA Resource Book: Conflict resolution with young children*. Canberra: AECA.

Stephens, K. (2000). *Child Care Information Exchange Respect is a Verb: Help children put it into practice.* AECA Resource Book. Canberra, ACT: AECA.

Tarrant, S. & Konza, D. (1994). *Promoting self esteem in integrated early childhood settings*. AECA Resource Book. Canberra, ACT: AECA.

United National General Assembly. (1990). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. New York, USA: United Nations Retrieved from http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm.

Assessment Task

1. Describe how you would initiate, develop and maintain meaningful relationships with the children and families in your centre.

2. List the things you consider important to know and understand about a child in order to work with them effectively, particularly when they display challenging behavior.

3. Discuss how the educators and the environment can affect children's behavior:

   a)   In a positive way

   b)   In a negative way

4. What are some procedures that you would include in a policy on guiding children's behaviour?

5. Outline the steps you would take, or have taken in responding to a child who consistently displays behaviour that is challenging