Planning and Strategies to Promote Positive Behaviour (5 - 12 years)

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

Planning and Strategies to Promote Positive Behaviour (5 - 12 years)

You have chosen to complete the 'Planning and strategies to promote positive behaviour (5-12 years)' package. The aim of this package is to provide you with information that will support your work and provide you with helpful strategies in working with children aged between 5 and 12 years. It is important to ensure that the actual environment, the program and the adults working with children provide appropriate opportunities for children to learn productively and happily and to interact with others in appropriate ways. This package aims to help you understand more fully the types of environments, programming and adult interactions that help promote positive behaviours and actions of children.

Introduction

Children are not born 'good' or born 'bad'. They develop a range of behaviours, attitudes and ways of expressing their needs depending on a range of factors throughout their childhood years. The environments in which children spend much of their time and how adults react to and provide guidance to children in these early years plays a critical role in helping them to develop positive behaviours. If a child is encouraged, guided gently and consistently and comes to trust educators as reliable, trustworthy and predictable, it is more likely that inappropriate behaviours will not develop or continue in the long term.

All children as they develop and grow and come into contact with others will experience a range of feelings. Some of these, such as frustration, disappointment, anger and sadness, may not be demonstrated in constructive ways. Accepting that these feelings and experiences are part of being a human being and that children, in particular, are neither experienced enough or mature enough to know or understand these feelings and how to express them is crucial in understanding children. Even as educators, it is often difficult to know how to deal with your own anger or sadness or that of someone else.

The educator's attitude, expectations and understanding of children is therefore very important in working with children's behaviours. Knowing the appropriate strategies to both minimise opportunities for behaviours to become challenging and knowing how to work with children when their behaviours are causing difficulties to themselves or others, is the challenge we face.

Working with school-age children often means working with children early in the morning or after school. These children may be tired and perhaps have had a difficult or challenging day in the classroom or with their peers in the playground. Children often arrive at programs such as Family Day Care, Out of School Hours or Holiday programs feeling resentful that they have to be at the program. They may have wished to spend time at a friend's house, or simply gone home. These feelings of frustration or tiredness or anger are normal human emotions.

For example, a child may arrive at the program and throw their school bag across the middle of the room causing disruption. What they are actually expressing is anger or seeking attention for some reason. The educator needs to know how to respond to these situations in ways that provide alternative and more appropriate ways for the school-aged child to express their emotions. The challenge for those working with this age group is to both acknowledge the frustration and to use appropriate skills in helping children to settle, to feel more at peace and to learn appropriate ways of expressing their feelings.

The EYLF, FSAC and the VEYLDF describe why building strong positive relationships between significant adults and children is essential for those children to develop a sense of belonging, where they feel a strong sense of identity, and can see themselves as significant and respected. This package will consider a range of issues related to the following:

- Accepting that feelings and frustrations are a normal part of development and life
- Respecting feelings
- Ensuring appropriate expectations of children and understanding their stage of life
- The proactive versus the reactive strategies for guiding behaviour
- The role of the environment
- The role of the program
- The role of the educator
- Related strategies of encouragement, consistency, consequences not punishment, redirection and limits

Importance of Feelings and the Right of All Children to Express Them

Educators, who are attuned to children's thoughts and feelings, support the development of a strong sense of wellbeing. They positively interact with the young child in their learning... Through a widening network of secure relationships, children develop confidence and feel respected and valued. They become increasingly able to recognise and respect the feelings of others and to interact positively with them.

(EYLF Principle 1: Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships, pg 12).

At times we hear adults make statements to children when the child is upset or worried, such as, "come on give me a smile, you'll be okay", or, "come on you're a big girl now, you don't need to cry". It is a fact however, that sometimes, even as adults we are sad, we are afraid or angry and we may not wish to smile when we are angry or upset. Educators need to learn to comfort, encourage and support children at times when they are distressed. They need to acknowledge the child is upset and then provide a range of strategies to help the child.

We sometimes witness children being dropped off at school and crying because they don't want their parent or educator to leave them. This is sometimes known as separation anxiety. Unfortunately, sometimes teachers or workers become frustrated at such times, particularly if it occurs regularly and statements are made between the professionals such as, "that child is just attention seeking or manipulative, as soon as the parent leaves they are okay". It is extremely important that professionals with the responsibility of working with children and guiding their behaviour are careful about the types of statements they make and the sort of attitudes or belief system they carry about children.

It is a fact that some children really do find the moment of separation really difficult and when the parent actually leaves, it is a relief for the child and they can begin to settle and calm down and 'get on with' their work and play. It is also a fact that children are not usually as manipulative or conniving as adults may attribute them to being.

'Relationships are the foundations for children's construction of identity. In order to form a strong sense of self, children need to build secure relationships within the family and then with caring, attentive educators in their settings.... Children's positive experiences of relationships and places support their understanding of themselves as secure, significant and respected individuals. A positive self identity strengthens children's interests and skills in being active participants in their communities.' (VEYLDF Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity pg 18).

Children, just like adults, feel a range of emotions or feelings. These may be positive or they may cause other emotions such as feeling sad, angry, frustrated, fearful, jealous or disappointed. We all feel things and react to them with our emotions. As children, there are two important elements about feelings.
1. Children need to learn that feelings, both the positive and negative are part of life, and that they can be expressed, shared and supported.

2. There are appropriate ways to express feelings or needs where others do not become hurt or injured.

It is the educator's role to respect the feelings of children; the positive and negative. The adult needs to learn how to acknowledge that feelings are appropriate, to understand the child as much as possible and then work with the child in helping them to express or work through their feelings in appropriate ways.

Self Help Question 1

Brainstorm a list of 20 feelings and divide them into positive and negative feelings.

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Describe how you deal with your own feelings. Can you express your negative feelings in ways which do not cause others to become angry with you?

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When is it easiest to express your own negative feelings? During or after the heat of the moment? Who do you find you can share your feelings with most?

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Spend some time reflecting upon how you react generally to children when they are upset or angry. What do you tend to do most times? Do you think you demonstrate understanding and respect?

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Respect for children's feelings

An educator can acknowledge respect for a child's feelings in the following ways:

1. Acknowledge that the child does feel something and that feelings are normal
2. Reflect the feeling in words that the child at their stage of development might understand
3. Respect the child even if the way the child expressed their feelings was inappropriate

There is a saying that often helps at these times.
'Always accept the child, you don't have to accept or approve of the behaviour.'

One of the most straight-forward ways to help acknowledge and respect a child's feelings is called, 'Reflective Listening.' This acknowledges how a child feels, is recognised and respected and helps a child to view their feelings and responses as valid. Reflective listening does not allow or encourage children to express feelings in inappropriate ways but rather acknowledges things such as:

"I know you feel angry that you have to be here today. It must be hard when you really just wish to go home".

"I know you feel frustrated at the moment, you seem to have had a tough day at school."

This acknowledgment enables a child to see that they are in fact able to feel things, even negative feelings, and that words can be used to express feelings. This, over time, helps a child to use language (words) rather than kicking or hurting another. As a child matures, they in turn are then more likely to express their needs or thoughts to others and thus, help to encourage and help each other.

An extension of reflective listening, when a child has perhaps hurt another child from frustration is the following example.

Scenario:
A six year old child is making a tall structure with some building blocks and another child who wanted a particular block kicks over the six year-old's block building.

The educator, using reflective listening and redirection/consequence strategies could respond in the following way.

"I know you are frustrated because you wanted that block and it is hard when you can't have what you want, but it is not okay to mess up someone else's blocks. If you want to continue to play here, you will have to stay away from the other child's blocks."

In this response, the educator is not 'letting the child get away with it,' or simply acknowledging the frustration of the child but ignoring the inappropriate behaviour. The educator is respecting that it is normal to be frustrated when you cannot have something when you want it, but also that it is not okay to interfere or hurt or mess up someone else's game because you are frustrated.

Over time, with a consistent approach such as this from educators, we provide opportunities for children to learn to use words if they can or to seek the support of an adult rather than hurt another child or interfere with other children's play.

Self Help Question 2

Think about reflective listening. Try to practice this technique with people you live with or work with. A strategy that may help involves starting your response with, "It seems like you are feeling….". List some of the situations when you have practiced this technique.

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Think about the phrase, "Always accept the child, you don't have to accept or approve of the behaviour". In what situations might you have to really remember this? List three examples.

Reflect upon your own language and expression with others. Are you able to acknowledge feelings and to describe them to others? Practice doing this.

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Expectations of Children

Children are not the same as adults or even the same as teenagers. They do not think the same way as adults, they have less language skills, they have less experience in interacting with others, they understand things in different ways and often make sense of things very differently from the way adults do.

Sometimes, educators mistakenly assume that children and adults are the same. Sometimes we hear educators saying things like, "come on, you should know better, you are in Grade 3 now", or, "you are old enough to know better".

Educators must remember that, trying to reason with a child who has done something inappropriately, is not always the best approach. Using humiliation, like, "you should know better than that" often leads to increased frustration and anger and also does not help a child reflect upon their actions.

One of the important aspects of working with children is to remember that they are in fact children, not miniature adults. Children think differently, understand things differently, and need simple, straightforward ways of being redirected and encouraged to use appropriate, rather than inappropriate, ways to interact with others.

'Children learn about themselves and construct their own identity within the context of their families and communities. This includes their relationships with people, places and things and the actions and responses of others. Identity is not fixed. It is shaped by experiences. When children have positive experiences they develop an understanding of themselves as significant and respected, and feel a sense of belonging. Relationships are the foundations for the construction of identity – who I am, how I belong and what is my influence?' (EYLF Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity; Belonging, Being and Becoming are integral parts of identity pg 22).

The directions, expectations, language and interactions that adults use must reflect that we are working with children, and that we cannot expect and should not expect them to respond to us in the way adults do.

Self Help Question 3

Consider the sorts of things adults say to children. List five statements you have heard adults use with a child where it sounds as if the adult has forgotten or not considered the child is a child rather than an adult.

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List five ways that you think a child demonstrates they think differently or understand things differently from an adult

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Proactive Versus Reactive Strategies for Guiding Behaviour

The most common strategies used in guiding behaviour are known as 'reactive.' Reactive strategies are ones that occur or are implemented after an event or incident. They usually involve what is known as 'punishment' or 'consequences' and attempt to stop the inappropriate behaviour. Whilst reacting in some way to inappropriate behaviours is part of guiding children, the reactive approach is neither the most important, nor usually the most effective strategy in the longer term.

The aim in working with children is to help promote in them a sense of what is known as '**intrinsic motivation**' to encourage children to behave because they know it helps themselves and others in productive ways and not to avoid punishment.

Extrinsic motivation to behave is about avoiding punishment or getting a reward and is not the most effective means of helping children develop responsibility for their own actions and behaviours.

An example of extrinsic motivation:
A parent may say to their children when they get into the car. "You had better put on your seatbelts or the policeperson will get us".

This example places fear of punishment as the reason and rationale for doing something like putting on a seat belt. For families to help children to develop appropriate behaviours for intrinsic reasons the parent could have said,
"You need to put your seat belt on so that we are safe in the car".

In order to promote more opportunities for children to develop intrinsic motivation, to gain understanding and to take responsibility for their own behaviours, the proactive approach is the first and most important strategy we can use with children.

The proactive approach differs from the reactive because the proactive attempts to establish an environment that avoids as many opportunities as possible for high levels of frustration in children and attempts to reflect an environment that is encouraging, respects the individual and provides a range of learning experiences that help children to express feelings, explore feelings and behaviours in ways that are safe and secure. The proactive approach requires the adults to spend energy in thinking, planning and setting up an environment that is most likely to support, encourage and minimise frustration for children, even before they arrive.

The proactive approach attempts to 'get in first' before the need arises to 'react' to inappropriate behaviours.

There are three major areas that the proactive approach includes:

1. The environment
2. The program
3. The adult

The Environment

The environment needs to be set up in ways that best suit the stage of development of the children. Environments need to reflect a range of characteristics to help respect the child and minimise frustrations for children.

Some of these characteristics include:

- Enough space for children to move easily and freely around the room without bumping into things
- Enough cosy corners and 'escape' places such as cubby houses made from a blanket, for children to have some personal space and time away from others
- A light and bright feeling in the air that is not stuffy, not too hot in winter etc.
- A range of activities and play areas set up so children can have choice and variety.
- Plenty of time outdoors. Children need ample time to be outdoors even though adults may feel the cold, children don't tend to!
- Being given some responsibility for making some of the rules. Shared decision making in the 5-12 age group empowers children to feel that they have some say in how things work.
- Giving some choice and decision making as to what activities or experiences can be planned and implemented.

The Program

The actual activities, learning experiences, resources, equipment and materials provided for the children can also impact upon their behaviours.

The following lists some of the program considerations to enable a proactive approach.
- Allowing some choice of activities and play for children both inside and outdoors

- Providing creative art opportunities so that not all children are expected to reproduce something that an adult has made. Copying the creation of an adult or art book's creation often leads to frustration. This practice also shows a lack of respect for the child's own creativity and learning.
- Providing plenty of time for long uninterrupted play time. Remember that at school children spend a lot of time working together in groups.
- Having small groups rather than large groups and providing lots of time for children to play on their own if they wish.

The Educator

The educator has the most important part of all in the proactive approach to guiding children's behaviour. The educator role is the most critical and listed below are some of the aspects of their role in the proactive approach.

- Establishing a real and respectful relationship with each child
- Providing opportunities for children to attach and develop trust with the educator
- Respecting and reflecting the feelings of each child
- Respecting the culture and family of each child
- Holding realistic expectations of children
- Using language that is appropriate to a child's understanding
- Avoiding using sarcasm, 'putdowns' or negative language with a child
- Using encouragement with each child and making a point of affirming something they have done during each day
- Providing appropriate modelling of their own behaviours and interactions with others

Self Help Question 4

Write in one paragraph your own understanding of the differences between a reactive approach and a proactive approach to guiding children's behaviour

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Write in one paragraph your understanding of the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and why promoting intrinsic motivation may be beneficial to children

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Consider the three elements of the proactive approach (the environment, the program and the adult role). List three additional examples under each of those three elements of how you can promote a proactive approach to guiding behaviour

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The environment
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The program
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The adult
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Working with Children when Inappropriate Behaviours Arise

'Children's learning and development is advanced when they experience interactions with highly effective early childhood professionals. Early Childhood professionals become more effective through critical reflection and a strong culture of professional enquiry. Early childhood professionals:

- _Gather information that supports, informs, assesses and enriches decision making about appropriate professional practices_
- _Continually develop their professional knowledge and skills to enable them to provide the best possible learning and development opportunities for all children_
- _Promote practices that have been shown to be successful in supporting children's learning and development_
- _Use evidence to inform planning for early childhood experiences and practice_
- _Challenge and change some practices'_

(VEYLDF Practice Principles for Learning and Development: Reflective practice p14).

Reflective practice is an important tool in professional learning. It assists educators to:
- respond thoughtfully and with integrity to complex situations and challenges
- make careful and well-informed decisions and plans
- implement changes in their practices and policies and evaluate the effectiveness of those changes
- be accountable to families, colleagues and communities for their approaches and methods
- improve learning experiences and outcomes for children

(Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning and Development Framework for Australia, 2010, p7).

Despite all of the best intentions, planning and preparation, there will be times when a child will behave in ways that cause concern either to themselves, the group or another child. At these times, it may be helpful to remember the following phrase:

'All behaviour has meaning'

That does not mean we excuse the behaviour or condone the behaviour, but that we remember that no child is 'evil' or 'bad.' Some of their behaviours may well be totally inappropriate, perhaps even causing harm to others or themselves and while intervention will be needed, the educator must remember to respect the child through this process.

The following procedures, along with the proactive approach, may help when working with challenging behaviours:

- Use reflective listening to provide words for the child if they appear frustrated, angry or upset.
- Think before you respond and act, this gives you just a second to remain calm and assess what is occurring (obviously if a child is in danger, you don't wait).
- Try to avoid listening to two sides of an argument and trying to ascertain things like who had the ball first etc. Unless you saw the actual incident, it is too difficult to know what really happened and usually prolongs the issue.
- If two children are fighting or arguing over the same piece of equipment you might provide a choice or allow the child to make a decision. For example: "I don't know who had the ball first, you two try to work it out and if you can't then I will put the ball away for a while and you can both find something else to play with."

The idea is to provide what is known as a **consequence** if a child is mature enough to understand that their actions or choices will result in a consequence.

Example of a consequence:

If you can't sort out who had the ball first then the ball will be put away.

It is important that a consequence is not viewed by the educator as a threat or as a punishment but rather as an opportunity to let the children or child make a decision, change their behaviour or find a solution. These are important life skills and children need to be provided with opportunities to problem solve and sort out their own difficulties and frustrations.

If a child repeatedly uses behaviour that is inappropriate and/or is causing real harm to others or disruption to the program, quietly but firmly leading them to another part of the room may be appropriate. This is not to be mistaken with the old view of 'time out' where children were punished by being put on a 'naughty chair' or put in a corner or made to stay away from everyone for a prolonged time where they were humiliated.

The removal should only be for a short time, perhaps 30 seconds or until the child chooses to move away themselves. This removal away from the disruption allows the child to calm themselves, perhaps to sit with an educator or alone and to just be removed from the stress. The removal place should still be within the program and room and not be seen by any child as the punishment area. Just a place away from where the disruption occurred.

- It is not productive to try to reason with an angry child or a child who is having a tantrum. In the heat of the moment, they are unlikely to reason with you or to be calm enough to hear or understand.
- Once you have made a decision or set a consequence it is important to carry through with the consequence and not be seen to easily change your mind. Therefore it is important that you think

through carefully before reacting to a child in terms of what decision or action you are going to take.

- Always use a positive example when redirecting children. For example; "please walk inside", instead of "don't run inside". This not only redirects the child from not running it helps them to know what to do instead, e.g. Walk not run. Instead of saying at the lunch table, 'sit nicely' say, 'sit still or sit quietly, or use your quiet voice".
- Avoid using judgemental terms when talking with children at times when their behaviour is inappropriate. For example, never include words such as:
  · Naughty
  · Difficult
  · Bad
  · Hopeless
  · Stupid

Self Help Question 5

Think of the language, words and tones you use when working with a child who is displaying challenging or inappropriate behaviours. What are some of the words you might try to change? What words might you replace them with?

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Consider the term consequence as opposed to punishment. Write a paragraph that demonstrates your understanding of the differences between the two terms.

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Summary

Working with children, particularly in terms of helping a child to develop appropriate behaviours requires the educator to remember the following key points:

- Establishing and maintaining a positive relationship and positive interactions with the child
- Respecting and reflecting children's feelings and recognising the right of each child to have feelings
- Ensuring that educators have appropriate expectations and understandings of children's development
- Providing a range of proactive strategies within the environment, program and adult role that promote opportunities for children to develop intrinsic motivation
- Avoiding judgemental or negative terms with children
- Using a range of redirection, encouragement, consequences and limits with children

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Assessment Task

1. A strategy is a plan or procedure of action designed to achieve a particular goal. Write four key strategies for guiding children's behaviour

2. Write at least three proactive strategies that could be used in response to the following scenario:

   Upon arriving at the service at 3.30pm after school, a ten year old child finds it difficult to settle into the program routine. The child wanders around the room, knocks over equipment and disrupts other children.

3. Write three strategies you would employ in response to the following scenario. Provide the reasoning underpinning your strategies.

   A five year old child has just started in the Before School Care program and attends each day. For the past five days, (the length of time the child has been attending) the child has cried and become extremely distressed when the parent has left. The level of distress does not appear to be calming down and the families and the educators are all feeling concerned

4. What are three positive strategies for communicating the behaviour expectations of the program to the children?

5. Please produce and attach an example of a handout for staff working with children outlining the importance of acknowledging children's feelings