

Planning and Strategies to Promote Positive Behaviour (5–12 years)

Self-guided Learning Package 2nd Edition



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ACECQA acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Lands on which we work and across Australia, and we also extend our respects to Elders, past and present.

We recognise and celebrate the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia, including their role in the education and care of children. We recognise the rich and diverse cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the valuable contribution this diversity brings.

About Self-Guided Learning Packages

Self-Guided Learning Packages can be completed in your own time and convenience and offer an alternative to attending training sessions. This package aims to develop skills and knowledge that will be valuable to you in providing quality education and care programs. Packages are often used for professional development by staff teams, networks and other groups of children's services professionals. You can work through the package with colleagues by reading the package together, discussing the information and collaborating to complete the one assessment task.

Planning and Strategies to Promote Positive Behaviour (5–12 years)

You have chosen to complete the 'Planning and strategies to promote positive behaviour (5–12 years)' package. The aim of this package is to provide you with information that will support your work and provide you with helpful strategies in working with children and young people aged between 5 and 12 years. It is important to ensure that the actual environment, the program and the adults working with children and young people provide appropriate opportunities for children and young people to learn productively and happily and to interact with others in appropriate ways. This package aims to help you understand more fully the types of environments, programming and adult interactions that help promote positive behaviours and actions of children and young people.

INTRODUCTION

Children are not born 'good' or born 'bad'. They develop a range of behaviours, attitudes and ways of expressing their needs depending on a range of factors throughout their childhood years. The environments in which children and young people spend much of their time and how adults react to and provide guidance to children and young people in these early years plays a critical role in helping them to develop positive behaviours. If a child or a young person is encouraged, guided gently and consistently and comes to trust educators as reliable, trustworthy and predictable, it is more likely that inappropriate behaviours will not develop or continue in the long term.

All children and young people as they develop and grow and come into contact with others will experience a range of feelings. Some of these, such as frustration, disappointment, anger and sadness, may not be demonstrated in constructive ways. Accepting that these feelings and experiences are part of being a human being and that children and young people, in particular, are neither experienced enough or mature enough to know or understand these feelings and how to express them is crucial in understanding children and young people. Even as educators, it is often difficult to know how to deal with your own anger or sadness or that of someone else.

The educator's attitude, expectations and understanding of children and young people is therefore very important in working with children's and young people's behaviours. Knowing the appropriate strategies to both minimise opportunities for behaviours to become challenging and knowing how to work with children and young people when their behaviours are causing difficulties to themselves or others, is the challenge we face.

Working with school-age children and young people often means working with children and young people early in the morning or after school. These children and young people may be tired and perhaps have had a difficult or challenging day in the classroom or with their peers in the playground. Children and young people often arrive at programs such as Family Day Care, Out of School Hours or Holiday programs feeling resentful that they have to be at the

program. They may have wished to spend time at a friend's house, or simply gone home. These feelings of frustration or tiredness or anger are normal human emotions.

For example, a child or young person may arrive at the program and throw their school bag across the middle of the room causing disruption. What they are actually expressing is anger or seeking attention for some reason. The educator needs to know how to respond to these situations in ways that provide alternative and more appropriate ways for the school-aged child or young person to express their emotions. The challenge for those working with this age group is to both acknowledge the frustration and to use appropriate skills in helping children and young people to settle, to feel more at peace and to learn appropriate ways of expressing their feelings.

The My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia V2.0, 2022 (MTOP V2.0) describes why building strong positive relationships between significant adults and children and young people is essential for those children and young people to develop a sense of belonging, where they feel a strong sense of identity, and can see themselves as significant and respected. This package will consider a range of issues related to the following:

- accepting that feelings and frustrations are a normal part of development and life
- respecting feelings
- ensuring appropriate expectations of children and understanding their stage of life
- the proactive versus the reactive strategies for guiding behaviour
- the role of the environment
- the role of the program
- the role of the educator
- related strategies of encouragement, consistency, consequences not punishment, redirection and limits.

IMPORTANCE OF FEELINGS AND THE RIGHT OF ALL CHILDREN TO EXPRESS THEM

'Educators who prioritise nurturing relationships through culturally safe and responsive interactions, provide children and young people with consistent emotional support. They value rituals and routines and ensure children and young people develop the skills and understandings they need to interact with others. They also help children to learn about their responsibilities to others, to support their own and others wellbeing, to appreciate their connectedness and interdependence as learners, and to value collaboration and teamwork' Principle 1-Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships (MTOP V2.0, 2022).

At times we hear adults make statements to children and young people when the child or young person is upset or worried, such as, "come on give me a smile, you'll be okay", or, "come on you're a big girl now, you don't need to cry". It is a fact however, that sometimes, even as adults we are sad, we are afraid or angry and we may not wish to smile when we are angry or upset. Educators need to learn to comfort, encourage and support children and young people at times when they are distressed. They need to acknowledge the child or young person is upset and then provide a range of strategies to help the child or young person.

We sometimes witness children and young people being dropped off at school and crying because they don't want their parent or educator to leave them. This is sometimes known as separation anxiety. Unfortunately, sometimes teachers or workers become frustrated at such times, particularly if it occurs regularly and statements are made between the professionals such as, "that child is just attention seeking or manipulative, as soon as the parent leaves they are okay". It is extremely important that professionals with the responsibility of working with children and young people and guiding their behaviour are careful about the types of statements they make and the sort of attitudes or belief system they carry about children and young people.

It is a fact that some children and young people really do find the moment of separation really difficult and when the parent actually leaves, it is a relief for the child or young person and they can begin to settle and calm down and 'get on with' their work and play.

It is also a fact that children and young people are not usually as manipulative or conniving as adults may attribute them to being.

'Children and young people learn about themselves and construct their own identity through their experiences with other children and young people, their families and communities' (MTOP V2.0, 2022).

'When children and young people have positive experiences, they develop an understanding of themselves as significant and respected and feel a sense of belonging' (MTOP V2.0, 2022).

'Relationships are the foundations for the construction of identity – 'Who I am', 'How I belong' and 'What is my influence?' Educators are culturally responsive in assisting children and young people to explore their cultural, social, gender and linguistic identities. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, awareness of their kinship networks and connections to Country are important to the development of identity' (MTOP V2.0, 2022).

Children and young people, just like adults, feel a range of emotions or feelings. These may be positive or they may cause other emotions such as feeling sad, angry, frustrated, fearful, jealous or disappointed. We all feel things and react to them with our emotions. As children and young people, there are two important elements about feelings.

- Children and young people need to learn that feelings, both the positive and negative are part of life, and that they can be expressed, shared and supported.
- There are appropriate ways to express feelings or needs where others do not become hurt or injured.

It is the educator's role to respect the feelings of children and young people; the positive and negative. The adult needs to learn how to acknowledge that feelings are appropriate, to understand the child or young person as much as possible and then work with the child or young person in helping them to express or work through their feelings in appropriate ways.

Self Help Question 1 Brainstorm a list of 20 feelings and divide them into positive and negative feelings.

Self Help Question 1 (continued)
Describe how you deal with your own feelings. Can you express your negative feelings in ways which do not cause others to become angry with you?

Self Help Question 1 (continued) When is it easiest to express your own negative feelings? During or after the heat of the moment? Who do you find you can share your feelings with most?

Self Help Question 1 (continued) Spend some time reflecting upon how you react generally to children and young people when they are upset or angry. What do you tend to do most times? Do you think you demonstrate understanding and respect?

RESPECT FOR CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S FEELINGS

An educator can acknowledge respect for a child's or a young person's feelings in the following ways:

- 1. Acknowledge that the child or young person does feel something and that feelings are normal.
- 2. Reflect the feeling in words that the child or young person at their stage of development might understand.
- 3. Respect the child or young person even if the way the child or young person expressed their feelings was inappropriate.

There is a saying that often helps at these times.

'Always accept the child, you don't have to accept or approve of the behaviour.'

One of the most straight-forward ways to help acknowledge and respect a child's or a young person's feelings is called, 'Reflective Listening.' This acknowledges how a child or a young person feels, is recognised and respected and helps a child or a young person to view their feelings and responses as valid. Reflective listening does not allow or encourage children and young people to

express feelings in inappropriate ways but rather acknowledges things such as:

"I know you feel angry that you have to be here today. It must be hard when you really just wish to go home".

"I know you feel frustrated at the moment, you seem to have had a tough day at school."

This acknowledgment enables a child or a young person to see that they are in fact able to feel things, even negative feelings, and that words can be used to express feelings. This, over time, helps a child or a young person to use language (words) rather than kicking or hurting another. As a child or a young person matures, they in turn are then more likely to express their needs or thoughts to others and thus, help to encourage and help each other.

An extension of reflective listening, when a child or a young person has perhaps hurt another child or young person from frustration is the following example.

Scenario

A six year old child is making a tall structure with some building blocks and another child who wanted a particular block kicks over the six year-old's block building.

The educator, using reflective listening and redirection/consequence strategies could respond in the following way.

"I know you are frustrated because you wanted that block and it is hard when you can't have what you want, but it is not okay to mess up someone else's blocks. If you want to continue to play here, you will have to stay away from the other child's blocks."

In this response, the educator is not 'letting the child get away with it,' or simply acknowledging the frustration of the child but ignoring the inappropriate behaviour. The educator is respecting that it is normal to be frustrated when you cannot have something when you want it, but also that it is not okay to interfere or hurt or mess up someone else's game because you are frustrated.

Over time, with a consistent approach such as this from educators, we provide opportunities for children and young people to learn to use words if they can or to seek the support of an adult rather than hurt another child or young person or interfere with other children's or young people's play.

Self Help Question 2 Think about reflective listening. Try to practice this technique with people you live with or work with. A strategy that may help involves starting your response with, "It seems like you are feeling....". List some of the situations when you have practiced this technique.

Self Help Question 2 (continued) Think about the phrase, "Always accept the child, you don't have to accept or approve of the behaviour". In what situations might you have to really remember this? List three examples.

Self Help Question 2 (continued) Reflect upon your own language and expression with others. Are you able to acknowledge feelings and to describe them to others? Practice doing this.

EXPECTATIONS OF CHILDREN

Children and young people are not the same as adults or even the same as teenagers. They do not think the same way as adults, they have less language skills, they have less experience in interacting with others, they understand things in different ways and often make sense of things very differently from the way adults do.

Sometimes, educators mistakenly assume that children, young people and adults are the same. Sometimes we hear educators saying things like, "come on, you should know better, you are in year 3 now", or, "you are old enough to know better".

Educators must remember that, trying to reason with a child or a young person who has done something inappropriately, is not always the best approach. Using humiliation, like, "you should know better than that" often leads to increased frustration and anger and also does not help a child or a young person reflect upon their actions.

One of the important aspects of working with children and young people is to remember that they are in fact children and young people, not miniature adults. Children and young people think differently, understand things differently, and need simple, straightforward ways of being redirected and encouraged to use appropriate, rather than inappropriate, ways to interact with others.

'During childhood, the sense of [children's and young people's] self-identity becomes more complex and multifaceted as children and young people have more varied interactions and experiences in the broader community. As children and young people get older, they can differentiate aspects of their self-identity and reconcile different ideas and traits about themselves' (MTOP V2.0, 2022).

'In school age care settings, children and young people develop a sense of belonging when they feel accepted and can establish and maintain relationships with their peers and educators' (MTOP V2.0, 2022).

The directions, expectations, language and interactions that adults use must reflect that we are working with children and young people, and that we cannot expect and should not expect them to respond to us in the way adults do.



Self Help Question 3 Consider the sorts of things adults say to children and young people. List five statements you have heard adults use with a child or a young person where it sounds as if the adult has forgotten or not considered the child or young person is a child or a young person rather than an adult.

Self Help Question 3 (continued) List five ways that you think a child or a young person demonstrates they think differently or understand things differently from an adult.

PROACTIVE VERSUS REACTIVE STRATEGIES FOR GUIDING BEHAVIOUR

The most common strategies used in guiding behaviour are known as 'reactive.' Reactive strategies are ones that occur or are implemented after an event or incident. They usually involve what is known as 'punishment' or 'consequences' and attempt to stop the inappropriate behaviour. Whilst reacting in some way to inappropriate behaviours is part of guiding children and young people, the reactive approach is neither the most important, nor usually the most effective strategy in the longer term.

The aim in working with children and young people is to help promote in them a sense of what is known as 'intrinsic motivation' to encourage children and young people to behave because they know it helps themselves and others in productive ways and not to avoid punishment.

Extrinsic motivation to behave is about avoiding punishment or getting a reward and is not the most effective means of helping children and young people develop responsibility for their own actions and behaviours.

An example of extrinsic motivation:

A parent may say to their children when they get into the car.

"You had better put on your seatbelts or the police officer will get us".

This example places fear of punishment as the reason and rationale for doing something like putting on a seat belt. For families to help children and young people to develop appropriate behaviours for intrinsic reasons the parent could have said,

"You need to put your seat belt on so that we are safe in the car".

In order to promote more opportunities for children and young people to develop intrinsic motivation, to gain understanding and to take responsibility for their own behaviours, the proactive approach is the first and most important strategy we can use with children and young people.

The proactive approach differs from the reactive because the proactive attempts to establish an environment that avoids as many opportunities as possible for high levels of frustration in children and young people and attempts to reflect an environment that is encouraging, respects the individual and provides a range of learning experiences that help children and young people to express feelings, explore feelings and behaviours in ways that are safe and secure. The proactive approach requires the adults to spend energy in thinking, planning and setting up an environment that is most likely to support, encourage and minimise frustration for children and young people, even before they arrive.

The proactive approach attempts to 'get in first' before the need arises to 'react' to inappropriate behaviours.

There are three major areas that the proactive approach includes:

- 1. The environment
- 2. The program
- 3. The educator

THE ENVIRONMENT

Educators work in collaboration with children, young people and families to prepare environments that cater for diverse interest, needs and curiosities promoting a sense of ownership and independence. The environment needs to be set up in ways that best suit the stage of development of the children and young people. Environments need to reflect a range of characteristics to help respect the child or young person and minimise frustrations for children and young people.

'School age care is characterised by opportunities to develop relationships. Some children and young people develop social skills through quiet play, such as talking to friends, so having spaces and time for small and large groups of children and young people to gather is important. Other children and young people socialise through physical play requiring open spaces to develop physical skills and social skills, such as team building and leadership' (MTOP V2.0, 2022).

Some of these characteristics include:

 enough space for children and young people to move easily and freely around the room without bumping into things

- enough cosy corners and 'escape' places such as cubby houses made from a blanket, for children and young people to have some personal space and time away from others
- a light and bright feeling in the air that is not stuffy, not too hot in winter etc
- a range of activities and play areas set up so children and young people can have choice and variety
- plenty of time outdoors. Children and young people need ample time to be outdoors even though adults may feel the cold, children don't tend to!
- giving some choice and decision making as to what activities or experiences can be planned and implemented
- being given some responsibility for making some of the rules. Shared decision making in the 5–12 age group empowers children and young people to feel that they have some say in how things work.



THE PROGRAM

THE EDUCATOR

In school age settings, play and leisure experiences provide opportunities for children and young people to learn as they discover, problem solve, create, improvise, imagine and act with confidence. Educators are intentional in providing opportunities for children and young people to engage in learning through play, leisure and recreational opportunities. The actual activities, learning experiences, resources, equipment and materials provided for the children and young people can impact upon their behaviours.

The following lists some of the program considerations to enable a proactive approach:

- Allowing some choice of activities and play for children and young people both inside and outdoors.
- Providing creative art opportunities so that not all children and young people are expected to reproduce something that an adult has made. Copying the creation of an adult or art book's creation often leads to frustration. This practice also shows a lack of respect for the child's or young person's own creativity and learning.
- Providing plenty of time for long uninterrupted play and leisure time. Remember that at school children and young people spend a lot of time working together in groups.
- Having small groups rather than large groups and providing lots of time for children and young people to engage in play and leisure and recreational activities on their own if they wish.

'Children and young people act intentionally in play when they make decisions about their play with what and with whom to engage and invite into their play. Neural pathways and connections in the brain are stimulated when children and young people are fully engaged in their play as they make plans, create characters, solve problems, develop self-awareness and learn how to socialise, negotiate and think with others' (MTOP V2.0, 2022).

The educator has the most important part of all in the proactive approach to guiding children's and young people's behaviour. The educator role is the most critical and listed below are some of the aspects of their role in the proactive approach.

- establishing a real and respectful relationship with each child and young person
- providing opportunities for children and young people to develop trust with the educator
- respecting and reflecting the feelings of each child and young person
- respecting the culture and family of each child and young person
- holding realistic expectations of children and young people
- using language that is appropriate to a child's or young person's understanding
- avoiding using sarcasm, 'putdowns' or negative language with a child or a young person
- using encouragement with each child and young person and making a point of affirming something they have done during each day
- providing appropriate modelling of their own behaviours and interactions with others.

Self Help Question 4 Write in one paragraph your own understanding of the differences between a reactive approach and a proactive approach to guiding children's and young person's behaviour.

Self Help Question 4 (continued) Write in one paragraph your understanding of the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and why promoting intrinsic motivation may be beneficial to children and young people.

Self Help Question 4 (continued)	
Consider the three elements of the proactive approach (the environment, the program and the educator role). List three additional examples under each of those three elements of how you can promote a proactive approach to guiding behaviour.	

WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHEN INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOURS ARISE

'Educators' professional judgements are central to their active role in facilitating children and young people's wellbeing, learning and development. In making professional judgements, they intentionally weave together their:

- professional knowledge and skills
- contextual knowledge of each child and young person, their families and communities
- understanding that relationships with children and young people and families are critical to creating safe and trusting spaces
- awareness of how their beliefs and values impact on children and young people's wellbeing, learning and development
- knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives
- personal styles and past experiences
- understanding of the planning cycle'

(MTOP V2.0, 2022).

'Drawing on a range of perspectives and theories can challenge ways of seeing children and young people, facilitating learning, and encouraging educators, as individuals and with colleagues, to:

- 'investigate why they act in the ways that they do
- consider the voices of children and young people, their families and their communities in their decision-making and consider the consequences of their actions for children and young people's experiences
- discuss and debate theories and other perspectives to identify strengths and limitations
- recognise how theories, world views and other knowledges assist in making sense of their work but can also limit their actions and thoughts
- consider who is included and who is excluded and silenced by ways of working
- find new ways of working fairly, justly and inclusively

• consider the ecosystems in which children live and learn'

(MTOP V2.0, 2022).

Despite all of the best intentions, planning and preparation, there will be times when a child or a young person will behave in ways that cause concern either to themselves, the group or another child or young person. At these times, it may be helpful to remember the following phrase:

'All behaviour has meaning'

That does not mean we excuse the behaviour or condone the behaviour, but that we remember that no child is 'evil' or 'bad.' Some of their behaviours may well be totally inappropriate, perhaps even causing harm to others or themselves and while intervention will be needed, the educator must remember to respect the child or young person through this process.

The following procedures, along with the proactive approach, may help when working with challenging behaviours:

- Use reflective listening to provide words for the child or young person if they appear frustrated, angry or upset.
- Think before you respond and act, this gives you just a second to remain calm and assess what is occurring (obviously if a child or a young person is in danger, you don't wait).
- Try to avoid listening to two sides of an argument and trying to ascertain things like who had the ball first etc. Unless you saw the actual incident, it is too difficult to know what really happened and usually prolongs the issue.
- If two children or young people are fighting or arguing over the same piece of equipment you might provide a choice or allow the child or young person to make a decision. For example: "I don't know who had the ball first, you two try to work it out and if you can't then I will put the ball away for a while and you can both find something else to play with."

The idea is to provide what is known as a **consequence** if a child or a young person is mature enough to understand that their actions or choices will result in a consequence.

Example of a consequence:

If you can't sort out who had the ball first then the ball will be put away.

- It is important that a consequence is not viewed by the educator as a threat or as a punishment but rather as an opportunity to let the children and young people make a decision, change their behaviour or find a solution. These are important life skills and children and young people need to be provided with opportunities to problem solve and sort out their own difficulties and frustrations
- If a child or a young person repeatedly uses behaviour that is inappropriate and/or is causing real harm to others or disruption to the program, quietly but firmly leading them to another part of the room may be appropriate. This is not to be mistaken with the old view of 'time out' where children and young people were punished by being put on a 'naughty chair' or put in a corner or made to stay away from everyone for a prolonged time where they were humiliated.
- The removal should only be for a short time, perhaps 30 seconds or until the child or young person chooses to move away themselves. This removal away from the disruption allows the child or young person to calm themselves, perhaps to sit with an educator or alone and to just be removed from the stress. The removal place should still be within the program and room and not be seen by any child and young person as the punishment area. Just a place away from where the disruption occurred.
- It is not productive to try to reason with an angry child or young person or a child or a young person who is having a tantrum. In the heat of the moment, they are unlikely to reason with you or to be calm enough to hear or understand.

- Once you have made a decision or set a consequence it is important to carry through with the consequence and not be seen to easily change your mind. Therefore it is important that you think through carefully before reacting to a child or a young person in terms of what decision or action you are going to take.
- Always use a positive example when redirecting children. For example; "please walk inside", instead of "don't run inside". This not only redirects the child or young person from not running it helps them to know what to do instead, e.g. Walk not run. Instead of saying at the lunch table, 'sit nicely" say, 'sit still or sit quietly, or use your quiet voice".
- Avoid using judgemental terms when talking with children and young people at times when their behaviour is inappropriate. For example, never include words such as:
 - naughty
 - difficult
 - bad
 - hopeless
 - stupid.

Self Help Question 5 Think of the language, words and tones you use when working with a child or a young person who is displaying challenging or inappropriate behaviours. What are some of the words you might try to change? What words might you replace them with?

Self Help Question 5 (continued) Consider the term consequence as opposed to punishment. Write a paragraph that demonstrates your understanding of the differences between the two terms.

SUMMARY

Working with children and young people, particularly in terms of helping a child or a young person to develop appropriate behaviours requires the educator to remember the following key points:

- establishing and maintaining a positive relationship and positive interactions with the child or young person
- respecting and reflecting children's and young people's feelings and recognising the right of each child and young person to have feelings
- ensuring that educators have appropriate expectations and understandings of children's and young people's development
- providing a range of proactive strategies within the environment, program and adult role that promote opportunities for children and young people to develop intrinsic motivation
- avoiding judgemental or negative terms with children and young people
- using a range of redirection, encouragement, consequences and limits with children and young people.

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ASSESSMENT TASK

- 1. A strategy is a plan or procedure of action designed to achieve a particular goal. Write four key strategies for guiding children's and young person's behaviour.
- 2. Write at least three proactive strategies that could be used in response to the following scenario:

 Upon arriving at the service at 3.30pm after school, a ten year old child finds it difficult to settle into the program routine. The child wanders around the room, knocks over equipment and disrupts other children and young people.
- 3. Write three strategies you would employ in response to the following scenario. Provide the reasoning underpinning your strategies.
 - A five year old child has just started in the Before School Care program and attends each day. For the past five days, (the length of time the child has been attending) the child has cried and become extremely distressed when the parent has left. The level of distress does not appear to be calming down and the families and the educators are all feeling concerned.
- **4.** What are three positive strategies for communicating the behaviour expectations of the program to the children and young people?
- 5. Please produce and attach an example of a handout for staff working with children and young people outlining the importance of acknowledging children's and young people's feelings.

