

# **BASIC TENETS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

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1. Every child is an individual with his own rate and style of learning and growing, his own unique patterns of approach to situations, and his own innate capacities.
2. The genetic constitution and the environment together determine the course of development of an individual.
3. Intelligence develops as it is nurtured.
4. All aspects of development are interrelated: physical, social, emotional, and intellectual/cognitive.
5. Growth means change.
6. Growth takes place in orderly sequences or stages, with each successive stage depending on the outcome of previous stages.
7. Play is an important avenue for learning and for enjoyment.
8. Attitudes and feelings are important in learning and in healthy personality growth.
9. Behavior is motivated by extrinsic and intrinsic factors.
10. Understanding responsible guidance is necessary if the child is to develop his potential.
11. The development of a young child suffers if there are deficiencies in nutrition and health care; in attention and loving care; in opportunities to play and have relationships, which nourish social, emotional, and intellectual growth.
12. A healthy environment is the right of every child and the first responsibility of the community, the state, and the nation.

## **GUIDES TO SPEECH AND ACTION**

Summarized from Read, Gardner, Mahler, *Early Childhood Programs: Human Relationships & Learning* 9<sup>th</sup> Edition, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, N.Y. 1992

Summary: A goal of the Child Development Center is to create an atmosphere permeated with mutual respect and trust so authentic relationships with children and adults can develop. In order for student teachers to build strong relationships with children, the teachers must trust children, be attentive in interactions, appear approachable and allow time for the relationship to develop. These relationships allow the children an opportunity to problem solve and negotiate strategies with other children and adults. Student teachers may use only positive, patient, compassionate, and nurturing techniques with the children.

It is acceptable to disregard ignorable behavior. The use of "time-out" is prohibited. Although, the use of "spending quiet, calm, nurturing time with the individual children" can be utilized in situations where balancing the needs of the individual with the needs of the group is identified. Utilizing "time with individual children" can help children to regain composure or successfully rejoin situations such as, meal, story, or group time. The goal is for children to learn "self-discipline" where intrinsic (internal) motivation is more important than extrinsic (external) motivators. Children are validated in a positive manner as they express autonomy and independence. The preschool classrooms are child centered rather than teacher centered.

## **Guides in Speech**

### **1. State suggestions or directions in a positive rather than a negative form.**

A positive suggestion is one, which tells a child what to do instead of pointing out what he is not to do. A positive direction is less likely to rouse resistance. It makes help seem constructive rather than limiting. When we make suggestions in a positive way, we are giving the child a good social tool to use. To put directions positively represents a step in developing a more positive attitude toward children's behavior inside ourselves. If you say "Leave the door open" instead of "Don't close the door," the child knows what to do and doesn't have to stop and think, "What should I do?"

- Avoid use of the word "no" and/or "careful" when starting suggestions or directions in positive form to children. Be specific with statements. For example, "Slow your tricycle down when you get near other trikes" rather than, "No crashing into other tricycles" or "Be careful."

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

Choices are legitimate. With increasing maturity one makes an increasing number of choices. But there are decisions, which a child is not ready to make because of his limited capabilities and experience. We must avoid offering him a choice when we are not really willing to let him decide the answer. It is confusing to the child to be asked a question when what is wanted is not information but only confirmation or agreement. Be sure your questions are legitimate ones. If you give the child a choice, let the child choose. "Do you want to clean up?" is not really a choice if the child must do it.

Transitional warnings: Before children move from one activity to another, it is mutually respectful to give all the children a transitional warning. This transitional warning gives children a chance to prepare mentally for a change while choosing how to spend the last few minutes before the transition. For example, "Five more minutes before lunch time." Typically the lead teacher walks around and alerts all teachers in the indoor and outdoor environments. As children may be absorbed in an activity, the supervising teachers in each area then follow up with individual transitional warnings.

**3. Your voice is a teaching tool. Use words and a tone of voice, which will help the child to feel confident and reassured.**

A quiet firm manner of speaking conveys confidence. It may be necessary to speak firmly, but it is typically never necessary to raise one's voice. The most effective speech is simple, direct, and slow. It is always better to move nearer the person, to whom you are speaking, rather than to call or shout across any play area. Your words will get a better reception if they are spoken quietly, fact to face. If you lower your voice tone to show the child you mean what you say, that helps the child realize you are serious. Your face shows a change also. In a situation that involves safety and you believe that you are too far from the situation to stop it promptly, you may use the child's name and say firmly "stop." For example, you see that a child is ready to push another child off of the climbing structure, so you say firmly and loud enough for the child to hear, "Gabriela, stop!"

**4. Avoid trying to change behavior by methods, which may lead to loss of self-respect such as shaming a child or labeling behavior "naughty," "selfish."**

Neither children nor adults are likely to develop desirable behavior patterns as the result of fear, shame, or guilt. In learning constructive ways of guiding behavior, our first step is to eliminate destructive patterns: gestures, expressions, tone of voice, and words that pass judgment. A child will be helped if we accept him as he is and try to make it possible for him to find some success, rather than if we reprove him because he does not meet our standards. Say "almost", when a child succeeds partially. It is more helpful to say, "I can't let you do that; you might get hurt." Instead of "you're bad" or "that's not nice to hit your friend."

**5. Avoid motivating a child by making competitions between one child and another or by encouraging competition.**

Children who are encouraged to be competitive are very likely to quarrel more with one another. In competition someone always loses and is likely to feel hurt and resentful. Competition does not build friendly, social feelings. It also created problems within the child. Neither constant success nor too many failures prepare a child well for what he will meet later in a competitive world. Avoid competitive kinds of motivation until children have developed ego strength and can balance failures with successes. Young children fall apart or get very angry when they are involved in competition.

**6. Redirect the child by suggesting an activity that is related to his own purposes or interest whenever possible.**

We will be more successful in changing the child's behavior if we attempt to turn his attention to an act, which has equal value for him but is acceptable. Suggestions for acting differently will take into account the different meanings in behaviors-throwing (balls instead of sand), vigorous play (raking leaves instead of running wildly). Redirection should help the child face his problem by showing how it can be met, not by diverting him. The child's ideas are sometimes in the wrong place or amount; a child's running is acceptable outside but not inside. Always help children to re-engage and achieve success in the activity that s/he has been redirected. Allow the children an opportunity to negotiate and help find an acceptable solution.

**7. The effectiveness of a suggestion or a direction may depend largely in its timing.**

The timing of a suggestion may be as important as the suggestion itself. Advice given too soon deprives the child of a chance to try to work things out for himself. A suggestion made too late may have lost any chance of being successful. Through experience one can increase one's skill in giving a suggestion at the moment when it will do the most good. We watch to see if the child can handle the situation or resist the urge to do something wrong. But if not, then stepping in quickly is important; the longer we wait, the more the child feels we accept the behavior.

## **Guides in Action**

**1. Avoid making models in any are medium for the children to copy.**

Art is valuable because it is a means of self-expression. The young child needs avenues of expression. His speech is limited. His feelings are strong. If he has models before him, he may be blocked in using art as a means of self-expression. He will be less likely to be creative and more likely to be limited in trying to copy. Art then becomes only another area where he strives to imitate the adult who can do things much better. Give the child ideas to get him started and talk about how it takes a long time to learn. He can watch artists at work to see techniques but will not feel competent if we do it for him.

**2. Give the child the minimum of help in order that he may have the maximum chance to grow in independence, but give help when the child needs it.**

Children's self-confidence is increased by independent solving of problems. There are all kinds of ways to help a child help himself rather than stepping in and doing it for him. In leaving the child free to satisfy his strong growth impulse to be independent, we support his feeling of confidence in himself: "I can do this all by myself."

To allow the child do things for himself does not mean denying their requests for help. When a child asks for help, we listen to his request and answer it in a way that will make him less helpless and dependent. Confidence in self is based on a foundation of trust in others. As the child develops physical skills using hand and body, the child's self image improves.

**3. Make your directions effective by reinforcing them when necessary.**

A verbal suggestion, even though given positively, may not be enough in itself. A glance at the right moment, moving nearer a child, a verbal suggestion, or actual physical help are all techniques. One common fault of parents and teachers is using too many words. Have confidence in the child's ability to hear and respond. But add different techniques together until successful rather than depend solely on words. Just the word "now" spoken softly but closer to the child can reinforce directions. Sometimes the reinforcement is an offer of help to do it together.

5. **Forestalling is often the most effective way of handling problems. Learn to foresee and prevent rather than mop up after a difficulty.**

Learning to prevent problems is important because, in many cases, children do not profit from making mistakes, or the consequences would be too serious, or the child may interpret consequences incorrectly. Effective guidance depends on knowing how to forestall and prevent trouble as much as on knowing what to do when trouble occurs. Sometimes forestalling means explaining to the child what to expect from an event. When you can predict a child's response, you can avoid an unpleasant situation before it occurs. Supervision is crucial to the children's safety. Position yourself so you can see as much as possible in your area. Move closer as you anticipate help needed.

6. **When limits are necessary, they should be clearly defined and consistently maintained.**

In a well-planned environment at school or home, there will not be many "no's"; but these "no's" will be clearly defined, and the child will understand them. The adult must be the one who is responsible for limiting children so that they do not come to harm or do not harm others or destroy property. Children will feel more secure with adults who can take this responsibility. The same rules must apply each day and in a reasonable situation. When a different situation happens, such as visiting someone in the hospital, explain why the rules are changed.

6. **Be alert to the total situation. Use the most strategic positions for supervising.**

Observation of the total situation is essential to effective guidance: for children's safety, for helping children, and for enrichment of experience. Trouble is seldom avoided by a suggestion given at a distance. Your presence nearby is often enough to help a child stay in control.

- **The health and safety of the children are a primary concern at all times.** The skillful teacher or parent never relaxes watchfulness for things, which affect the health and safety of the children. It is the reason we stop children most.
- **Observe and take notes: increase your own awareness of what goes on.** Underlying all these guides is the assumption that teaching is based on the ability to observe behavior objectively and to evaluate its meaning. Skill in observing and recording is essential in building understanding. Parents also learn about their child from observation, though it is seldom written. Observation tells us where the child is in the developmental sequence as well as his unique patterns and responses.

## **Additional "Guides for Speech and Action"**

1. **Active listening: listen reflectively to the child's feelings: mirror them.**

This is a special skill that will be discussed in seminar and class. Identify in your mind what the child is feeling right now. While maintaining eye contact when having conversations with children at their level, "mirror back feelings/thoughts" to him/her. "You're seem angry." "You want a turn NOW." "It's hard to wait." Avoid saying, "I know just how you feel." Especially avoid the temptation to include a little "lesson": "You appear angry, but it's not nice to hit," or "You want a turn now, but everybody has to share here; and if you don't share, he won't want to share with you, and..." In order to listen actively, student teachers will need to reserve conversations with other adults to before and after class unless it directly relates to the children.

Stay at child's level at all times. If the student teacher is in the indoor environment, s/he will probably either sit in a child-sized chair or sit on the carpet. When student teachers are in the outdoor environment, they can sit on the grass or sand unless they are supervising the climbing structure at which time it is appropriate to stand.

Talk to the children to show an interest in their play, but step back - do not play with them unless invited by the child. The program utilized the philosophy of floor time and child-directed play where the child gets to be in charge of his/her play.

2. **Change undesirable behavior, or promote desirable behavior, by changing the physical environment.**

You teach best by example. If you run in the hall (to the telephone), why can't the children run in the hall? If you chew gum, why can't children chew gum at school? (It gets in someone's hair!) If you shout across the play yard, why can't children yell at someone and expect compliance? An obvious example seldom occurs at nursery school, but may occur at home: if you use "bad language," why can't children say the same words? If you use "please" and "thank-you" at the snack table, the children are more likely to follow your model.

3. **Change undesirable behavior, or promote desirable behavior, by changing the physical environment.**

Take a good look at the room, at the yard, at the locker room, at the gate, at the kitchen. Do they suggest by arrangement any clues for the behavior or activities expected there? What can be added or removed so adults won't have to state rules or limits to children? How can the environment promote the behavior we prefer?

- Drips of paint on the floor by the easel? The children see the bucket of water and sponge; may mop up without an adult suggestion.
- Running inside the building? Furniture arrangement discourages running.

4. **Arrange it so the child experiences the natural consequences, the logical consequences of his/her behavior.**

We try to teach the children cause and effect rather than punish.

- Flour or macaroni or water is spilled? The child, with teacher's help, can use broom and dustpan or sponge.
- A child repeatedly throws sand, after a warning? The consequence is that he/she may not play in the sand anymore until after snack or until tomorrow. Likewise, when equipment is used incorrectly, the child loses the privilege of playing with it for a short, easily comprehended time.

A positive consequence of sharing (blocks, dolls, ride in trailer) is that the child has a friend; "she likes to play with you." Adults can point this out. Some consequences are beyond a child's ability to understand; breaking a drum head by pounding on it with a stick (instead of using hands) or pushing a doll buggy into the sand area (getting sand into the axels) has the consequence of requiring repairs and depriving children of the equipment. We adults have to step in with simple explanations (not moralizing) and redirection of the behavior.