

Positive Responses that Guide Children

1. **Describe** children's actions

- i. Simply *describing what you see a child doing* helps that child:
 1. Feel seen, cared about, and heard.
 - a. It is generally more effective than praise.
 - b. It is specific, unique to them, and interesting.
 - c. Works best if you are describing actions that you value.
 2. Increase their vocabulary and ability to use language. It can also be a way to introduce tribal or other languages:
 - a. "You are putting your coat away"
 - b. "You are using walking feet."
 - c. "Sandy is tromping to breakfast."
 - d. "You climbed really high on the climber!"
 - e. "You are cuddling the stuffed *schetwen*."
- ii. *Narrating conflicts*
 1. Can help slow down the action
 2. Gives children the opportunity to think and solve the problem.
 3. Example might go something like this when Sue and Darrel are both pulling on the red truck: Caregiver says, "Sue wants the red truck...Darrel is pulling hard on the red truck (while caregiver hangs on too)...Sue is grunting and frowning...Darrel is watching Sue...Darrel let go and got the green truck. Sue, when you are done, you can let Darrel know so he can have a turn" Caregiver lets go too.

2. **Do's instead of Don'ts**

- i. Putting things in the positive creates a positive atmosphere in the room. For example, "Use walking feet," instead of, "Don't run!"
- ii. Linguistically, children hear the ends of sentences and respond to what they hear:
 1. When you say, "Don't throw that block," they tend to hear, "...throw that block."
 2. When you make the ending say what you want them to do—"Put the block down"—they tend to hear, "...block down."
- iii. Another technique is to state what you want them to do in "-ing" words. For instance, instead of saying, "Don't run" or even "Please walk," you could say, "Walking."

3. **Time in:** Group environments can be overwhelming. As you observe, notice if a child is having difficulty and is getting upset or frustrated.

- i. Help her by moving her away from the group and offering a hand.
- ii. Give a child positive connection through one-on-one time to avoid problems later.
 1. For example, "I need a helper. Can you help me?"
 2. "Would you like to read with me?"
 3. "We could do a Special Time right now. We can do whatever you want for 3 minutes" (or 5 or 15 or however long you know you can devote to it), then follow the child's lead for the designated time. Say, "Thank you for our Special Time" when the time is up.

Interactions and Guidance

4. **Aware touch**

- i. Everyone needs human touch that conveys nurturing and support—a hug, a pat on the back, cuddling a baby, rubbing a back at rest time.
- ii. Your touches can convey your kind regard as you guide a child.
- iii. Touch can be used to protect a child or others from danger. Examples are:
 - 1. Putting your hand on a child's arm to suggest slowing down.
 - 2. Asking a child to hold your hand during transition or when moving from one area of the building to another.
 - 3. Placing your hand on a child's hand to keep the child from hitting someone or throwing something.

5. Give Choices--Offer choices you are comfortable with children making. Like everyone, children like to have a say in what they do. Making choices promotes executive function.

- i. "I can see that you are not through playing yet, Sadie. Would you like to put that over here and finish after lunch, or take two more minutes before washing your hands for lunch?"
- ii. "Mikhail has the red marker now. Would you like this green one or this blue one till he is finished with the red?"

6. **Redirect** by giving a child alternatives to their current behavior

- i. Example: "James is sitting there, Joey. You need to pick another place to sit."
- ii. "Michi, you have so much energy, but running is for outside. No one is at the water table right now. Let's play over there."

7. Time out is really for *you* to get a break when you cannot think anymore. (Use a soft, cozy place like an easy chair with pillows for the child)

- i. Time out is not to be used as a punishment.
- ii. A good rule of thumb--1 minute per year of child's age (and time out is not appropriate before 3 years old).
- iii. Time out doesn't solve the problem but can get the child out of harm's way, including from your angry response.
- iv. If you find you are using time-out often, it's time to invest in more "time in" (above) or set limits and allow for emotional release (see "Setting limits" handout).

8. **Support positive peer interaction.**

- i. Provide cues and prompts to help children learn how to interact positively.
- ii. Describe children's peer interactions to them as acknowledgment and reinforcement.

Summary list:

- 1. Describing children's actions
- 2. Dos instead of Don'ts
- 3. Time in
- 4. Aware touch
- 5. Give choices
- 6. Redirect
- 7. Time out
- 8. Support positive peer interaction