

Behaviour Modification Policy

July 2007

A Child Care Centre is a place of joy, learning and wonder for children of many ages.

There are many varied behavioural problems and concerns that arise and they can be difficult to manage. Each child is a unique individual and their behaviour is indicative of this, therefore every situation is different and should be handled as such.

Our ultimate goal at Children First Learning Centres is to help young children with their behaviour and to assist them to control their actions and reactions.

We endeavour to do this by:

- Discussing choices children can make and how to act and behave appropriately, BEFORE problems occur,
- Give consequence to the action ALWAYS reassuring the child they are welcome back into the group when they feel they are able to use their voice to express their feelings,
- Actively teaching children how to make friends, keep friends and be liked by others. This is a pro-social skill,
- Helping and guiding children to negotiate solutions and conflicts. This is conflict resolution.

However there are some trends and characteristics that develop in Child Care at some stage or another and this is usually age appropriate.

Some could be:

- Active and distracted
- Biting
- Hitting and Aggression
- Temper Tantrums
- Mean and Cruel
- Swearing and name-calling
- Clingy and Dependent
- Excessive crying or whinging
- Lying
- Shy and withdrawn
- Stealing

By guiding children's behaviour positively the staff at Children First Learning Centres aim to help children develop sensitivity to self and others. Strategies for prevention and action are outlined on the following pages. This involves helping young children develop the skills, attitudes and understandings required to take control of self, and respond appropriately to others.

1. ACTIVE AND DISTRACTED

This child has difficulty concentrating or sitting still for a short time.

PREVENTION

- Avoiding a situation that is overly stimulating for the children.
- By labeling and organizing all shelves and containers.
- Informing all children of what to expect ahead of time.
- Setting up any following daily routines.
- Providing an equal balance of free, structured, unstructured, indoor and outdoor play.
- Giving instructions clearly and specifically for tasks.
- Keeping group times short and meeting in small groups.

ACTION

- Providing physical contact like a touch or a cuddle. This helps active children feel more in control of themselves.
- Changing teacher expectations.
- Using redirection to give the child a non-destructive or even positive outlet for energy.
- Some children may need to be referred to paediatrician for physical examination, which may have a physiological cause.

2. BITING

Children who bite usually do so because they feel frustrated or angry. They often act quickly and impulsively, too young or immature to think through other choices. The age where biting is most frequent is between 13 months and 24 months. Some children bite because their language skills are not developed enough to say what they want. Teething can also be a cause of biting.

PREVENTION

- Having at least 2 of each toy for toddlers.
- Creating a setting with few frustrations.
- Attending to teething needs of toddlers.
- Providing a variety of ways for children to express their feelings and frustrations e.g. play dough, hammering, toys to pound.
- Helping children to express their feelings with words and vocalization.
- Providing a great deal of individual attention and affection.

ACTION

- Comfort the child who has been bitten and say in a sharp voice, “that hurts”.
- Be brief so as not to give the biter too much attention.
- Monitor the child daily for times and circumstances that involve biting, make necessary changes to the routine to alleviate the action that warrants the behaviour.
- Encourage the child to vocalise their need instead of biting.

3. HITTING AND AGGRESSION

This is probably the greatest single behaviour concern of teachers. Realising that a certain amount of this behaviour is normal and to be expected with young children is important. Many children are not fully able to control their strong feelings, and they act impulsively. They are also not able to understand the consequences of their actions.

PREVENTION

- Give the child a choice of words that can be used instead of hitting.
- Discussions with the group as to why we don't hit other people.

ACTION

- Redirection of children into cooperative games that involve working together.

4. MEAN AND CRUEL

Mean and cruel behaviours are very disturbing to see. We worry about children who seem to be without a conscience. Rather than seeing them as "problems", Teachers can help these children by being empathetic. We try to let them know that we think they are good people worthy of love, although we don't approve of their behaviours. We try to accept their anger as legitimate feelings to have and the show them better ways of expressing it. We give them a great deal of positive encouragement and attention when they are acting in acceptable ways. Children develop consciences as a result of knowing that an adult cares deeply about them.

PREVENTION

- Establish a classroom rule: "Use your body and words without hurting others or yourself".
- Assuring all children that we will not let anyone be mean to them and that we will not let them be mean to anyone else.
- Teaching the children the correct words to use and the correct actions to take.
- Letting them know that it's OK to be angry and showing them how to express this without hurting others.
- Providing many outlets for children to express their strong feelings safely and positively.

ACTION

- Realising that the child who is being cruel is building itself up by putting others down.
- Helping the child who is the object of the cruel behaviour by standing up for them-selves.
- Intervening when needed and making the children aware of the impact of their behaviour.
- Build self-esteem in the child through positive verbal reinforcement and through physical affection.

5. TEMPER TANTRUMS

This behaviour is fairly common in toddlers, but if seen in children older than three

and a half, it is a cause for concern. Toddlers throw tantrums because they do not have the language to express their needs. All their frustrations in understanding and coping with the world of “giants” build up to the point where they explode. Preschool children, however, usually can think abstractly enough to get their needs met with other people, and have more self-control and emotional maturity.

PREVENTION

- Providing many outlets for children to express their emotions and feelings.
- Reduce frustrations by offering many choices of a wide variety of hands-on, self-directed activities.
- Observe the children carefully and step in when they begin to get frustrated and help them to solve their problem.

ACTION

- Ignore the tantrum, except to ensure the safety of the child and other children. Giving attention (negative or positive) will result in an increase of the tantrums because you are reinforcing the child’s goal.
- Tell the child it’s OK to be frustrated and angry but it’s NOT OK to disturb others. When they are ready to be calm they may join the others.
- Make adjustments to daily routine if after observation we find there is something we find there is something triggering the child.
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6. SWEARING AND NAME CALLING

This can be a difficult problem for teachers because they do not want to ignore foul language, yet they know paying attention to it may make it worse. Children use swear words because it gets a big response and this makes them feel powerful.

THE KEY TO ELIMINATING THE BEHAVIOUR IS TO TAKE AWAY THE POWER OF THE WORDS, TO MAKE THE CHILDREN FEEL POWERFUL IN ACCEPTABLE WAYS, AND TO TEACH BETTER RESPONSES TO ANGER OR FRUSTRATION.

Other behaviours commonly seen in child-care settings are listed below. These behaviours are often seen but rarely become major problems for parents and staff.

7. CLINGY AND DEPENDENT

Clingy and Dependent behaviours are NORMAL for children who are new to a program or who are going through a difficult change. However, some children are clingy and dependent because they have learned that it gets them what they want. In either case indulging the behaviour is not helpful to the child.

8. EXCESSIVE CRYING OR WHINGING

This problem is more common in children who are new to the centre.

9. LYING

All young children lie occasionally. In most cases they do not see this as doing something wrong. They believe it is acceptable to lie if the lie prevents them or a friend from being punished. Because young children think very differently than adults, moral lectures will not change the behaviour. Instead adults can avoid putting children in situations that force them to lie in order to save face. We can also forgive the occasional lie as a typical behaviour of young children.

10. ROUGH PLAY

Rough play is part of childhood. We will never be able to eliminate the need some children have for it. For many children, it is a way of expressing affection for another child.

11. SHY AND WITHDRAWN

This personality characteristic can stay with people throughout their lives, even though shy people express a lot of pain and unhappiness about the condition. The causes can be numerous, but many shy children have low self-esteem, therefore it is our job as teachers and parents to make all children feel loved, desirable and respected.

12. STEALING

Most children steal because they feel deprived. They feel they are missing something that other children have. They often obtain material objects as a substitute for affection.