

Specific Strategies for Guiding Young Children at Children's House Preschool

Children are viewed as coming to us as a blank slate with no prior experience in solving conflicts and frustrations. Teachers model, model, model how to get all needs met – physical, social, emotional, and cognitive, with language or body language signs (depending on ability or language proficiency). We describe to children how to recognize the nuances of people's tone of voice, facial expression, and body language. All teachers and children are viewed as responsible and cooperate in making our preschool a peaceful, loving place. Peers are encouraged to offer advice to any other children who may be struggling to maintain a peaceful environment.

A positive relationship is supported with vertical age grouping so younger peers have built in peer models with their older peers. In turn, older peers have authentic teaching experiences, when instructing younger children in activities, the classroom environment, and classroom expectations for peace and safety. It requires higher thinking skills to teach someone else a skill, once that skill is mastered.

Modeling appropriate behaviors is one of the best teaching methods for young children. Children follow the examples of their elders and peers. To say one thing while exhibiting behavior that is contradictory, will cause confusion in a child, causing them to be unsure of the correct way to act. If you model suitable conduct then you will reinforce the acceptable actions that you wish to see displayed. Teachers use a variety of means to model appropriate behaviors depending on each child's natural inclination to take in new information. Teachers may use stuffed animals or dolls to model a scenario, they may have a friend describe what to do or give reminders, they may use visual charts, or give silent signals to the child.

The schedule is designed to have children recognize their personal energy and which activity offered during open choice best meets that need. Open choice fills the first hour and fifteen minutes of each day, allowing children to start their day as they see fit. If a child requires alone time, they may choose to curl up on a cushion with a book or tape, complete puzzles, explore the science discovery table, paint, play dough or art. Socializing is supported through dramatic play, group puzzles, large block building projects, and doing art with friends. Children are also aware that after snack, they are able to go outside, and that that is a place to run, throw, jump and kick. This helps with ensuring class rules are respected without the need for teachers to say "No", children become aware of the difference between appropriate indoor and outdoor behavior. If a teacher recognizes that a child is too energetic to start in the classroom and needs to move faster before settling, that child may run laps in the playground, or set up playground activities with a teacher before being asked to settle in the classroom.

Behavior is supported by having a prepared environment ready from the moment the children arrive, with areas that are closed to the children being covered with cloth. Transitions are aided through the use of songs, a clean-up song, and welcome and goodbye song, a song to signal all the children to come to the teacher, and a song to signal that it's time to sit quietly for story. Teachers arrive half an hour before class to ensure the environment; activities, art room and snack are completely prepared. After the children leave, teachers stay an hour to clean, make notes, restock supplies, and meet to discuss any areas of the room which may require change, or communicate progress of

individual students, and next steps to follow. Ratios range from 8:1 to 6:1 based on the groups need to ensure a smooth, peaceful, enjoyable experience.

Using encouragement, instead of praise builds on a child's abilities, instead of finalizing their effort. "Wow that's great" sounds affirming, but teachers want the child to go beyond seeking outward affirmation and have them reflect on their own progress, effort and skills attained. We see this as a life long skill to cultivate. To this end we reinforce success, acknowledge their effort, point out their accomplishments, and encourage them to continue to grow.

Setting limits enables children to explore and be a part of their environment in a safe, unhindered way. It is essential to set very clear limits and stick to them. Allowing limits to be bent and broken will cause a child to question what is acceptable. Children flourish if they are sure of the rules, and have the freedom to engage within those limits. There needs to be a restriction to the number of limitations placed on a child, otherwise they will feel the desire to break all rules to satisfy their natural urge to discover. Children will always test limits, which is why consistency is of the utmost importance. Children wanting to test out an idea are brought into the problem-solving role to think through safety.

Effective communication is one of the key social skills taught at our preschool. For many children, it is their first experience in having to negotiate with peers, and adults who are not related. Teachers give children the language they need to effectively communicate their needs and wants. They also model and instruct children in beneficial communication strategies such as volume and facial regard. Children are continually encouraged to develop a trust in language to get their needs met.

Conflict resolution and problem solving begin as teacher mediated for children that need assistance, and then develop into child initiated negotiations. Our goal is to give every child the tools required to independently resolve conflicts and frustrations. Children are encouraged to remain flexible on reaching a compromise while remaining open to help. When a child is 2 1/2 years old, it is natural for them to use physical force as a way of asserting their needs, and reacting to conflict. A teacher's job is to give them the skills to socialize in a positive manner with their peers, and use vocabulary to resolve conflicts. This is one skill that may take many children their whole preschool lives or longer to master. We do our best to assist children in mastering the language that can be used instead of physical force or relinquishing rights, and to empower children in their problem solving capabilities. We also make sure that we are present to show all children how to work towards a peaceful existence in the classroom.

Children will discover that there are consequences to their actions. Natural consequences are the most basic form of learning and will be more prominent in a child's mind. "If I push that hard, it will fall over." It also works with socializing and discipline. In most cases, a child will learn that if they push, or are physical with other peers, one of two things will happen: the peer will push back, or the peer will become upset, and then not want to play with the child. Teacher's help children to recognize the natural consequences of their actions by having the children talk to, and aid those who they have hurt, such as getting them a glass of water or icepack, or keeping them company until they feel better.

Children are taught to observe themselves, and identify their impulses and make wise decisions in keeping our school a happy and safe environment. For example,

someone may throw something in class for many reasons. 1) They are angry, to which you can find the source of their anger, and offer alternative ways for them to solve the problem. 2) They want to hit a target, to which you can offer them an acceptable item to throw such as a beanbag, or make sure they know there are things to throw at outdoor time. These are just a couple of examples of how to redirect behavior, as a lot of what is termed 'misbehavior' is merely mistaken behavior which does need an outlet, but may require direction, choices, and a place to engage in that activity.

A great way to de-emphasize unwanted behaviors that do not infringe upon other children's experiences, or create safety issues, is to not give those actions any extra energy. Children may act out to get attention, and quite often will stop once they realize their intention is not going to be met. One effective way of ignoring adverse behavior is to address the child who they are with, thanking them for helping the class by their actions. Soon the other child will realize that attention is being given to the responsible peer, and may change his or her own actions. Peers are encouraged to offer invitations to create new opportunities. A child who didn't participate in clean up will be offered the chance to do a community service job later such as wiping down the snack table or sweeping the floor, so they can receive enthusiastic appreciation for their teamwork.