

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN

The material in this chapter was compiled by Melody Bucholz from a variety of sources, including her long experience with children. It serves not only as a supplement to the information on parent helping in earlier chapters, but as a source of ideas for all aspects of our work as parents.

Guidelines (general) for working with children

1. When talking with children, squat down to their level.
2. Sit down whenever possible while supervising.
3. Answer questions, and talk to the children when the occasion calls for it, but avoid interrupting their conversations, or talking all the time.
4. Be relaxed.
5. Be consistent.
6. When children are playing well, don't interrupt or interfere.
7. Avoid talking about a child in his/her presence.
8. Look for what children are doing right or well.
9. Let children do what they can themselves, give them time to try before offering assistance.
10. Listen to them.
11. Encourage children to give and receive help from each other.
12. If a child appears to be struggling, ask if help is desired before stepping in.
13. Tell children what you want them to do, rather than what to stop doing ("please walk" rather than "don't run").

Parent Helper's Roles in Classroom

The most common set of questions about parent helping surround "What do I do?," "When should I intervene?," and "How can I facilitate play in our setting?"

You will spend the major part of the day interacting informally with individuals and small groups of children, facilitating learning rather than in adult-directed activities. You will spend little time correcting, stopping, hurrying, reminding, referring, reprimanding, or timing-out the children. You have time to respect and respond to individual needs and to relate to each child with warmth.

In the creative play program, it is assumed that a caring and understanding adult is involved at all times in whatever activity the children are participating. The role of the adult is not that of an instructor or entertainer, but rather of a friend whose presence will insure the quality and appropriateness of the experiences in which the children engage.

There are three primary types of involvement:

1. **Participant:** The adult actually participates with the children in the activity.
2. **Facilitator:** The adult gives necessary guidance and assistance as needed, but does not participate.

3. **Observer:** The adult can see the children and be seen by them, giving them the security of knowing that they will have help if they lose control of the materials they are using or of their emotions.

—Clare Cherry

You will spend most of your classroom time in the last two of these roles, allowing the children to have each other for players. Let me expand on these roles.

PARTICIPANT

Player (you will usually be accepted because the teacher/parent is desirable and has good ideas), but this should be kept to a minimum. Wait to enter—then be careful that you maintain and extend the children’s general theme and direction. Be careful that your intervention doesn’t identify or change their play. Enter by making statements that reflect what the children are doing. Observational statements communicate approval without judgment. They let children know you recognize what they are doing is important.

FACILITATOR

Stage manager (usually done before class). It’s easier and more appropriate to move around and manipulate things rather than children.

Mediator: imposed solutions interrupt play—mediated solutions enhance and continue play.

To extend play scripts—by materials, ideas and problem solving/negotiating. Ask open-ended questions. These kinds of questions require no specific or correct response, but inspire a variety of answers. Wait three seconds—classroom teachers have been timed to allow just 9/10 of a second before asking another question. Count slowly and silently to three before responding, another three after the child has made a response to allow the child to elaborate if he/she thinks of more. Step away so children can resume their play, or when they gain control over the play themselves.

OBSERVER

When the teacher/parent is not needed to sustain play he/she can be a scribe, assessor, communicator, and planner. Writing while children play gives something important for adults to do without interrupting their play.

Techniques for Behavior Management

1. When talking with a child maintain eye contact. Have your face at their face level. If you lose eye contact, ask for it: "I need you to look at me." "Look at my eyes."
2. Don't ask a question unless there is a choice. Say, "It's clean-up time," not "It's time to clean up, okay?"
3. Give one or two warnings, then take action. Follow through. Be consistent. This will probably require you to stop doing what you're doing and stay near the child until the entire requested activity is completed. If you leave the area or divert your attention, you will likely lose their cooperation.
4. Use "I" statements. "When you do that, or say that to me, I feel..." or "When you do that to (person) they feel ..."; "Look at (person's) face, s/he looks"
5. Give choices. "You may stay in this area and (state the rule that is to be followed), or you may go do something else."
6. Use natural or logical consequences. Following the above example, say "I see you chose to do something else." Then follow through at getting the child involved in an alternate activity. If you just send them away, they will likely wander into trouble somewhere else. Frequently a redirected activity that is quiet will help the child collect herself before going onto something else. Being read to, having snack, playing a game or working with playdough are likely candidates for redirected activity.
7. Acknowledge feelings. "I know you are angry (frustrated, excited, etc.), but I can't let you (fill in the inappropriate behavior). You could (fill in an appropriate release)." Some possibilities might include drawing a picture of how you feel, telling me how you feel, hammering some playdough, telling me and I'll write it down.

Conflict Resolution

1. Remove the danger if there is one—intervene only enough to prevent injury.
2. State the problem as you see it, "I see two children and one truck."
3. Ask for possible solutions, "What could we do so you would both be happy?"
4. Get agreement on a solution.
5. Look for more ideas if not agreed, "Would you like to know some things other people with the same problem have tried?"

Remember: The solution does not have to seem fair to you; it only needs to be acceptable to all involved parties.

If a child has already been hurt:

- Get teacher, if possible, or another parent if you need help.
- Attend to the child's injuries, involve the perpetrator if possible (getting a cold towel, Band-Aid etc.).
- Talk with the child about how the other was hurt, how s/he could have gotten her/his needs met without violence, etc.
- Reinforce that adults are here to help everyone get what they need—even the perpetrator.

Developing Self-esteem

If our goal is to increase self-esteem, what can we do to further that goal, at home and at school?

1. Use language of acceptance, and support (I-messages, non-judgments, encouragement, honesty).
2. Do not use or allow children to use put downs, (toward themselves or others).
3. Give children focused attention.
4. Discipline with respect—"How to Talk."
5. Allow children to grow at their own pace—many choices, no comparisons of different children.
6. Encourage each child's independence—own snack, own clothing. Don't do something for a child that he can do for himself.
7. Cherish each child's uniqueness. Help children find their own "specialness." Focus on the doing, not the product.
8. Reduce the emphasis on external measures of success such as grades, awards, etc. Encourage internal self-evaluation; "You must feel really proud."
9. Be available to your children—for listening, problem-solving, sharing.

Additional Resources

PARENTING LIBRARY

The preschool has a small lending library of parenting books, including the books on the list below marked with an asterisk. Parents are encouraged to sign books out, and donations are gratefully accepted.

If there is a parenting/child development topic you would like to see addressed at a General Meeting or other forum, please speak to the Anti-bias/Parent Education Chair, or the teacher.

If you read a good parenting book or article, you might consider writing a brief "review," including where you found the item—this would be a great addition to the newsletter.

MELODY BUCHOLZ'S RECOMMENDED PARENTING BOOKS

The books are listed in their category in descending order of importance as ranked by Melody Bucholz, former Portland Tillamook Preschool teacher.

General

*Faber, Adele, and Elaine Mazlish. How to Talk So Your Kids Will Listen and Listen So Your Kids Will Talk. Avon Books, 1980.

*Ames, Louise Bates, and Francis L. Ilg. Your ... Year Old. Dell Publishing, 1985. (We have ages 2 through 5 in our library.)

Carlsson-Paige, Nancy, and Diane E. Levin. Who's Calling the Shots? New Society Publishers, 1990.

Healy, Jane M. Endangered Minds: Why Children Don't Think and What We Can Do About It. Simon & Schuster, 1990.

Cecil, Nancy Lee. Raising Peaceful Children in a Violent World. Lura Media, Inc., 1995.

Kohn, Alfie. The Case Against Competition. Houghton Mifflin, 1986.

*Kelly, Marguerite, and Elia Parsons. The Mother's Almanac. Doubleday and Co., 1975.

Multi-age

Katz, Lillian G., et al. The Case for Mixed-Age Grouping in Early Education. NAEYC, 1990.

Driscoll, Amy. Cases in Early Childhood Education: Stories of Programs and Practices. Allen & Bacon, 1995. Chapters 5 and 8.

Chase, Penelle, and Jane Doan. Full Circle: A New Look at Multiage Education. Heinemann, 1994.

Specific Guidelines for Working in the Classroom (sample from one school)

CLASSROOM RULES

Children learn to follow these rules:

1. Children may not harm selves or others.
2. Children may not destroy materials.
3. Children need to clean up one activity before going on to the next one.
4. No weapon play

FREE PLAY

Table Toys

- Encourage the children to work quietly alone or in a small group.
- Honor child's need to play with a table toy alone.
- Help child who wants to play with an unavailable toy to find another toy or activity. Assure child that she will get a turn later. Make sure that she does get a turn later. Writing it down helps!
- Facilitate cooperative play: "I wonder if there's a way you can do it together?"
- Table toys may also be used on a rug nearby.
- Allow creative use of toys—children will often use toys in imaginative ways.
- Table toys should be returned to the shelf by the child, with all pieces, after use.
- Discourage random dumping of toys onto floor.

ART AREA

Easel Painting

- Assist children in putting on paint smocks if they choose to wear them. An offer of "Would you like to wear the red or blue smock?" is much more likely to get children's clothes covered than "Would you like to wear a smock?"
- Display an interest in the children's work, but do not ask what they have made. Young children are often more involved in the process than the product. You might say, "Tell me about your picture," or "I like that color."
- Encourage children to replace brushes in the correct container.
- Ask child where to write his name and the date on the paper. Capitalize the first letter of the child's name, and use lower case letters for the rest.
- If child wishes, you may label paintings or write comments made by the child.
- Hang painting to dry, or put on vinyl tablecloths in the gym if very "drippy."
- Children should hang up smocks and wash and dry their hands.
- If a color of paint runs out, refill from paints on the cart
- Do not paint pictures for children. This discourages their creativity as they cannot hope to imitate your models.

Art Tables

- The children may use any of the materials on the open art shelves to create at the table nearby.
- They should return unused materials to the shelf when done, and throw small paper scraps into the recycling bin.
- Large paper scraps are saved for future projects. There is a cubby for this paper.
- Encourage children to use small amounts of glue, but realize that there is a fascination with the squeezing and that it takes time to learn.
- Place names and dates on papers the same as at the easel and follow same guidelines for comments.
- Older children may want to write their own names. Ask.

Water/Sand Table

- Encourage children to keep water/seed/etc. inside table.
- Assist children in mopping or sweeping up spills. The floor gets very slippery when wet or covered with cornmeal and other materials.

DRAMATIC PLAY AREA/LOFT/BLOCKS

This area of the room is a super unit. Children may mix and match equipment among the areas for maximum creativity. Fire fighters on the structure may need food to eat. Housekeepers may need to make beds out of the crates, or go to work at the construction yard and come home again.

Loft

- Everyone can play on the loft. If a child wants to be alone, he needs to find another place.
- Children may not drop anything from the climbing structure.
- No jumping off the structure.
- Assist children when they are learning to climb. Do not lift children up or down, assist them in doing it themselves.
- If they are afraid, acknowledge that it is hard and that it is O.K. to be afraid. Assure them that they can keep trying, perhaps another day, and that you know they will learn how soon.
- Celebrate their success!
- The loft gives children a feeling of power; "I am so big, bigger than you. "If you have a problem with a child who is up there, you will get more cooperation if you climb up to her level.

Housekeeping

- Encourage children to return dolls, dishes, etc., to their places when done.
- You may facilitate play by supplying needed props, or making suggestions when you sense the play breaking down, but then withdraw and let the children play out their own themes.

Blocks

- Blocks may not be thrown. If this is a problem, tell children, "Blocks are for building."
- Child may build as high as their shoulders.
- Child may only knock down their own building.
- Make sure crate structures are steady before children stand on them.
- Don't build structures for children, or build elaborate adult models that children cannot hope to attain at this age.
- Don't "solve" their problems for them. Children learn about objects in space and the force of gravity by experiencing these forces.
- Say, "That's very big," or "You seem proud of your building," etc., instead of "What is it?" or "It's a . . ."
- Help a child who wants to play with an unavailable toy to find another toy or activity. Assure child that she will get a turn later. Make sure that she does get a turn later. Writing it down helps!
- Facilitate cooperative play: "I wonder if there's a way you can do it together?"
- Allow creative use of toys- children will often use toys in imaginative ways.
- Discourage random dumping of toys onto floor.
- Encourage pick up by making it fun: "Let's drive the cars to the garage (shelf), or "Let's be cranes and lift these onto the shelf."

Playdough

- Playdough should stay on the table or in the dramatic play area.
- If children hoard, tell them, " _____ needs some playdough. Would you like to give her some, or shall I help you?"

OUTDOOR TIME

- The playground will have been set up before class. There must be an adult outside before children go out. Children must get their name clip from the inside adult and deliver it to the outside adult. When going in they must take the clip in with them and give it back to the inside person.
- Every few minutes, take a head count to insure all the children are present.
- Be firm about boundaries. Children may not play behind the shed or down the side of the church, or go toward the parking lot past the cones.
- Children may not throw sand. "sand stays on the ground." Encourage children to keep the sand inside the sandbox.
- Bikes may not crash into people or things. Children get one warning, then "lose their license" for the day. If this happens, help the child find something else to do.