

National Quality Framework

Understanding children's behaviour

Fact Sheet | June 2014

Behaviour guidance

Guiding children's behaviour is an important aspect of educating and caring for children. Positive strategies need to be developed to assist children to learn appropriate ways of behaving. The term 'behaviour guidance' is used to reflect current thinking about the most positive and effective ways to help children gain understanding and learn skills that will help them to manage their own behaviour.

Corporal punishment and unreasonable discipline are not permitted in education and care services, not only because the child may be physically harmed, but also because it nearly always has detrimental effects on the child's self-esteem and feelings of security and belonging.

In Quality Area 5 of the National Quality Standard, Relationships with Children, Standard 5.2 explores how each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships with other children and adults.

The elements of the National Quality Standard associated with Standard 5.2 are:

Element 5.2.1: Each child is supported to work with, learn from and help others through collaborative learning opportunities.

Element 5.2.2: Each child is supported to manage their own behaviour, respond appropriately to the behaviour of others and communicate effectively to resolve conflicts, has a strong focus.

Element 5.2.3: The dignity and the rights of every child are maintained at all times.

Questions we may reflect upon:

- How do we support children to learn from each other?
- How do the behaviour management strategies we use help build positive relationships with the children?
- Do the strategies we use help the child to control their own behaviour and learn self-discipline?
- When/how do we include the children in discussions about feelings and about strategies used?
- How have children been included in the journey of managing behavioural options and for managing highly emotive times?
- How do we maintain the dignity and rights of the child?

What the legislation requires

There are important obligations for approved providers, nominated supervisors, staff members and family day care educators in relation to guiding children's behaviour including that they must:

- ensure no child being educated and cared for by the service is subjected to any form of corporal punishment or any discipline that is unreasonable in the circumstances (section 166).
- ensure that every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children from harm and from any hazard likely to cause injury (section 167).

All education and care services must:

- take reasonable steps to ensure that education and care is provided to children in a way that gives each child positive guidance and encouragement toward acceptable behaviour (regulation 155).

- have a policy and procedures about interactions with children (regulation 168(2)(j)), that includes procedures to ensure education and care is provided in a way that:
 - gives each child positive guidance and encouragement toward acceptable behaviour and encourage children to express themselves and their opinions
 - allows the children to undertake experiences that develop self-reliance and self-esteem
 - maintains at all times the dignity and rights of each child
 - has regard to the family and cultural values, age, and physical and intellectual development and abilities of each child being educated and cared for by the service
 - children being educated and cared for by the service have opportunities to interact and develop respectful and positive relationships with each other and with staff members and volunteers
 - considers the size and the composition of the groups in which children are being educated and cared for (regulations 155 and 156).

What is behaviour guidance?

Behaviour guidance is an integral part of the educational program. The program that is planned and delivered to children must contribute to the following outcomes:

- the child will have a strong sense of identity;
- the child will be connected with and contribute to his or her world;
- the child will have a strong sense of wellbeing;
- the child will be a confident and involved learner;
- the child will be an effective communicator (regulation 73).

Educators guide children's behaviour through their interactions and communication at all times. The service's approach to behaviour guidance in daily practice impacts on learning outcomes for children. Research indicates that quality learning environments and sensitive, nurturing adults are essential for achieving positive learning outcomes for children. When educators adopt a positive and active approach to behaviour guidance, they reduce challenging behaviours and encourage children to achieve success, develop positive self-esteem and increase competence. A positive, inclusive and active approach includes considering the reasons for children's challenging behaviour, not just dealing with the behaviour itself. The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) describes inclusive practice in the description of supportive learning environments as '... vibrant and flexible spaces that are responsive to the interests and abilities of each child. They cater for different learning capacities and learning styles and invite children and families to contribute ideas, interests and questions'¹. Behaviour guidance consists of a variety of ways that adults help children learn to guide or 'self manage' their behaviour to learn acceptable behaviour. It encourages children to reflect on their actions and the impact those actions have on themselves, others and the environment around them.

This contrasts with the more traditional 'behaviour management' or 'discipline' approaches that generally imply an adult 'managing' children's behaviour or using punishment, or inappropriate discipline to control them. Behaviour guidance based on positive mutually respectful relationships between adults and children is most likely to influence behaviour in constructive ways. The absence of a warm and trusting relationship with an adult will often result in the child resisting direction from that adult. Both the behaviour guidance practices and the educational program need to meet the developmental and individual needs of each child.

¹ Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments (2009). *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Australian Government, Canberra.

Behaviour guidance:

- demonstrates respect for children
- is based on knowledge of children's development and learning
- is based on an understanding and knowledge of each child, including background, culture, community and family
- is proactive and positive
- recognises the child's strengths
- does not use any form of corporal punishment or any discipline that is unreasonable in the circumstances
- does not involve making judgements about children and families.

Challenging behaviour

Children's behaviour, including challenging behaviour, may be an attempt to satisfy a valid need or express a want, or be an indication of their needs or interests not being met. Environmental conditions may also influence children's behaviour and generally with good environmental support, children thrive. Children who feel valued and who observe and experience respectful and caring relationships between children and adults will generally learn to behave in respectful and caring ways with other children and adults. Adults who model positive attitudes, behaviour and appropriate use of language help children to learn socially acceptable ways of behaving and interacting with others. Children need support from the adults in their lives to interpret and express their needs in ways that are appropriate to the situation and environment. When practices are based on respect, knowledge of children's backgrounds and communities, their self-esteem and confidence will improve and they become more skilled at managing their own behaviour. Some behaviours regarded as challenging are simply age appropriate behaviour. For instance; a two year old not being able to sit still, or an eight year old unable to contain their excitement and wait for their turn. Learning to communicate needs and wants in appropriate ways is one of the many challenges young children face.

Behaviour can be described as challenging when it:

- interferes with the rights of others
- causes harm or risk to the child, other children, adults or living things
- damages the physical environment, equipment or materials
- interferes with the child's learning and relationships with others
- includes a child presenting as shy, withdrawn or excessively passive
- is inappropriate to the child's age or developmental stage or background.

Role of the child

It may be appropriate, at times, to involve children in decision making and discussions about their behaviour. However, this must be done sensitively with careful forethought. Some examples of inappropriate conversations with young children regarding their behaviour include demanding answers to questions such as 'Why did you do that?' or insisting that children apologise for their behaviour.

Role of the adult

It is important to discuss challenging behaviour with the child's parent/guardian. Families can provide educators with valuable information and insights about individual children's strengths, interests and needs and the strategies that will best assist them to participate fully in the program. When educators and families have mutually respectful relationships and communicate openly they are able to work together to plan a supportive and appropriate experience for each child. Families vary considerably in child rearing practices and the ways each family manages challenging behaviour. The kinds of behaviour they accept may differ from those of the education and care service. This can cause confusion for the child and may not be helpful in assisting the child to change their behaviour. When there are differences in ways of responding to

challenging behaviour and there are differences of opinion it is crucial for the parents and services to work together to come to an agreement that is in the best interests of the child. When the child's behaviour does not fit with what is appropriate for the child's developmental level, and is frequent or extreme, it is important to try to discover the reasons for the behaviour. Children's behaviour must be understood in the context of one's own expectations about what is 'challenging' whilst considering children's developmental level. For instance, a child may consistently hit other children. This behaviour although undesirable may not be outside of typical development, and needs to be guided accordingly.

This requires:

- an understanding of the child in the context of the family, culture, community
- knowledge of the child's developmental stage
- understanding of the family dynamics
- anything unusual that may be occurring within the family or influencing the child's behaviour.

This knowledge will assist the service in understanding the child's behaviour and help to develop effective individual strategies for that child. It is important for educators to look critically at the child's experience within the service to determine the extent to which it may be causing or contributing to the challenging behaviour.

Factors that may influence children's behaviour

Factors within the service

- an environment designed to foster children's learning and development – offer a range of challenges and experiences that reflect the breadth of ages, interests and capabilities of all children
- the educational program contributes to the learning outcomes and is based on the interests, ability and experiences of each of the children and is sensitive to individual differences
- educator and child relationships – when interactions between educators and children are positive, respectful, engaging, caring and supportive, children's confidence, abilities and self-esteem are enhanced
- consider the children's environment – for instance, would the child's behaviour be different if they were in another room with a smaller group or a mixed age group or does the child require more targeted intervention
- consistency in care – children need reliable and consistent adults who keep them physically and emotionally safe and know their individual needs to enable them to develop the skills necessary for self-regulation such as self-esteem, confidence and trust
- educators work in partnership with families to ensure that experiences planned for children are meaningful
- consider children's behaviour in the context of their culture, their community and their family and in relation to their individual stage of physical and intellectual development
- educator to child ratios need to be adequate to meet the particular needs of the children at the service.

External factors

- family relationships
- changes to family circumstances
- an event that has occurred in the community
- limited social experiences
- cultural expectations, experiences and child rearing practices
- exposure to drugs, alcohol
- the child's emotional development and temperament

- presence of a disability that may impact on the child's social and emotional wellbeing.

Strategies to guide children's behaviour and prevent behavioural issues

A positive environment for learning and development will help reduce challenging behaviours. When a child displays challenging behaviour, it is important to consider how frequently the behaviour occurs, and what it may be in response to, in which settings it occurs and how extreme it is. There may be times when a child displays challenging behaviour that is isolated or infrequent. In some situations the service may need to increase the educator to child ratios to meet the needs of children with challenging behaviour. The key to understanding children's behaviour is to aim to identify the reasons for the behaviour.

For a child under preschool age, assessments of their developmental needs, interests, experiences, progress against the learning outcomes and participation in the educational program; and for a child over preschool age, evaluations of the child's wellbeing, development and learning can be used to inform behaviour management strategies that may assist to minimise challenging behaviours at the education and care service. For children over preschool age the aim is to empower them to make favourable choices, develop positive and respectful relationships and to reflect and act upon what is fair and equitable. Educators can assist and guide older children's capacity to interact with others in respectful and cooperative ways and to develop their independence and ability at self-regulation.

It is important to ensure that:

- children's behaviour is observed and documented carefully and sensitively by educators and a holistic view of the child developed in the context of an understanding of the purpose of the behaviour. Observations need to be recorded and information collated so that an informed decision can be made about whether individual behaviour guidance strategies are required or whether the behaviour can be addressed through the daily behaviour guidance practices of the service.
- the educational program is:
 - based on an approved learning framework; and
 - delivered in a manner that accords with the approved learning framework; and
 - based on the developmental needs, interests and experiences of each child; and
 - designed to take into account the individual differences of each child (section 168).
- children know that they are valued, respected, and that they can get help from adults when they need it;
- adults' interactions with children are based on respect, understanding and knowledge of child development and of each child;
- educators are deliberate and purposeful in the planning of the program ensuring all children's interests and needs are considered;
- children are known in the context of their cultures, communities and families and use this information to enhance relationships with children;
- educators communicate with families to ensure consistency in guiding behaviour and responding to challenging behaviour;
- educators respond to and address issues of boredom and unrest as they arise;
- children's behaviour is guided in a sensitive and caring manner, using positive acknowledgement;
- behaviour guidance practices are based on the service's statement of philosophy and are proactive and positive;
- the service has policies and procedures that articulate what is expected for educators with interactions with children and behaviour management;
- redirection, giving explanations, encouragement, giving help, collaborating to solve problems and helping children to understand the consequences and impact of their behaviour;

- children are supported by providing acceptable alternative behaviours when challenging behaviour occurs;
- appropriate behaviours are expressed in the positive and a focus on positive statements and the positive choices children make;
- limits are consistent, carried out in a calm, firm manner, followed through and that children are helped to behave within the limits . Collaborate with children on expectations of behaviour and develop behaviour limits and consequences for inappropriate behaviours;
- support is sought from other educators and use other professionals when necessary to help with behaviour guidance;
- educators role model and act in a manner that exemplifies respectful, kind and thoughtful behaviour;
- identify children's individual strengths, capabilities and interests and build on them.

When observing and responding to a child's behaviour it is important to consider whether the behaviour is a developmentally appropriate response to a particular situation or behaviour that is challenging.

Discipline

The term 'discipline' is often associated with punishment and may suggest inappropriate and damaging methods of attempting to control children in order to change their behaviour. It is critically important to guide children's behaviour in ways that support them to develop understandings and skills that assist them to manage their emotions and control their behaviour by themselves. Discipline, or punishment, does not contribute to this aim. Using appropriate behaviour guidance helps children to regulate their own behaviour so that they do not always rely on adults to guide their behaviour, although they will still need assistance much of the time. Older children are more able to negotiate their own rules and the consequences of not keeping to them, whilst younger children need clearer guidelines and boundaries. In recognition of their growing maturity and ability to take responsibility for their own behaviour older children may be provided with some privileges and increased freedom. The approved provider of an education and care service must ensure that no child being educated and cared for by the service is subjected to any form of corporal punishment or any discipline that is unreasonable in the circumstances (section 166).

Unacceptable practices – discipline and punishment

The following are some examples of corporal punishment and unreasonable discipline that are considered serious breaches of the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* (National Law):

- hitting, slapping, pinching
- force feeding
- isolating
- yelling
- humiliating or belittling a child
- physically dragging a child
- depriving a child of food or drink, e.g. saying to a child 'if you don't eat your vegetables you can't have dessert'.

Other examples of unacceptable practice include:

- negative labelling
- criticising
- discouraging
- blaming or shaming
- making fun of or laughing at

- using sarcastic or cruel humour
- excessive use of negative language, such as, “no” “stop that!” “don’t...” “you never...” .

Time out

‘Time out’ is defined as removing a child for a period of time to an alternative place and in isolation. Isolating the child not only has the potential to cause fear and/or humiliation, but it also is likely to increase negative behaviour at other times. This practice focuses on the exclusion of the child from the group with no support or opportunity for reflection or consideration of other ways of behaving and it does not help children develop positive behaviour or feelings of self-worth. All services are required to operate in a way which ensures that children are safe, that their developmental needs are being met and that they are adequately supervised at all times. Use of time out in this context is inappropriate and could be considered as unreasonable discipline (section 166).

In some situations it may be necessary to take a child to an alternative environment to support the child to calm down or regain self-control. Our aim should be to prompt and support children when children are experiencing frustration, anger or fear, to remove themselves from these situations and move to a space where they can gain composure and control over their emotions. Options for redirection to another activity and/or to a quiet, safe space may be provided to the child. The educator must remain with the child, offering reassurance and support so the child can settle down and regain self-control. This strategy can be used as an opportunity for educators to help the child develop self-calming behaviours and gain composure and control. This is viewed as a learning opportunity, not as punishment. However, this approach should only be used as part of a behaviour management plan and when there is an immediate danger of the child being hurt or hurting others and when other strategies to guide the child’s behaviour have not worked. An educator should always remain with the child. In the heat of highly emotive moments it can be challenging for children to think or talk about what went wrong. When the child has calmed down, educators may then provide support and assist the child to identify what happened and what they may have done differently.

Consulting and referring with other professionals

Effective partnerships with educators, families and other professionals allows the sharing of information about the child’s ongoing experiences and achievements and what works well for that child. When a child does not respond to daily behaviour guidance strategies, it is essential that educators consult with parents about developing specific behaviour guidance strategies. There may be times when additional professional assistance and external support are needed to help a child.

Parental consent is required where referral for intervention is requested by educators. When professionals from other support services become involved in assisting with a behaviour guidance program for a child, it is important that this is done in collaboration with educators and parents. This gives everyone the opportunity for input and information about the strategies and expectations that are developed. The professional should also be made aware of the service’s policy so that the behaviour guidance strategies that are developed are consistent with the policy. It is also important that all educators working with the child, even if only for a short period each day, are aware that there is a specific behaviour guidance program to be followed for that child. This is necessary so that all educators have a consistent approach to guiding children who are displaying challenging behaviour. Children with diagnosed behavioural difficulties may require individual management plans and these must be developed in consultation with the family, professionals and/or support agencies.

State and Commonwealth Funded Referral Services

Pre School Field Officer (PSFO) Program

The Preschool Field Officer Program (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development) is an early intervention outreach service that is universally available within State-funded preschools for any child with developmental concerns. More information about the Preschool Field Officer Program can be accessed at:

www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/needs/Pages/kinderinclusionsupport.aspx

Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP)

The Department of Education (Australian Government) provides the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) to promote and maintain high quality, inclusive education and care, for all children, including those with ongoing high support needs. Education and care services approved for Child Care Benefit or those funded under the Budget Based Funded Program are eligible to access the Inclusion Support Subsidy (ISS). This subsidy may be used to contribute towards the costs associated with engaging an additional educator to increase the educator-to-child ratio when a child or children with ongoing high support needs are in care. Further information can be located at: www.education.gov.au/inclusion-and-professional-support-program

Notification of serious incidents or complaints

The approved provider must notify the Department within 24 hours of the following:

- any serious incident at the approved education and care service or complaints alleging that the safety, health or wellbeing of a child or children was or is being compromised while that child or children is or are being educated and cared for by the approved education and care service (section 174);
- the death of a child while being educated and cared for by an education and care service; or following an incident while being educated and cared for by an education and care service;
- any incident involving injury or trauma to, or illness of, a child while being educated and cared for by an education and care service for which a reasonable person would consider required urgent medical attention from a registered medical practitioner; or for which the child attended, or ought reasonably to have attended, a hospital;
- any incident where the attendance of emergency services at the education and care service premises was sought, or ought reasonably to have been sought;
- any circumstance where a child being educated and cared for by an education and care service –
 - appears to be missing or cannot be accounted for; or
 - appears to have been taken or removed from the education and care service premises in a manner that contravenes the National Regulations; or
 - is mistakenly locked in or locked out of the education and care service premises or any part of the premises (regulation 12).
- any circumstances arising at the service that poses a risk to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or children attending the service (regulation 175(2)(c)).

Notification forms can be accessed from the ACECQA website at: www.acecqa.gov.au/notifications

Notifying Victoria Police (SOCIT)

The Department receives notifications and complaints from services/members of the public where there may be a risk to the safety, health and wellbeing of the children. In some cases Victoria Police may also need to be notified. Services making a notification to the Department are encouraged, in the first instance, to also contact Victoria Police.

Incidents or suspected incidents of abuse occurring within the service itself are considered criminal offences and must be reported to Victoria Police – Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team (SOCIT). This can include a notification/complaint alleging that a staff member has hit or sexually assaulted a child while the child is being cared for or educated by the service.

The SOCIT telephone numbers can be found on the Victoria Police website at: www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?Document_ID=36237

Further Reading

Better Health Channel, Behavioural Disorders in Children:

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Behavioural_disorders_in_children

CareforKids.com.au, Positively Guiding Children's Behaviour:

www.careforkids.com.au/childcarenews/2013/april/23/behaviour.html

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Guiding Children's Behaviour:

www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/pages/parentlinenews.aspx

Early Childhood Australia, Promoting Positive Behaviours:

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/feelings_and_behaviours/promoting_positive_behaviours/promoting_positive_behaviours.html

KidsMatter, About Serious Behaviour Difficulties: www.kidsmatter.edu.au/families/mental-health-difficulties/serious-behaviour-problems/serious-behaviour-problems-how

National Outside School Hours Services Association (NOSHSA): www.netoosh.org.au/noshsa/resources_articles.htm

Further information

The **Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority** (ACECQA) is the national, independent statutory authority governing the National Quality Framework.

Phone: 1300 422 327

Email enquiries@acecqa.gov.au

Web: www.acecqa.gov.au

The **Department of Education and Early Childhood Development** is the Regulatory Authority in Victoria.

Phone: 1300 307 415

Email: licensed.childrens.services@edumail.vic.gov.au

Web: www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation