



# Promoting Positive Behaviour Guidelines

  
Barnardos

2011

# Acknowledgements

Special thanks go to Dr. Karen L. Bierman, Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Director of the Child Study Centre at Pennsylvania State University for her generosity of time and knowledge. Her approach to social-emotional development forms the basis of our model for promoting positive behaviour.

The development of these practice standards is thanks to the hard work, commitment and enthusiasm of a number of Barnardos staff:

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A warm thanks to the staff and managers from the Barnardos centres who generously participated in the various stages of the development of this document.

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# Introduction

These guidelines were developed by Barnardos to guide staff and managers with the application of our promoting positive behaviour policy (2011). This policy outlines Barnardos' commitment to an approach of social-emotional coaching as this has been demonstrated to promote emotional understanding, problem-solving and help children develop the skills which are needed for effective self-regulation. The foundation of this approach is the use of the teaching pyramid which is a mix of promotion strategies, induction strategies and some external control strategies where needed.

This document contains information about the promoting positive behaviour approach, more specifically social-emotional skill development, and considerable detail on the application of the teaching pyramid in practice.

These guidelines can be used both with individuals and in group contexts. The final section focuses on how they apply across different age groups i.e. Best Start (0–5 years), Best Chance (6–12 years), Best Choice (13–18 years) and Adults.

# Developing Social-Emotional Skills

Children are unique individuals who express their feelings and emotions through their behaviour. Social and emotional skills building is an essential part of children's development. In our work with children we support them, according to their developmental needs, to express their individual thoughts and feelings, to manage their emotions and to self-regulate their behaviour more effectively.

Social-emotional development is affected by experiences in children's lives including in the home, school and community. Their social and emotional skills are also influenced by experiences, many of which may have made it feel unsafe to express their feelings and emotions<sup>1</sup>. This suppression of emotions may lead to expression of feelings through unpredictable or challenging behaviour.

Social-emotional coaching promotes emotional understanding, self-control and positive peer interactions. It helps children with problem-solving and develops the skills which are needed for effective self-regulation. In order to help children, we must be aware of our own emotional reactions towards their behaviour and ensure that we manage these constructively through what we say, how we say it and what we do.



<sup>1</sup>such as domestic violence, bereavement or neglect

# The Teaching Pyramid<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup>Bierman, K.L., Domitrovich, C.E., Welsh, J.A. and the Head Start REDI Team (2004) *Promoting Social-Emotional Competence: Coaching Strategies for Teachers*. Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania State University

In order to promote social-emotional development we use the following:

1. **Promotion strategies** which are used liberally, every day.
2. **Induction strategies** which are needed less often. They are used when children are struggling with a social-emotional challenge and need support to self-regulate.
3. **External control strategies** which are used least often, only as they are needed and may never be used.

# Applying the Teaching Pyramid

## 1. Promotion Strategies

Promotion strategies form the basis for all our work and are used every day. They can help to prevent the escalation of challenging behaviour and reduce the social and emotional challenges between children and their peers. The quality of our relationship with them is key, as children are more responsive if they feel connected to adults.

### **Environment**

Effective preparation and planning of the environment is essential. The way in which physical space is structured and organised can either encourage or discourage behaviour:

- Allow enough time to prepare the room before meeting the children
- Arrange space and resources in a way that maximises children's learning opportunities



## Group composition

When bringing a group of children together we should consider the mix of children attending the group in order to create the optimum learning environment:

- Consider the optimum group size for the particular programme
- Avoid creating groups of children who have aggressive behaviours. When working with children who have aggressive behaviours, include them in mixed gender groups that also contain children with other types of social difficulties, such as social withdrawal



## Rules, routines and expectations

Children are better able to manage themselves when our expectations and routines are predictable and engaging. We should:

- Clearly display information about group expectations to guide children regarding what behaviour is expected of them
- Anticipate and plan for transitions and endings - how will children be supported as they move from one activity to the next, or prepared for the ending of the session?
- Negotiate choices with the children as this can help them take appropriate responsibility and provides them with positive life skills, such as listening and reasoning
- Give children the chance to exercise choice whenever there is an opportunity for a real choice to be made and then follow through on implementing their decision
- Create opportunities that encourage children's participation in decisions relating to their environment, rules and routines, etc.



## 2. Induction Strategies

Induction strategies help to improve children's behaviour by helping them to access their feelings, therefore encouraging self-awareness and self-regulation.

The goal of induction strategies is to provide positive guidance and support to children, giving them information about what they could or should do. They should be used prior to, or instead of, correcting the children or telling them what not to do.

Children are not always aware of which emotions are affecting their behaviour. Sometimes we need to figure out what children are feeling by observing their behaviour. We can then respond in a way that addresses both the behaviour and the feeling. When we recognise this unmet emotional need, we should respond by giving the appropriate emotional support whilst also addressing the behaviour.

Different induction strategies can be used to support children of different ages and different needs. It is important to vary our use of these strategies to ensure we do not overuse one option with same child or group of children.

### Induction strategies:

- Use active listening to get a clear picture of what is happening and to validate the child's experience
- Offer an emotionally neutral response to absorb the affect
- State your hopes and positive expectations
- Use 'I' statements, such as: "I hope...." or "I am worried that...."
- Ask for peer feedback
- Focus on consequences that matter for the child
- Praise the positive behaviour of others
- Give realistic choices to the child to help him/her to self-regulate
- Use positive redirection
- Use appropriate physical proximity and supportive contact for the child

The induction approach does not mean that we intervene or react to every situation or behaviour. It is important to remember to ignore some behaviour, the exception being if a child has harmed, or is likely to harm, someone else or him/herself.

When the behaviour is attracting attention from other children and adults, ignoring it can help it to cease. This can be a positive strategy as it does not feed the child's idea that if he/she misbehaves, he/she gets attention. It is important to remember that we are ignoring the behaviour, not ignoring the child.

## Different children, different induction strategies

There are two common emotional needs or triggers which, if not met for children, can result in challenging behaviour: **relatedness** and **autonomy**. Many children have both relatedness and autonomy issues.

### *Relatedness*

**Relatedness**, or **security**, is the desire to feel 'connected to' and 'supported by' others. When children feel secure with other people, they are able to participate with ease. They can ask for help and support, if needed, but are also comfortable alone and with friends. Children who have relatedness issues can be extra sensitive to threat and perceive that others are 'not on their side' or that they are not going to be accepted. This may trigger an over-reaction in children, with them exhibiting feelings of anxiety, distress, abandonment, loneliness and anger.

Security needs can be triggered when a child is trying to join in, or is left out of, an activity; is being ignored by an adult or the adult is giving attention to someone else. The associated behavioural reaction could be refusal to join in, withdrawal, isolation and hostile or intrusive behaviour towards others.



Induction strategies to use with a child with *relatedness* issues:

- Provide meaningful praise, positive attention and displays of affection
  - Give compliments for appropriate behaviour
  - Provide affection (e.g. smiles, hugs, compliments, pats on head)
  - Avoid combining praise and correction
- Make time for positive adult-child interactions
  - Play with the child
  - Create roles for a child who is disengaged
  - Create opportunities for a child to be special helper
  - Use supportive social referencing
- Help the child connect with peers
  - Look for opportunities for children to play in pairs or smaller groups
  - Praise children for co-operative activities
  - Draw children together by pointing out similarities



## *Autonomy*

Some children have particular needs in relation to **autonomy**. They need to feel in control and to make choices. They want to be their own boss and do things themselves.

Children with a high need for autonomy may feel threatened if they are constantly asked to comply with, or be controlled by, others and can react negatively to commands. They can test limits, break rules and find it hard to accept suggestions.

These children are particularly sensitive if they feel there has been unfairness in sharing or that they have not had equal access to opportunities or resources. They find turn-taking difficult. These feelings may manifest in 'testing the limits', being domineering and being very aggressive towards their peers.

Induction strategies to use with the *autonomous* child are:

- Use appropriate physical proximity and supportive contact for the child
- Keep limits clear and offer the child more praise
- Praise the positive behaviour of others – looking for children who are behaving the way you want
- Label your hopes and positive expectations – focusing on the kind of behaviour you want to see. This can help re-orientate the child
- Use 'I' statements – these can help the child to see the cause-effect impact of his/her behaviour
- Elicit peer feedback
- Focus on consequences that matter for the child
- Give choices
- Identify what rule children have complied with, how well they did and what the benefit for them was



## Conflict resolution

Conflict situations can become learning opportunities through the use of conflict resolution mechanisms, such as 'traffic light' or 'turtle'. A four stage conflict resolution strategy is used wherein children are supported to:

- Stop, take a deep breath, say the problem and how they feel
- We then name the children's feelings and the problem as we see it, which can validate the child and de-escalate the emotion
- Help children to think of what they can do to solve the problem, make a plan and think about whether it would work
- Support them in trying out their best idea and help them reflect on how it worked

Conflict resolution enables children to pause before they act.

It is important that we ask children for their ideas of how the problem can be solved, rather than offering an adult solution. By asking children to generate their own solutions, we are fostering their ability to solve problems by themselves.



### 3. External Control Strategies

Sometimes promotion and induction strategies may not work for a particular child. Where a child is struggling we need to stop and ask ourselves: what is too challenging for this child? What do I need to do differently?

When managing behaviour in the context of group sessions it may occasionally be necessary to provide external control. This is the use of clear, direct commands and consequences, which are aimed at eliciting improved behaviour.

These management strategies are designed to be short term responses which allow us to handle periodic disruptive behaviour of individual children whilst maintaining group focus. External control strategies should not be used as an ongoing way to manage a child's or children's behaviour.

These strategies are used least because external control does not promote the child's ability to self-regulate, but they may be needed when a child is too upset or the behaviour is too disruptive or disorganised for him/her to be able to listen to, or respond to, induction strategies.

External control strategies can do as much harm as good. It is essential that we think through our plan and consider if it is going to be the right thing to do. Some external control strategies, such as holding or time out, can escalate the situation as a child can perceive them as a direct challenge. These strategies relate to the control of a particular issue and do not provide learning opportunities for the child.



It is also important to remember that any behavioural issues which may endanger a child's safety require immediate intervention by staff. Whilst the promotion of positive behaviour is Barnardos' strategy, the priority is always to keep all children emotionally and physically safe.

Some children may struggle with serious behavioural difficulties which are creating

problems for them at home, in school or in their community. In these instances we should develop an individualised behavioural management plan which focuses on both the short term goal of helping a child regulate behaviour whilst working with him/her on the longer term goal of identifying and regulating emotions. In the short term a more directive approach may be required in order to ensure the child and others are safe. An effective behaviour plan will be specific and individualised with clearly defined behavioural goals<sup>3</sup> developed with both the parent and the child.

<sup>3</sup>Linked to specific rewards and consequences

## Time-away

- In some situations, it may be appropriate to use 'time away' to enable children to calm down e.g. following an incident in which they have been very angry, anxious or frustrated to the extent that they themselves and others have been upset and disrupted from their activities.
- Time away should only be used when children are not able to self-regulate or control themselves and need adult intervention. At such times, they rely on adults to help them gain control of their behaviour, calm down and reflect.
- These strategies should only be used for a short period of time. They should take place within the room and only be used if we consider that the children are going to accept it. Encouraging children by suggesting "let's take a break for a minute" is more effective than physically bringing children to a time out space / chair.
- Adult support is needed throughout time away, and the children and adults should decide when the children feel able to continue to participate in the activities.
- If time away is used with a child, staff must stop and consider what they are asking that is too difficult for the child and should develop an individual behaviour management plan.



## Token rewards

Another external control strategy is the 'token reward' or a point earning reinforcement system. This strategy should only be applied on a temporary basis. It should then cease, because this system does not contribute to building internal self-regulation skills and will not be available to children when they are managing behaviour in their wider environment. Ideally, token rewards should be given within the session.

Token rewards should only be used in a group context to ensure the children are safe. Token rewards should focus on children earning tokens for positive behaviour. For example, children may be encouraged to earn token sweets by taking part in the group activities. The sweets are then gathered in a jar and shared amongst the whole group at the end of the session. In this way, the individual child's compliant behaviour is benefitting the whole group. This has been shown to reduce any victimisation of the child by peers.

Token rewards should be small rewards without a stated target for success. That is, guidance for the children should be "if you get enough" rather than if they get a defined number.

# Conclusion – A Balanced Approach

A balanced approach should be taken towards the promotion of positive behaviour. It is important to remember that no single strategy will be effective in every situation, or with every child.

At different stages of child development, strategies must vary to suit the individual's needs, and adults are encouraged to combine and integrate these approaches and strategies.

The strategies in the 'Teaching Pyramid' provide children, and those working with them, with support for social-emotional learning and self-management of the children's behaviour.

# Some Things to Remember

## Best Start (0–5 year olds)

- The adults' role is to ensure that children know what is expected of them in different situations.
- Encourage children to express feelings in a variety of different ways, for example, through clay or sand work or by playing active games.
- Assist children by suggesting language to help them name and then articulate their feelings.
- Teaching young children the 'why' of a boundary helps them to internalize and learn the rules of social living.
- Wherever possible, offer choices to children and follow through on their decisions, as this enables children to feel their independence is being respected.
- Time spent with a child in activities chosen by the child, even if it is only for a few minutes of every day, can have a positive effect on behaviour.
- Every child needs and deserves attention, as he/she is rapidly developing social skills and relationships with adults and the adult world around him/her. It must be remembered that a child will accept negative attention, rather than no attention. Adults must recognise this underlying need, pay attention when the child is responding positively and acknowledge this behaviour through praise and reinforcement.



## Best Chance (6–12 year olds)

- Appropriate reinforcement helps children build self-confidence and encourages them to repeat positive behaviours. When using this strategy, adults should take care to focus on the specific behaviour rather than on the children. This enables the children to recognise their own self-worth rather than being dependent on adults for their perception of themselves.
- The intent of modelling a problem-solving approach is to provide internal resources for children to be able to overcome their obstacles to success. By asking children to think of solutions, we are building their capacity to solve problems in the future, whereas if we suggest solutions we may solve the current problem, but this will not build the children's problem-solving skills.
- If children are unable to suggest solutions, it may be appropriate to pose different scenarios.
- When a situation has been resolved, follow-up with the children and encourage them to reflect on their actions. This builds and reinforces problem-solving skills.
- Redirection can be an effective strategy for children of all ages. As children mature, this strategy enables them to recognize their own emotions and behaviours and to redirect themselves away from an over-stimulating situation, activity or location before inappropriate behaviours occur or escalate. When children are guided to develop impulse control and redirect themselves to an area that helps them to 'feel better', they are able to participate in shared settings.



## Best Choice (13–18 year olds)

- When young people attend our services, we should work out with them how we will work together to achieve joint objectives.
- Explore which behaviours would be acceptable and unacceptable with each young person and communicate expectations clearly. Agree with them the potential consequences of not adhering to this.
- Reassure them that all emotions and feelings are OK and healthy.
- Our interventions should be based on an in-depth understanding of the individual's experience, feelings and needs.
- It is important to consider and understand young people in the context of their different relationships with their family, peers and community.
- Always be clear with young people about what information is shared with parents and professionals and why this is so.
- Some behaviour, such as swearing and spitting, may be considered within normal development parameters for this age group.



## Adults

- Staff working with children, and delivering services to them and their families, have a particular role in modelling and promoting positive behaviour through enabling a healthy expression of feelings and emotions.
- Behaviour can be culturally defined; therefore similar behaviours can be interpreted differently in different cultures, for example, eye contact and touching.
- It is important to give parents opportunities to express emotions, as this creates capacity for them to focus on their children's needs.
- Active listening further enables the expression of emotions.
- Open-ended questions enable the understanding of the emotional link between feelings and behaviour and to cognitively plan to make changes.
- Create a positive climate where emotions and feelings can be expressed safely, by being empathetic, non-judgemental, child-focused, calm and able to resolve conflict.