

Guides to Speech and Action

1. State suggestions or directions in a positive form.

Tell the child what to do vs. what not to do. A question is not a statement. Keep directions short so children will understand all of it. The following are directions stated positively:

- "Ride your bike around the bench" instead of "Don't bump the bench"
- "Throw your ball over here" instead of "Don't throw toward the window"
- "Give the ball to me to hold while you climb" rather than "Don't climb with the ball in your hands"

2. Give the child a choice only when you intend to leave the situation up to him.

Be careful of offering a choice when we are not willing to let him decide the question. "Do you want to go to bed?" is a question. Sometimes a choice is offered to clarify a situation for the child. The teacher may ask, "Do you want to stay in the sandbox?" a response of "yes" is defined further as "Then you will need to play over here, out of Jose's space" Asking questions that end with an "O.K.?" is a question and usually asked when a person feels uncertain or wants to avoid an issue.

3. Use your voice as a teaching tool.

A quiet, firm voice projects confidence and reassurance. Simple, slow direct speech is the most effective. Children are sensitive to the tone quality, tightness in a voice, unfriendliness, or fear. Children are more likely to use their voice in loud, harsh ways if the teacher uses her voice in these ways.

4. Make health and safety of the children a primary concern.

Survey indoors/outdoors before allowing children to enter. Don't offer an activity without adequate supervision. Toys that have been mouthed need to be removed; don't share towels or eating utensils, cups, plates, tissues. Wash hands diligently.

5. Use methods of guidance that build the child's self-respect.

Fear, shame and guilt are not positive motivators; labeling children lowers their self-esteem....like "naughty", "selfish", "spoiled" or "bad". Guidance should help a child acquire acceptable behavior not communicate disrespect. There are reasons for behavior and we need to figure out the circumstances...they need time and practice to acquire desired behaviors.

6. Help a child set standards based on his/her own past performance, rather than on comparison with peers.

Comparing one child to another is a dangerous way to try to influence behavior. Competition can foster aggression, fear and low self-esteem. Someone always loses! Accept the child where s/he is, not based on past accomplishments. Children shouldn't feel the only way to get approval is by being "first" or the "fastest" or by being the "best"

7. Redirect the child in ways consistent with his purpose and interest.

Focus the child toward an activity or interest similar to the original one. If a child takes a toy from another, provide the child with a similar toy. Suggest an alternative that meets the needs s/he is expressing in the behavior.

8. Time directions and suggestions for maximum effectiveness.

Timing is crucial when guiding a child's behavior. Advice given too soon deprives the child of a

chance to try to work things out for him/herself. If a child becomes too frustrated (a little frustration is motivating) offer a suggestion to help the child succeed.

9. Observe the individual ways children use art media, explore the materials yourself, but avoid making models for children to copy.

Copied work is not children's work. Using models is a message that a child's art is not acceptable. Art is not imitation and whatever the child chooses to create is acceptable. Teachers can explore materials to encourage children but don't need to "create" something.

10. Give the child the minimum of help in order that s/he may have the maximum chance to grow in independence.

Allow children to develop self-help skills. Some struggle is acceptable...that's how we learn! Show children how they may help themselves. Ask the child if help is needed—if not, let the child proceed alone. When help is requested, offer the least amount to get the job done. Confidence develops over time and over successes. Allow the child the chance to be successful.

11. Make your directions effective by reinforcing them when necessary.

Sometimes it is necessary to combine several techniques in order to be effective. First, allow the child a chance to hear and process your directions. Follow up with another direction that is consistent with the first one. Keep directions short and give the child a chance to respond. "It's time to go in to lunch" may need to be reinforced with another suggestion like "I'll help you park the bike" or ask "Would you like to park the bike or do you need my help?"

12. Learn to foresee and prevent rather than "mop up" after difficulty.

Learn to anticipate and prevent problems. Avoid the "I told you so" mentality. At meal times, have a wet sponge handy for spills. If a child needs help entering into the play of another suggest things the child can say or do to make friends, "If you would like to play with Mike, ask if he needs this block". Anticipate the child's behavior and offer positive ways to make friends. The key is knowing the children and anticipating their actions---remember temperamental differences!

13. Clearly define and consistently maintain limits when they are necessary.

Limits should be related to children's safety. Safety of others and safety of property. New teachers usually have too many rules. When they are necessary, consistently apply them. Think about the limits you impose—if unreasonable, change them. Children may rebel against limits and scream and say they don't like you. That's OK!! They don't have the experience to know potential harm and you do. Be firm but fair.

14. Use the most strategic positions for supervising.

Experienced teachers are always alert to the entire situation. Scan an area to see where the most optimal point for seeing everything is and supervise from there. Observe all children, not just those in the immediate area. Many times a teacher is often in a better position to help a child when she is at the child's level, and children may feel freer to approach the adult who is sitting. Adults should avoid gathering in groups leaving areas unsupervised.

15. Increase your own awareness by observing and taking notes. The best teachers are always learning. When you are not open to learning about human behavior, stop teaching!! Plan for observation and documentation as part of your daily activities. Memory fades....learn systems that work for you: sticky notes, index cards, voice recording, video recording, clipboards around the room, etc. Notes need to be taken on a daily basis as actions are occurring.