

# GROWING IDEAS

## Building Belonging: Providing Guidance for Social Skill Development

### What is meant by guidance?



- As young children grow, they are learning how to develop relationships with others and to be members of a community. All children need support to learn and achieve these important life skills. The process adults use to teach and support this learning is known as guidance. Effective guidance assumes the following conditions:
- Respect, understanding, and appreciation for every child's unique qualities.
  - Knowledge that children's mistaken behaviors provide learning opportunities.
  - An encouraging community where every child belongs and feels safe.
  - A developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive setting.

### Children may need guidance for a variety of reasons, including:

- They are trying out a behavior to see what will happen.
- They want to impress or influence others.
- They have strong, unmet needs (*may feel tired, hungry, ill, lonely, or unsafe*).
- They lack skills needed to succeed.
- The program expectations are not clear or developmentally appropriate.

### Why is guidance important?

The guidance adults provide lays the foundation for social-emotional skill development. Guidance helps young children learn social skills, participate as community members, and develop a positive self-image.

### How do we begin to provide guidance?

- Develop a positive relationship with each child.
- Provide clear and developmentally appropriate expectations.
- Teach and model strategies for solving conflicts and expressing strong feelings based on respect for self and others.
- Understand that behavior is a means of communication. "Listen" to what the child's behavior is "saying," and respond to the message in ways that tell the child, "*I understand and care.*"

## Use educational practices designed to support guidance and prevent challenging behaviors.

- Involve parents and professionals in planning and coordinating consistent expectations and responses across all settings.
- Organize learning centers, the schedule, activities, and staffing patterns so every child can succeed, providing additional supports when needed.
- Consider each child's interests and strengths to design engaging activities.
- Provide positive attention daily and establish a trusting relationship.
- If something is not working, search for solutions, monitor your own feelings, and know where to look when help is needed.

Guidance is not just keeping children in line; it is actively teaching them skills they will need for their entire lives.

Wittmer, D.S., & Honig, A.S. (1994). Encouraging Positive Social Development in Young Children. *Young Children* 49(5), 61-75.

## Help children learn new social skills as part of the planned curriculum:

- Use conflicts that arise during play to teach children how to solve problems. Help children learn to express themselves by suggesting phrases or alternate forms of communication such as pictures. Books, pictures, and puppets can be used to help children learn social skills.
- Teach respect and appreciation for differences by incorporating books, posters, and learning materials that positively represent various cultures, ethnicity, genders, and ability.
- Teach self-regulation by including calming strategies, such as slow breathing, counting, dancing, and stretching exercises, as part of daily activities.
- Teach children to participate as members of a learning community. Express appreciation for children's gifts, talents, and strengths by giving all children a chance to "shine."
- When necessary, speak to children privately and calmly, to help them understand and meet classroom expectations.

## Collaborate, plan, and evaluate as needed:

While most children respond to general guidance strategies, a child may need additional help and a more comprehensive guidance plan.

Begin by:

- Establishing a team, including family, staff, and other professionals involved with the child to create a guidance plan and support implementation of the plan.
- Doing an assessment to understand the message behind the behavior.
- Selecting intervention strategies that support the child based on an understanding of the meaning of the child's behavior.
- Meeting regularly as a team to reflect on the effectiveness of the plan and make adjustments as needed.



## Where to learn more:

Marion, M. (1995). *Guidance of Young Children*. Columbus, OH: Merrill.

Gartrell, D. (2004). *The Power of Guidance: Teaching Social-Emotional Skills in Early Childhood Classrooms*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Honig, A. (2003). *Love & Learn: Positive Guidance for Young Children*. Retrieved January 8, 2005 from <http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200307/love-learn.asp>

See also: *Growing Ideas Toolkit tip sheets*: "Assessment Basics," and "Thoughtful Teaching."



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Revised: 07/27/2006