



Australian Children's  
Education & Care  
Quality Authority

## QUALITY AREA 5

# SUPPORTING CHILDREN TO REGULATE THEIR OWN BEHAVIOUR



From birth, children begin to explore how the social world works. Exploring and learning to manage feelings, behaviour, rights and responsibilities is a complex process.

Educators play an important role in supporting children to regulate their own behaviour.

Positive, respectful daily interactions with children can support them to learn about interdependence and to become considerate citizens.

These relationships provide a solid foundation from which to guide and support children as they develop the self-confidence and skills to manage their own behaviour, make decisions and relate positively and effectively to others.

## FOSTERING A SENSE OF BELONGING AND PROMOTING A SENSE OF SECURITY

An important aspect of children's 'belonging, being and becoming' involves them learning how their behaviour and actions affect themselves and others and developing the skills to regulate these independently.

Educators can support children to develop these skills by guiding children's behaviour as a mediator and helping children to negotiate their rights in relation to the rights of others.

The Circle of Security is an intervention initiative based on research that secure children exhibit increased empathy, greater self-esteem, better relationships with parents and peers, smoother transition to school, and an increased capacity to handle emotions more effectively when compared with children who are not secure.

This model highlights the importance of adults being at children's level and available for children as a support, and to provide a secure base for children as needed.



Always: be bigger, stronger, wiser and kind.  
Whenever possible: follow my child's need.  
Whenever necessary: take charge.

Circle of security diagram adapted from the Early Childhood Resource Hub ([www.echr.edu.au](http://www.echr.edu.au)), adapted from Circle of Security © 1998 Cooper, Hoffman, Marvin and Powell, [circleofsecurity.org](http://circleofsecurity.org)

## EDUCATORS WHO ARE WARM, RESPONSIVE AND AVAILABLE

When guiding and supporting children to learn about self-regulation, it is important that educators acknowledge that these skills develop gradually and on a continuum.

Children's capacity to apply these developing skills can often change. This may depend on their mood, health, family circumstances and situations they find challenging.

You can support children to learn to manage their behaviour when you:

- view children as capable and competent and approach situations from a strengths based perspective
- ensure they feel secure and let them know that you are there to help and support them
- provide positive reinforcement, encouraging a strong sense of identity and pride in themselves,
- encourage them to use a range of communication strategies to express their needs, wants and feelings
- help them deal with conflict constructively and develop a sense of empathy for others.

## INVOLVING FAMILIES

Educators can play an important role in helping families support and guide their child's behaviour in positive and effective ways. Developing collaborative partnerships that involve respectful communication about all aspects of a child's learning helps both parties to adopt a holistic and consistent approach.

Families may need support, and educators need to respond in non-judgemental ways. As with so many areas of communication and relationships, it helps to put yourself in the shoes of the family whose child is demonstrating challenging behaviour and to think how you may feel in the same situation. A professional approach means that even when you are unsure of a solution, you present a positive attitude to families, working collaboratively to identify options to solve problems.

It is important to inform families about the service's philosophy in regard to managing behaviour and self-regulation. When educators and families have different views regarding behaviour guidance, the educator may need to seek support from colleagues and draw on the service's policies for guidance.

### Accessing additional support

Further support may be needed if there are issues involving safety or further strategies and assistance are required. If your service requires additional support, you can contact the relevant Inclusion Support Agency. Visit the site for more information:

[www.education.gov.au/inclusion-support-programme](http://www.education.gov.au/inclusion-support-programme).

## REFLECTING ON PEDAGOGICAL DECISIONS

### Is the situation or the environment contributing to or creating a problem?

Some environmental factors that support children and foster positive relationships include:

- providing adequate space and a balance of activities, that provide for challenge and inspire a sense of wonder
- organising intentional grouping of children in small groups throughout the day based on their rhythms, interests and routines
- implementing a flexible routine, where educators respond and adjust to children's needs, an example might be providing access to both the indoor and outdoor spaces simultaneously
- minimising transitions and ensuring they are planned and considered to reduce anxiety and stress
- offering a variety of materials, equipment and experiences that engage their interests, are culturally relevant and create a sense of belonging and security
- insuring lighting and noise levels that are calming.

### Are my expectations appropriate?

Think about whether you are expecting children to behave in ways that suit their current strengths and capabilities. Consider the end goal of supporting children to be considerate and respectful of others and focus on what children are learning from situations and adult responses. You may need to consider modifying your approaches based on the age of children, for example in outside school hours care services, older children will have more autonomy.

### Am I being consistent?

Responding to the same behaviour in exactly the same way every time is not always possible or appropriate. However, a consistent response can support children to understand expectations. For example, if swearing is sometimes ignored, sometimes laughed at, and at other times responded to with a strong reprimand, a child may find it difficult to determine the boundaries related to this behaviour.

### How is the child likely to be feeling - what does this situation mean for the child?

Empathy, or trying to put yourself in the child's place, often helps you figure out the most effective response to their behaviour. Behaviours do not necessarily mean the same thing to a child as they do to an adult.

As each situation is different and children are learning strategies and the ability to cope with complex social situations, they may not always get it right.

### To what extent is my mood contributing to my reactions?

Children need clear messages from adults. Sometimes our response is an emotional reaction because we are frustrated, tired or impatient. Our responses in those situations may not be constructive. Be aware of the extent to which your mood and energy levels affects children's behaviour.

## INTENTIONAL STRATEGIES

### Keep in mind the power of modelling

Children learn from observing adults working and collaborating together and modelling positive behaviours. This encourages children to move towards considerate actions that support an understanding of inter-dependence.

### Using a range of communication strategies

Sometimes words are not enough. Use a wide range of communication strategies with all children, recognising this equips children with many approaches to use when they attempt to resolve conflict and organise their own feelings.

For children to learn to guide their own behaviour they need help to understand expectations and what is acceptable. For example, they may not understand why it is okay to throw a ball outside but not inside; why they have to wait to use the new equipment; why they must wait for you before crossing the street; why they cannot draw on the walls; why it is not appropriate to pull someone's hair to get them to move.

The answers to these questions can be obvious to us but not always to children. Of course, the explanation needs to be tailored to the child's level of understanding.

### Be firm when you need to be, help organise feelings

Children need the security that comes with knowing that there are limits and that when they need help with their behaviour they will get it. Children need adults to set reasonable boundaries and help them to organise their feelings and responses. Educators can support children to focus on the outcomes of being considerate to others while searching for a fair and equitable resolution, that supports children learnings.

### Give appropriate choices and agency

Supporting children's agency enables them to make choices and decisions and influence events and their world. This provides children with an opportunity to implement their emerging skills and develop a strong sense of identity.

Educators need to implement strategies, practice and programs that support every child to work with, learn from and help others through collaborative learning opportunities.

### Avoid encouraging 'hollow' gestures

Adults often require children to say they are sorry when they have hurt another child or done something else that is not acceptable. It is important, when talking to the child to get them to think about what they have done and how that makes others feel.

We want children to develop care, empathy and respect, but there is no point in getting them to say the words "I'm sorry" without the genuine feeling.

### Try to avoid power struggles

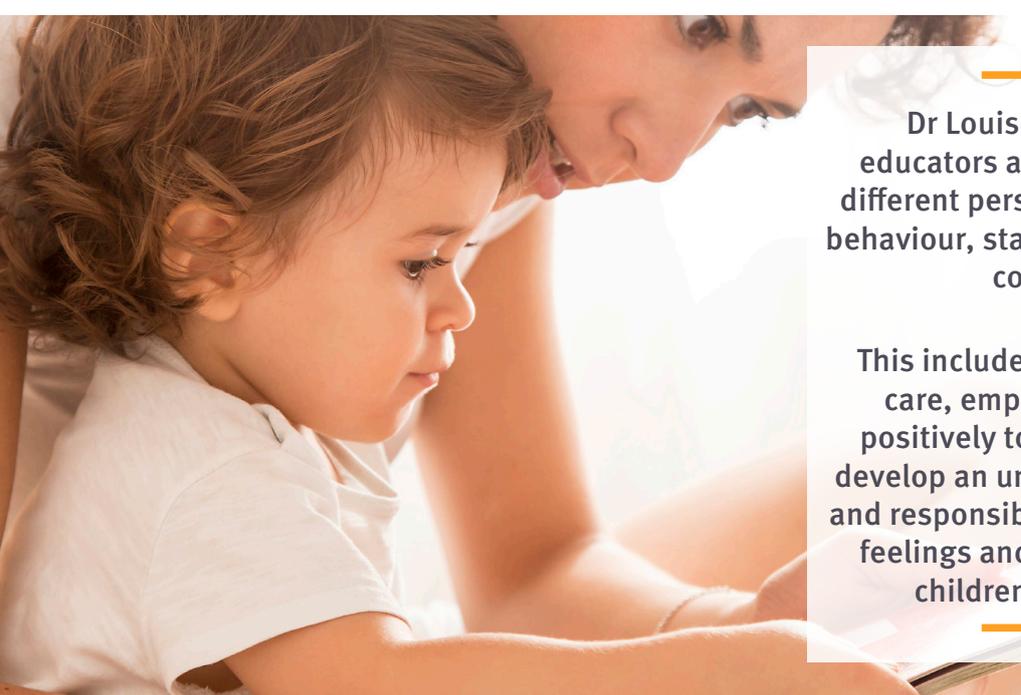
Even in situations where there are strong feelings and direct conflict, act in ways that let the child know that you are on their side. Try to come up with win-win situations. This may require some negotiation with the child and you may need to make some concessions.

### Acknowledge considerate behaviour

Let children know when they do things that you approve of or that you want to see more of.

Try to support children to manage their own behaviour in a way that tells the child "I know this is hard for you, but I will help you." Modelling empathy provides children with a repertoire of examples and strategies to use themselves.

The emphasis is on supporting children to manage their own behaviour in a ways that teach and show respect. When responding to a child's behaviour it is important to make sure you are doing so in ways that maintain their dignity and rights. In order to do so, it is important to take a moment and reflect on the best way to respond, rather than simply react, however in some situations educators may need to respond quickly if safety is an issue.



**Dr Louise Porter (2009) encourages educators and families alike to take a very different perspective on managing children's behaviour, starting with the goal of developing considerate behaviour.**

**This includes learning how to interact with care, empathy and respect, to respond positively to diversity and fairness, and to develop an understanding of reciprocal rights and responsibilities. Learning to communicate feelings and to resolve conflict all support children to be considerate people.**

## EMPOWERING CHILDREN

An important part of supporting children to manage their behaviour is giving them some responsibility. This begins with having appropriate expectations. Talk with them about their behaviour. Let them know that you trust them.

It is important to acknowledge children as individuals with a range of skills, emotions and experiences both at home and at the service that may impact on how they cope being part of a group setting on any given day.

Help them learn to self-regulate, for example, to take themselves away from the group to have some quiet time when they need it. Encourage them to help others and remind others of rules and limits. But let them know that you are always there to help.

Creating a caring and respectful environment assists everyone to feel part of the group and to take responsibility for the wellbeing of others.

## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

[Guide to the National Quality Framework at acecqa.gov.au](http://www.acecqa.gov.au)

[Understanding children's behaviour: Self-guided learning package at www.ecrh.edu.au](http://www.ecrh.edu.au) and supporting [fact sheet](#) by the Victorian State Government.

Visit the Early Childhood Resource Hub for resources on [exploring behavior guidance at www.ecrh.edu.au/national-quality-standard](#).

Porter, L. 2009 [Guiding Children's Behaviour at www.federalacc.com.au](#)

More information is available on the ACECQA website [acecqa.gov.au](http://www.acecqa.gov.au)

### Acknowledgment

The information in this publication was adapted from a National Childcare Accreditation Council resource.

## WHAT TO CONSIDER FOR ASSESSMENT AND RATING

Authorised officers may look for and discuss a range of different behaviours which demonstrate that educators are guiding and supporting children's behaviour. They might also look for how this is reflected in the service's policies and the educational program.

Authorised officers might look for evidence that:

- Educators are attuned to children's feelings and support children to deal with their emotions
- Educators do not exhibit negative behaviours: harshness, sarcasm, bad language or isolating children
- Educators respond positively to children who require their attention
- Educators are supporting children to identify situations where they can manage their own behaviour and act accordingly
- Educators respond patiently and calmly even when children strongly express distress, frustration or anger
- Educators model appropriate social behaviour and responsive relationships.

Authorised officers may seek to discuss with educators about:

- How they learn about and respond to individual children's relationships with others, and the relationship preferences they may have
- How they use their knowledge of individual children's personalities and friendship preferences to support children to manage their own behaviour and develop an understanding of others' feelings
- How children are supported when they are trying to negotiate and resolve conflicts with others.

Authorised officers may seek to sight:

- Philosophy and policy that use appropriate strategies to guide and support children to recognise, manage and learn from their behaviours and express their emotions in positive, non-threatening and productive ways.
- Documentation and strategies to guide and support children's behaviour and self-regulation
- Plans for the inclusion of children who have specifically diagnosed behavioural or social difficulties.

### Things to consider:

- How do educators build close, secure relationships with children of all ages, abilities, genders and backgrounds?
- How do educators enable children to form and maintain positive relationships with others?
- How is a culture of respect, equity and fairness encouraged and communicated to educators, children and families?