

## Ten Leadership Guidelines for Moving From Discipline to Guidance

Dan Gartrell 10/22

- 1. Guidance requires developmentally appropriate practice with every child in the group.** DAP allows for differences in development, experience, learning styles, and personalities. DAP accommodates the very active and physical nature of young children throughout the daily program. DAP means that the program is encouraging for every child in the group, and that inclusive group spirit in the group is alive. DAP includes proactive engagement with families to build an encouraging community that includes all. DAP requires each adult in the setting to act as a professional--not a technician--and work as a *Teaching Team*. TTs know that readiness is not a state of knowledge, but a state of mind.
- 2. Young children are best thought of as months-old, not years old.** They are just beginning to learn difficult life skills, and as beginners make mistakes in their behavior. TTs view children's conflicts not as "misbehaviors" (with the moralistic baggage this term carries), but as *mistaken behaviors* by children just beginning a complex learning process. TTs are then in a strong philosophical position to use guidance.
- 3. There is no such thing as a "bad kid." There are only children with bad problems that they need help in learning to solve.** "Challenging children" are challenged children. They are dealing with unmanageable levels of stress due to adverse experiences. They are often the hardest children to like, but are in need of a secure relationship with professionals the most. TTs who use guidance need not love every child, but they do need to build a positive relationship with each child. Secure relationships are built outside of conflict situations. In a guidance approach, secure relationships with every child are key.
- 4. First comes emotional health; social and all other development follows.** TTs know that young children need to feel acceptance as worthy members of the group and as worthwhile individuals before they can learn to express strong emotions in non-hurting ways: *Emotional-social development*, not the other way round.
- 5. Guidance works without using punishment; it is teaching not "disciplining."** Punishment has the effect of releasing stress hormones in children's brains. The effects of high stress levels make it difficult for them to learn the very skills they need. Punishment causes children to fall into a stress-aggression-punishment syndrome that prevents healthy development even into adulthood. Guidance involves believing in every child and acting on that belief.
- 6. Guidance is strong.** There is to be no harm to anyone in the early learning community. Guidance means using leadership skills that are sometimes firm, but firm and friendly not firm and harsh. Guidance professionals accept that causing a conflict does have consequences, *but for the adult as well as the child*. The consequence for the adult is to calm and teach. The consequence for the child is to reconcile and understand they can learn a better way for next time.
- 7. EC pros use four golden practices of guidance:** 1) When conflicts happen, TTs first *Triage and Calm All Down*. 2) If one child is involved, we use *Guidance Talks*. 2) If a small number of children are involved, we use *Conflict Management* (even with toddlers). 3) If conflicts involve many, we use *Group Meetings*. 4) if a child has repeated conflicts, we use *Comprehensive Guidance*.

- 8. Comprehensive Guidance.** The more serious the conflicts a child is experiencing, the more EC pros work as a team to help the child resolve underlying problems and gain emotional-social skills. The EC pro works together: with staff in the same setting, with the child's family, with administrators, and with outside professionals. Through working together in teams professionals accomplish together what they cannot accomplish alone. This strategy is called comprehensive guidance and may require an *Individual Guidance Plan*.
- 9. From day one, the ECE professional builds partnerships with families.** S/he is friendly first and unrelentingly positive. As with children, the professional builds trust-based relationships with family members. With mutual trust, family members are able to engage more with their children, with the TT, and with the program on behalf of themselves.
- 10. The professional learns even as s/he teaches.** The professional practices *liberation teaching*, never giving up on any child. To approach this highest level of guidance, professionals need support systems, both at work and in personal settings. Positive staff relations, no matter the differences among staff members, are vital. A central role of administrators is to foster and encourage support systems for every staff member in the program and at home. We all (little and big) make mistakes. We just need to learn from them.

#### **Moving to Guidance:**

<b>Move Beyond</b>	<b>Move to</b>
"The teacher teaches; assistants do not."	All members of the TT are teachers & team mates.
"Challenging children" show challenging behaviors	Children act out due to adverse experiences.
"Discipline": slides too easily into punishment	Guidance is firm but friendly; calms and teaches.
"Misbehavior": leads to negative S-A-P cycle	Mistaken behavior; all can learn from mistakes.
"Unacceptable behaviors": clearly judgmental	Conflicts: mistakes in expressing disagreements
"Punishment, logical consequence" of aggression	Leadership: calms, reconciles, teaches & affirms
"Removing" (expelling) children "who do not fit in"	Liberation teaching, not giving up on any child

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These guidance ideas come from my *Guidance Matters* columns in *YOUNG CHILDREN* and books, including *A Guidance Guide for Early Childhood Leaders* and *Guidance for Every Child* (2017, 2020 Redleaf Press) My new NAEYC book, *Education for a Civil Society: Teaching for Five Democratic Life Skills* is due out next spring. Further information about guidance, readiness, Individual Guidance Plans, and Engaging with Families is available at [dangartrell.net](http://dangartrell.net). You can contact me directly at [gartrell@paulbunyan.net](mailto:gartrell@paulbunyan.net)