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Growing Ideas - Building Belonging: Providing Guidance for Social Skill Development

University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies

GROWING IDEAS

Building Belonging:
Providing Guidance for Social Skill Development

What is meant by guidance?

As young children with and without disabilities 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.

All children at one time or another, may need guidance for a variety of reasons, including the following:

- Trying out a behavior to see what will happen.
- Wanting to impress or influence others.
- Having strong, unmet needs (tired, hungry, ill, lonely, or unsafe).
- Lacking skills needed to succeed.
- Experiencing program expectations that are not developmentally appropriate or clear.

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 adults begin to provide guidance?

- Develop a positive relationship with every 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.
- Design engaging activities by considering each child's interests and strengths.
- 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.
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> *Wittmer, D.S., & Honig, A.S. (1994). Encouraging Positive Social Development in Young Children. Young Children 49(5), 61-75.*

Help all 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. Guide children to the designated quiet space to relax.
- 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.
- Encourage children to follow rules and routines by helping them to understand and use posted words, picture/photo signs, and charts (visual supports).

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.

To begin:

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

Where to learn more:

See "Building Belonging: Providing Guidance for Social Skills Development — Selected Resources" at http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/guidanceres/

See "Building Belonging: Providing Guidance for Social Skills Development — Virtual Toolkit" at http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/guidancevtk/