Family Handbook: Guidance & Discipline

Guidance and Discipline
Social-emotional development is the foundation for life long success and for school readiness. For most children, nursery school is their first social experience. Our goal is to help each child make friends, develop a positive identity, and become a caring member of a group. We know that children who develop positive social skills will have the greatest opportunity for success in kindergarten and beyond. Learning how to make friends, negotiate compromise, recover from disappointment, and express self happens over many years throughout the early childhood experience. Social skills develop along with language skills, impulse control and self-regulation. Making first friends is a joyous experience but it can also involve frustration and challenges. Teaching social skills is central to every day at WNS.

Wimpfheimer Nursery School is grounded in principles of positive guidance and discipline. The word “discipline” means “to teach”. Young children provide abundant opportunities to teach by example and within contexts directly relevant and meaningful to their young lives. Core to the practice of positive guidance, we structure the environment and our interactions with children to coach and model pro social skills. The gradual scaffolding of conflict resolution skills is also a daily part of our guidance and discipline practices. Equally important, we seek and create opportunities to praise children’s growth and support them in feelings of accomplishment. Children are full capable human beings, and they continually show us their unique social-emotional intelligence and their deep capacity for empathy, connection, and relationships.
In compliance with this policy, we never use corporal punishment, shaming, or threatening. Corporal punishment is also prohibited by anyone on school grounds.

Positive guidance is not permissive. It means that adults use leadership skills that are firm, consistent and friendly - but not scolding and harsh. The goal of guidance is not to expect blind compliance, but to teach internal regulation, thinking, and life skills.

Young children who are learning social skills make mistakes. Learning social skills is a life-long pursuit. Adults can view children’s conflicts as “mistaken behaviors” rather than misbehaviors.

A problem-solving approach acknowledges that children will need time to experiment with sharing, taking turns, negotiating compromise, and asserting self within a social group all through their preschool years. When problems arise - it is a perfect social learning opportunity! Teachers carefully coach children in the moment towards conflict resolution and together teachers and children find solutions to problems.

Teachers model respect, care and listening through their tone of voice and choice of words. We accept the full range of emotions and help children learn to express emotions appropriately. We encourage authentic interactions and genuine friendship. Adults play a role in using responsive language to teach social skills and help each child feel their personal agency as well as their interdependence within a community of care and learning. Responsive language, which encourages reason, logic, independence, and encouragement, is preferred over restrictive language, which is based on asserting power and control, discouraging independence, and lecturing.

We build a child’s internal resources by involving children in problem solving steps and by using reflective language and by including children in rule making and agreements. The foundation of school rules is care –

- we care for ourselves
- we care for one another
- we care for our classroom materials and environment
- we care for our earth

We look for ways to help children have real experiences in participation and care – perhaps they water the plants or compost the lunch scraps or feed the fish or help a peer zip up their coat. Once the year has gotten underway the children quickly make the nursery school their own and they are able to internalize the routines and the social expectations. They develop trust in their teachers and classmates.

When children engage in physical behaviors towards others such as hitting, grabbing or pushing we stop hurtful behavior and we guide children towards appropriate social skills through discussion, conflict resolution, and offering alternatives and appropriate responses. If a child is putting himself and others in an unsafe situation, we will remove the child from the area where he or she is struggling and offer a short break, time to settle down, and gain control and have some time to talk it out when they are ready. Sometimes in the heat of a frustrating moment it is difficult to solve problems. Children are not isolated or given “time-out” – a teacher will stay close by to support the child and help him or her express feelings while talking about how our behaviors impact other and develop a plan for returning to play.
Principles of Child Guidance:

- Tell children what they CAN do (instead of what they can’t do). Focus on the DO’s instead of the don’ts
- Offer children choices ONLY when you are willing to abide by their decisions.
- Change the environment instead of the child’s behavior.
- Work with children instead of against them.
- Give children clear limits and boundaries they can understand.
- Recognize their feelings without accepting their actions.
- View boundaries and limits as loving and caring acts that helps the child gain internal resources.
- Maintain your authority calmly and consistently. Notice the difference between a tone of voice that is clear, firm and guiding and one that is negative, shaming, and scolding.
- Set a good example! Speak and act only in ways you hope children will speak and act.

- adapted from Jennifer Birckmayer (Discipline is not a Dirty Word)

More Tips for positive guidance and social-emotional learning:

- Teachers reinforce safe behavior with guiding and teaching tones
- Children make choices and engage in self-directed play. When children have the opportunity to make real choices and feel independent and in control within safe boundaries, they are less likely to struggle with being “told what to do”.
- Routines are established and schedules are followed. A predictable daily schedule allows children to feel secure and to know what to expect.
- The carefully planned environment where children can play individually, in small groups and large groups throughout the day minimizes frustration, congestion and confusion.
- Balance of activities helps children regulate activity: A balanced schedule alternates between active and quiet times, indoor and outdoor times, small group and large group times.
- Limit situations where children are required to sit, wait, or stand in lines.
- Ignore minor issues and offer positive alternatives and models whenever possible.
Supporting Children in Resolving Conflicts: **A problem solving approach:** The problem solving approach comes from the perspective that the social challenges and conflicts children face are opportunities for learning social skills. With supportive adults available to coach children during play, children can become successful problem solvers.

1. **Approach calmly and stop hurtful behavior**
   Gently reach out to the children who are upset or angry. Use a calm voice to communicate a neutral attitude. Stop any hurtful behavior by placing your body in between children and using words to describe the behavior. “Pushing has to stop – pushing hurts.”

2. **Validate emotions**
   “You both look very angry about this!” Children really need emotional validation before they can move onto solutions. This “emptying out” is an important step to being able to think clearly and move on. Use words that reflect the intensity of the emotion “I see you are very upset about pushing and I see you really want the shovel back.” If there is an item such as a favorite toy causing anxiety – the adult can hold the item and keep it neutral while helping children talk about what happened.

3. **Gather information**
   What’s happening here? – It looks like we have a problem. Ask open ended questions that describes the details of the actions that have transpired rather than questions which are too abstract such as “why did you do that?”

4. **Restate the problem**
   “I hear that Sam took the yellow shovel from you and you are angry about it and so you pushed him. Is that what happened? Check with the children to see if they agree that you have identified the problem “Is that right? Sam wants the shovel and you want the shovel too”

4. **Ask for ideas and solutions to the problem**
   Respect and explore the children’s ideas. Help children work out details to make the solution reasonable. For example, if a child says “we should share” the adult might suggest ways to share such as finding another shovel so the children can play side by side or setting a timer for 5 minutes so the children have a concrete way to take turns. Use the children’s ideas as much as possible.

5. **Give support and follow up as needed**
   Make simple statements to support the children as they enter back into play -
   “It looks like you’ve solved the problem”
   “Next time we’ll remember that hitting hurts – we need to keep our bodies safe while we play”

6. **Check with children to see if the problem has been solved,**
   especially children who have been very upset and may need an adult to play along-side them for a while and offer coaching to help them enter back into play successfully.

   Adapted from *Supporting Children in Conflict: High/scope for Preschool*
Resources for Guidance and Social Emotional Development

A guidance Approach for an Encouraging Classroom by Dan Gartrell

Beyond Behavior by Monica Dela

You Can’t Come to My Birthday Party: Conflict Resolution with Young Children by Betsy Evans

Me, You, Us: Social-Emotional Learning in Preschool by Ann S. Epstein and Lillian Katz