

Positive Guidance

- Tell children what they CAN do (instead of what they can't do). Focus on the DO's instead of the don'ts
- Offer children choices ONLY when you are willing to abide by their decisions.
- If possible, change the environment instead of the child's behavior.
- Work with children instead of against them. Work in the spirit of "I am on your side"
- Give children consistent safe limits and boundaries they can understand.
- Maintain your authority calmly and consistently. Use a tone of voice that is clear, firm and guiding rather than one that is angry or scolding.
- Set a good example! Speak and act only in ways you hope children will speak and act.

Adapted from Jennifer Birckmayer
(*Discipline is not a Dirty Word*)

Learning Social Skills at Bard Nursery School & Children's Center:

Preschool is the child's first large group social experience. Our goal is to help each child make friends, develop a positive self-image and become a caring member of a group. Social skills are at the core of all learning experiences. We know that children who develop positive social skills will have the greatest opportunity for success in school settings for kindergarten and beyond.

Learning how to make friends, negotiate compromise, recover from disappointment, and express self appropriately happens over many years. Social skills develop along with motor skills, language skills, impulse control and self-regulation.

Once the year has gotten underway the children quickly make the nursery school their own and they are able to internalize the routines and the social expectations. They develop trust in their teachers and classmates. Our goal is to create a safe and nurturing environment while teaching social skills within natural interactions every day.

Making first friends is a joyous experience but it can also involve frustration and challenges. When conflict arises, children may engage in typical preschool behaviors (hitting, pushing, and yelling). When this happens, we guide children towards appropriate social skills through discussion, conflict resolution and offering alternatives and appropriate responses to strong emotions. If these methods fail and a child is putting himself and others in an unsafe situation, we gently remove the child from the area where he or she is struggling and offer a break, time to reflect and gain control. Children are not isolated or given "time-out" – a teacher will stay close to support the child and help him or her express feelings while talking about how our behaviors impact other.

Children participate in making rules and discussing conflict and solutions. The general categories we discuss in preschool involve creating an environment where everyone is included and safe:

- Bodies are not for hurting (we keep our bodies safe)
- Feelings are not for hurting (we keep our feelings safe)
- Our environment is not for hurting (we keep our school safe)

We use non-punitive methods of discipline and guidance which are directly related to the child's needs and behavior. Teachers never threaten, shame or ridicule. Teachers never use food (or withholding of food) to discipline children. Teachers model respect, care and listening. We accept the full range of emotions and help children learn to express emotions appropriately. We encourage authentic interactions and genuine friendships.

Supporting Children in Resolving Conflicts: A problem solving approach

The problem-solving approach comes from the perspective that the social challenges and conflicts children face are opportunities for learning social skills. With supportive adults available to coach children during play, children can become successful problem solvers.

1. Approach calmly

Gently reach out to the children who are upset or angry. Use a calm voice to communicate a neutral attitude. Stop any hurtful behavior by placing your body in between children and using words to describe the behavior.

“Pushing must stop – pushing hurts”

2. Validate emotions

“You both look very angry about this!”

Children really need emotional validation before they can move onto solutions. This “emptying out” is an important step to being able to think clearly and move on. Use words that reflect the intensity of the situation, *“I see you are very upset about pushing and I see you really want the shovel back.”*

If there is an item such as a favorite toy causing anxiety – the adult can hold the item and keep it neutral while helping children talk about what happened.

3. Gather information

What’s happening here? – it looks like we have a problem.

Ask open ended questions that describe the details of the actions that have transpired rather than questions which are too abstract such as, *“why did you do that?”*

4. Restate the problem

“I hear that Sam took the yellow shovel from you and you are angry about it and so you pushed him. Is that what happened?”

Check with the children to see if they agree that you have identified the problem, *“Is that, right? It looks like Sam wants the shovel and you want the shovel too. Two children want the same shovel.”*

5. Ask for ideas and solutions to the problem

Respect and explore the children’s ideas. Help children work out details to make the solution reasonable. For example, if a child says, *“we should share”* The adult might suggest ways to share such as finding another shovel so the children can play side by side or setting a timer for 5 minutes so the children have a concrete way to take turns. Use the children’s ideas as much as possible. If children are stuck, the adult might say, *“I have an idea. Would you like to hear my idea?”* but try not to rush to the adult agenda too quickly. Value thinking and pausing and listening.

6. Give support and follow up as needed

Make simple statements to support the children as they enter back into play - *“It looks like you’ve solved the problem”* *“Next time we’ll remember that hitting hurts – we need to keep our bodies safe while we play”* Check with children to see if the problem has been solved, especially children who have been very upset and may need an adult to play along-side them for a while and offer coaching to help them enter back into play successfully.

Young children who are learning social skills make mistakes. Learning social skills is a lifelong pursuit. Adults can view children's conflicts as "mistaken behaviors" rather than "misbehaviors".

From *The Power of Guidance and A Guidance Approach for an Encouraging Classroom* by Dan Gartrell
<https://dangartrell.net/>

Our program is structured to support children's efforts to control their own behavior and develop social/emotional skills. We know children need us to provide limits as they are gaining internal resources throughout their preschool years. We view children as both vulnerable and competent. We are continually balancing the simultaneous needs to give children limits and safety while giving them room to make choices, take risks and develop autonomy and independence.

When children are actively involved in an enriched program, fewer discipline problems occur.

Our first job here at the center is to keep the children safe. We want to teach children to respect their environment and to respect each other.

Teachers work with children to use their words and to talk about how they are feeling. We also give the children the opportunity to work out a problem with their peers while being facilitated by a teacher.

Our approach to behavior management includes:

- Anticipating potential problems to help minimize conflict
- Designing a social environment that promotes sharing and socialization but also allows and respects playing alone or in small groups
- Crafting a schedule that helps children modulate throughout the day – with balance of active and quiet activities that promote wellness
- Stating our expectations in a clear, positive way
- Redirecting children to another activity when appropriate
- Providing clear limits
- Modeling pro-social behavior
- Acknowledging positive behavior
- Giving choices whenever possible
- Allowing children to talk and listen to children with attention and respect