

POWERHOUSE POSITIVE GUIDANCE

Turning around behavior struggles and empowering your most rambunctious, challenging, sensitive, and vulnerable children with competence for success

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Revitalize daily interactions with children and families with research-based, development-fostering strategies that boost language skills, strengthen social-emotional competence, and increase self-directed behavior regulation. Meet children's unique needs with resilience-promoting, child-centered guidance.

What is unique about young children?

- Average 2-3 year old runs 2.5 miles a day with up to 102 falls.
- Exerts as many calories as 82 rounds of boxing, running 30 miles, or cycling 82 miles.
- They have only one speed: Fast.
- They have only one way of learning: Touch, taste, push, pull, explore.
- They have only one time frame: Right now.
- They have only one way of feeling: Intense.
- They have only one perspective: Their own.

What are the seven senses? Hearing, sight, smell, touch, taste and...

- ✓ *Proprioception*: Awareness and coordination of body location in space.
- ✓ *Vestibular sense*: Ability to maintain balance, fine motor, visual (tracking), and torso control.
- ✓ What do children do to integrate these systems? Play. Run. Move. Twirl. Climb. Dance. Jump.

The following are foundations for behavior: Adequate exercise and nutrition, media limits, sleep, stress mediation, mental health, executive function skills, language development, physical health and wellness.

➡ **PAIR AND SHARE:** How do adults work against children's natural development? Why can children's emotions make you feel upset? What is it about children's behavior that is challenging?

➡ **PAIR AND SHARE:** What is the definition of behavior guidance? What is the goal of behavior guidance? What does the "positive" mean in positive guidance? What should every interaction lead to?

What are common misperceptions that interfere with effective behavior guidance?

- Believing behavior is "bad" or something is wrong with children. ("Misbehaviors" are simply children expressing needs and doing their best to manage and adapt.)
- Using greater control to manage behavior rather than teaching and scaffolding self-control.
- Responding after behaviors occur rather than anticipating and preparing children for success.
- Underestimating what children are capable of learning while overestimating how they are capable of behaving.
- Assuming children can act independently when they require co-regulation.
- Underestimating the influence of consistency and emotional/physical presence/attunement.

What does not work in behavior guidance approaches – and what does?

1. Disregarding children’s physical well-being, mental health, stress, sleep, diet, exercise, and media use. Educate yourself, colleagues, and families.
2. Disregarding development. Work with – instead of against – children’s natural ways of being.
3. Getting upset. Instead, calm and soothe. Stay quietly nearby to describe, reassure, and support emotion management. Use containment and emotion coaching.
4. Shaming rather than teaching. “I told you not to do that.” “You know better.” “Oooh, you are driving me crazy.” Instead: “I will stay with you. I will help you. You are making progress.”
5. Using power struggles. “Do it now.” “If you don’t x, you can’t y.” Instead try, “Let’s do this together.” Child responds to threat with 50% chance of success of success. Goal: self-regulation.
6. Mistaking punishment for discipline. Use guidance – to teach, support, coach, and train.
7. Allowing failure. Every interaction should lead to success. Success leads to more success.
8. Being inconsistent. Allowing one time (or with one child) what you let go another. Asking when you don’t follow through.
9. Telling the child what he did wrong – instead of helping him/her figure out skills and strategies for success (e.g., focusing on the what NOT to do, instead of problem-solving and supporting).
10. Telling parents what children did wrong, instead of sharing positive moments of progress.
11. Thinking the “behavior” is the child’s fault, instead of evaluating all contributions and supports.
12. Taking charge instead of putting children in charge of themselves. How do we do this?
 - Ask instead of tell. Instead of, “Put your feet on the floor,” ask, “Where are your feet? Where do your feet go?”
 - Teach calming skills. Explain what is happening. Stay nearby to assist, calm, support, and reassure. Young children co-regulate – with assistance.

➡ **PAIR AND SHARE:** Describe the top behavior challenges and how adults respond. Which behaviors are most frustrating to you/others? What are you doing now that is NOT working?

Positive Guidance that Changes You and Children

Guidance means to teach and train positive habits of behavior and strengthen self-regulation. Use these strategies individually or combine as needed. The desired goal is to ensure children experience success.

1. Model the behavior you want. Show children by example how to behave.

2. Prepare children for what is coming next. “First we will wash hands. Then we will eat lunch.” Be consistent every time. Only say what you plan to do. Don’t expect children to know what is happening next. They are focused in the moment.

3. Give positive feedback. Narrate what you see. “How kind. You shared your wagon with Skye.” “You stepped over Bryon’s puzzle. Good for you to see what he was doing and tell your body where to go.”

4. Use effective redirection. Rather than mention what should not be done (or tell a child to stop), *describe a safe, positive choice or solution.* “Food goes on the plate.” “Feet go on the floor.” Effective redirection is an incompatible alternative. It replaces rather than stops a behavior.

- Say to a child steering in the direction of another child’s ride-on-toy, “Drive around Tommy.” (Rather than “Don’t hit Tommy.”)
- Say to a child who bumps into another child’s body while walking, “Look for your feet.” (Rather than, “Look out. Don’t bump Charlie.”)
- Say to a child throwing a bean bag towards another child, “Throw the beanbag into the basket.” (Rather than, “Don’t through the bean bag at Remy.”) Alternative: “What is a safe place to throw the bean bag?”

5. Offer choices. Make a simple statement that describes a needed behavior, then add two choices to shift responsibility to the child.

- “Naptime. Do you want to snuggle with your blanket or teddy bear?”
- “Time to pick up toys. Do you want to help pick up the cars or the bears?” If needed, repeat. “Time to pick up toys. Cars or bears?” If the child does not choose, offer the container, help put the bears in, and talk about the upcoming activity.

6. Keep it simple. Young children have a short attention span. Give brief, one-step instructions.

- For a child climbing, say, “Feet on the floor,” rather than, “Look out, Shalynn. You will fall off that chair and hurt yourself.”
- For a child wanting to play at naptime, say, “Naptime. I will pat your back,” rather than, “Honey, if you don’t sleep now, you will be tired when Mamma comes, and I promised her I would help you take a good nap.”
- For a child waving a book around, say, “Book on your lap. Let’s read together,” rather than, “If you wave that book around, you will bop yourself on the head and get hurt.”

7. Use alternatives to “no.” Shift children’s attention forward to a positive activity.

- Redirect or distract. “I have a box of squishy balls. You can roll them down the slide.” Hand the box to the child and demonstrate.
- Offer a choice. “Would you like to paint at the easel or make handprints with Ms. Kelly?” Help the child get started.
- Engage the child in a new activity with other children. “Let’s blow bubbles with Jasmine and Sam.” Guide the child to the children with bubbles.

8. Validate feelings. “It’s hard to sit still.” “I feel like running, too.” Describe feelings you see. “I know you are disappointed. I see you are excited.” “I know you miss momma. Let’s read until she comes.”

9. Encourage and empower success. “Three cheers for my kind children. You were helping each other.” “Awesome! We had fun cleaning up together.” “I am so happy to read with you. You are a good book reader.”

Empower Self-Regulation

Executive function includes: Ability to focus, keep things in mind, act on purpose, and to refrain from acting when needed. The goal is to transfer responsibility from your direction to their self-direction!

1. **Ask instead of tell.** Instead of “Get down from the chair,” ask, “Where do your feet go.” Instead of telling children how to solve problems, show, model, and assist. Invite their ideas.
2. **Build body awareness.** “Where are your hands?” “Let’s look for our feet.” “Does your body feel hungry/thirsty/tired?”
3. **Nurture awareness of others to nurture empathy.** “Sara needs help with her straw.” “Lela looks tired.”
4. **Use physical cues.** Provide placemats, pillows, floor mats, individual tubs, and protected pace for private play (e.g., boxes, forts, mats, spaces). Toddlers need help with boundaries.
5. **Teach and model self-talk.** “Tell your hands to be gentle.” “Tell your feet to walk.” Say, “No thank you” or “Stop.” Tell your brain, “I can stop myself.”
6. **Use soothing touch.** *Let’s Talk Toddlers* provides many safe and soothing ways to touch young children with their permission to make routines and transitions times of connection and comfort.
7. **Foster helping skills.** Children take pride in helping, such as watering plants, folding blankets, sorting crayons, wiping/setting table, and pouring water, preparing food with support and assistance.

Q & A: Self-care routines

During self-care routines, children miss their mommy/daddy, family, and home. These are times for reassurance, soothing, and comforting. These patterns of nurture instill worth and healthy self-care.

- **Potty Time:** “You are making progress. You are learning how. I am glad you came for help.”
- **Nap time:** Increase exercise and nutrition, Read, rub backs, soothe, whisper and keep the same every time. Sleep-time poems, songs, chants, puppets, and finger plays make it special.
- **Meal time:** Offer, but never control or pressure children to eat. Honor internal hunger, needs, and choices. Be a positive role model.

Core Ideas

#1: Messages of love and positive labels are indelible.

#2: Adults must provide nurturing, secure relationships, and rich language interactions.

#3: See the setting through the eyes of children. What is present to learn and explore? What interactions support learning and engagement? Ensure the highest quality for all children.

The strategies in this handout are found in the following books:

- For teaching: 101 Principles for Positive Guidance: Creating Responsive *Teachers* (Pearson, 2013)
- For parenting: Enjoying the Parenting Roller Coaster: Nurturing and Empowering Your Children through the Ups and Downs (Gryphon House, 2016) Winner of two national awards.
- For toddlers: Let’s Talk Toddlers: A Practical Guide to High-Quality Care (Redleaf Press, 2018)
- For family child care: The Essentials: Providing High-Quality Family Child Care (NAEYC, 2018)
- For play: Serious Fun: How Guided Play Extends Children’s Learning (NAEYC, 2019)