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NORLAND

**Norland
Know-Hows
Behaviour**

Behaviour

You will have learned about behaviour as part of your course at Norland. We have collated some hints and tips below to help support your practice and to share with the parents you are working with. We hope you find them useful!

1. Be a positive role model

Children will do as you do. They look upon you as their guide and an example of how to deal with the world. Your behaviour, therefore, can be a positive example of how to react in both positive and negative situations. As a role model, you must try to 'walk the walk', not simply 'talk the talk'; what you do can be more important than what you say. For example, if you want your child to read more, then let them see you read and regularly read with them. If you would like your child to say please and thank you, then say them yourself at every opportunity.

2. Notice when your child is behaving well

Be on the lookout for any positive behaviour that you can comment on. This will encourage them to continue behaving well. The aim is to help young children seek attention in a positive way; by spotting it early, you are sending a message that they will get noticed and praised for positive, rather than negative, behaviour. Be specific about what you are praising – so, instead of saying, "You are a good boy", try saying, "I really liked the way you cleared up your toys before lunch." Timing is important too. Make sure you praise straight away and don't delay it – that way, the child fully understands what you are pleased about within that moment. Have you heard of Gottman's magic ratio? You can YouTube it. Gottman argues that in order to maintain a child's emotional wellbeing, we need to make sure that we give five positive comments for every negative one! Think of it like coins in a purse. Does your child have enough coins?

3. Look at your surroundings through the eyes of a child

Take a moment to look at your environment. What might be tempting for a child to play with? If you do not want a child to touch or play with something, try to remove it from their sight. This way, your child won't be tempted to play with it, especially during potentially boring times at home. Children are sensory learners, so it can be hard for them to remember not to play with certain things. They are also naturally driven to explore. You can avoid battles, nagging and potential catastrophes by removing or concealing items that are precious or breakable.

4. Avoid nagging

How often do you repeat yourself to your child? If you keep nagging, your child will learn to tune you out and stop listening. Try to say things once, clearly, and then move on. The aim is to be focused and to keep the instructions simple with an end goal. Assume that they will do what you have asked them. If they don't, you could remind them a short while later, making it clear that you have already asked them once. If they still do not comply, you might say, "I have asked you to do this twice now, but I see you're not listening. I will ask one more time, and if you don't do it, we will have to put this away." If you give them a consequence for not cooperating, make sure it is one that you can follow through on (you should always follow through). Some children need more time to process instructions, so wait before assuming they are not complying.

5. Share your feelings

Do not be afraid of showing your child how you feel and how their behaviour can affect you. Remember you are their role model, so how you cope with your feelings will provide a template for your child to copy. By explaining how you are feeling and why, you are helping your child to develop empathy, which is key to successful relationships. You are also sending the message that it is OK to

be sad, angry, excited, etc., which will help your child to feel more comfortable expressing these feelings in an appropriate way. Remember there is no bad feeling, only a bad way of expressing it! For example, you might choose to say, “When you shout, I cannot hear my own thoughts and it makes me feel confused.” Using “I” statements makes it clear how you are being affected and avoids blaming and shaming.

6. When communicating with your child, get down to their level

By physically moving down to their level, you are giving a powerful positive message, because you are giving them your full attention. You are more able to read their body language and give eye contact, and they will be better able to read yours. This will allow both of you to be able to tune into each other, and it gives the child time to focus in on what you are communicating. It is not helpful to insist that your child look at you if they are avoiding eye contact. Remember to role-model positive eye contact and your child should naturally follow over time.

7. Active listening

Active listening means giving your child your full attention and acknowledging what you are hearing, particularly with your body language. By repeating back what they have said to you and acknowledging and empathising with what has been communicated, your child will feel heard and understood. This will help relieve tension and possibly even a temper tantrum! You will also be clarifying your understanding of the situation. By labelling feelings, you are helping a child to understand and identify their own emotions and giving them tools to be able to express themselves more easily. For example, you might say, “I can see that you are cross that Johnny has that car. I get cross when I can’t have something I want too. Let’s go and talk to him and see if he will share it with you once he has had a play.” By acknowledging that you feel these feelings too, it helps the child to understand feelings and manage them more successfully.

8. Choose your battles carefully

When you get involved in something your child is doing or not doing, stop and consider whether it really matters. By keeping instructions, requests and negative feedback to a minimum, you create less opportunity for conflict and bad feelings. This way, your child is more likely to listen when you need them to. Can you win the battle? If you can’t, then ask yourself if it is worth it. Rules are important, especially safety rules, but keeping them to a minimum will ensure they are more easily followed. Make sure your child understands why there is a rule in the first place. Would you follow a rule if you didn’t understand it?

9. Keep it simple and positive

Where you can, try to keep your interactions, but particularly instructions, simple and positive. Are you being clear about what you are asking your child to do? Check for understanding by asking them to repeat the instruction. Try not to give too much information at once. Use positive language, so instead of saying, “Don’t leave the door open”, try: “Please shut the door.”

10. Actions have consequences

As children mature and their understanding develops, you can give them more responsibility for their own behaviour. This includes experiencing the normal consequences of their actions. An example of this could be a child who does not want to put their coat on to go outside. You might allow this, if appropriate, so that they then feel cold themselves and return to get their coat. This means that you do not have to nag all the time and the child feels a sense of autonomy, as well as recognising that actions have consequences – some good and some bad. If we protect children too much from the consequences of their actions, we may miss opportunities for them to learn via trial and error or come to their own understanding through direct experience. Of course, this flexibility

doesn't apply when you have to stop a child from doing something because it is dangerous or unacceptable, such as running into the road. In these cases, it is best to explain the consequences appropriately and help your child to understand them.

11. Pinky promise

Keep your promises and agreements. Do not make promises if you can't keep them! In this way, your child will learn to trust what you say and respect you. It also sets a good example for them to follow themselves in life. It is particularly important when you apply a consequence for poor behaviour, for example leaving a party because they are misbehaving. If you say that you are going to do something but don't follow through, they are less likely to comply next time. Be matter-of-fact about it and don't over-explain. By being able to trust what you say, your child will feel safe and secure.

12. Being valued

We all love to feel important. Children love to feel that they can make a positive contribution to the family. Think about some jobs and practical tasks you could involve your child in. Try not to make it too much of a chore or a punishment. They might need time to practise and get it right, so use lots of encouragement and positive reinforcement. This will help build your child's self-esteem and sense of responsibility and might even help you out a little too! A good strategy is to allow your child to overhear you praising them to someone else. This can be a very powerful way to encourage good behaviour.

13. Difficult times

Life does not always go to plan, and we must all face challenging situations in our lives. If something difficult happens, if possible, plan it around your child's needs. Explain what is happening honestly and in a way that is developmentally appropriate for your child. Do not sweep it under the carpet, as your child will find this more worrying than the truth. Explain why you need their cooperation and what they can expect. Wherever possible, children benefit from time to adjust to any transition, even simple ones during the day like mealtimes and bedtimes. Remember that what affects one member of the family unit affects all members, especially children, so being honest is important.

14. Laugh and the whole world laughs with you

Try to maintain your sense of humour. This can be difficult, but it can also be helpful for relieving tense situations. Try not to laugh *at* your child, as this could hurt their feelings and self-confidence (although it's OK to laugh at a child if they are attempting to make you laugh). It is about sharing jokes or finding the humour in situations *with* your child. By trying to make things fun and light-hearted, your child will be more relaxed. Family jokes can be especially helpful and encourage a sense of unity and belonging, especially during challenging situations.

15. Give choices

Giving children choices can be a helpful way to secure their cooperation. It makes them feel more empowered and more willing to engage with what needs to be done. It can be particularly useful for those activities they struggle with, such as brushing teeth. You could ask: "What colour toothbrush do you want to use today?" Or: "Shall we brush our teeth before or after your bath?"

16. Focus on the behaviour, not the child

Avoid personalising the behaviour. Be clear that certain behaviours are unacceptable, but don't shame the child. Say, "It's not OK to hit your brother." Don't say, "You're a bad child." Label the behaviour, not the child. This also works for more positive messages. Instead of saying, "You're a

kind child”, say, “That’s a kind thing to do.” This avoids putting too much pressure on a child to live up to certain expectations, but still promotes positive attributes and behaviours.

17. Consistency is key

One of the most important messages is to make sure you’re consistent about what you expect from a child’s behaviour and what you will allow. This consistency should be shared among all the adults in the family to avoid mixed messages. There’s always room for some flexibility, but changing the boundaries too much or too often is confusing and disruptive for a young child.

18. Routines (we have a separate information sheet on this)

Children gain comfort and security from a regular routine; it helps them to predict and accept the events that happen during the day. It is the order in which you do things rather than the timings that are most important. When there is a change to the routine for any reason, it is important to prepare the child for it in advance if possible.

19. Dos work better than don’ts

Highlighting what the child is doing wrong emphasises the word of that action in their minds. For example, if you say, “Stop jumping”, the child holds the word “jumping” in their mind. Imagine if I told you not to think of a pink elephant. What are you thinking of now? A pink elephant perhaps? Instead try to use your language to focus on what you would like your child to be doing – for example, “I do like it when you are walking nicely and safely.” If you have multiple children, praise the child who is doing what you have asked. This form of proximity praise works well. Of course, be sure to praise your child when they have adapted their behaviour to your request.

Further information

Emotion Coaching UK

emotioncoachinguk.com

Rose, J, Gilbert, L, Richards, V, 2015, *Health and Well-being in Early Childhood*, Sage.

This information is intended to provide guidance only. It is not exhaustive and should not be seen as a substitute for updating or enhancing your knowledge by completing training or a CPD course on the subject.