

Chapter 13

Adult Positive Guidance and Children's Relationship Challenges

Being with infants and toddlers offers many opportunities to use positive guidance strategies that demonstrate your empathy toward children and move them forward in their development. The following are common examples in infant and toddler programs:

Tomo (8 months) crawls over to Peter and pulls his hair, which is shining in the light from the window.

Lila (18 months) exuberantly grabs her friend Suki around the neck, and they both tumble to the ground.

Freddie (20 months) bites Colton on the arm when he reaches in front of Freddie to take his toy.

Keiko (2 years) throws herself on the floor and cries when he has to wait for his teacher to get ready to go outside.

In this chapter, we provide many examples of how to help infants and toddlers manage their strong feelings and learn to be kind and helpful to others. These ideas help children learn how to be healthy, happy, creative, and productive members of their community. This first starts with us as adults being kind and helpful to children and modeling thoughtful behavior.

There is a real contrast between positive guidance and power assertion (Kim & Kochanska 2015). Guidance involves teaching, modeling, and supporting positive behavior. Adults need to be warmhearted and kindhearted with children and sensitive and responsive to infants' and toddlers' needs and challenges. Positive guidance results in infants and toddlers feeling secure and loved, not resentful and angry.

When adults use power assertion techniques, they act critical and negative with children. They may, for example, force a toddler to go to time-out. They may yell at a child, “Sit down, now,” or they may say no without providing a reason or without demonstrating empathy for a young child’s difficulty waiting or wanting something he cannot have. An adult may withdraw love or threaten to leave until a child complies with the adult’s wishes. And adults may try to over-control young children. For example, one teacher we observed wanted the toddlers in a group to sit still without moving a muscle for two minutes before they could eat. Of course, this led to many tears as the food sat in front of them and they tried not to wiggle. Power assertion techniques often lead to young children’s anger, defiance, sadness, and unwillingness to cooperate. Or there can be compliance when the adults are present and sneaky noncompliance when the children are unobserved.

Instead of using power assertion techniques, use positive guidance strategies that work. As you come to know each infant’s and toddler’s temperament and strengths, you will choose strategies that work with *individuals*. Your strategies will change as children mature since they develop skills to express their feelings and needs, understand more reasons, and are able to think about how others feel.

Use Guidance Strategies

This section provides a list of 20 positive guidance strategies. You probably use many of them already. Some may feel new to you and will require frequent practice so that you become comfortable using them. These strategies focus on adults and children building strong, caring relationships with each other. When challenges such as pushing, hitting, and biting occur, positive guidance strategies focus on relationship rebuilding and restoration with both adults and peers. The long-term goals for children are the ability to do the following:

- › Enjoy and engage in healthy, caring relationships with adults and peers
- › Develop a strong and positive sense of self
- › Develop self-regulation skills
- › Understand and express emotions in healthy ways
- › Become prosocial: take the perspective of others, feel empathy for other’s fears and troubles, be helpful
- › Problem solve: come to agreeable solutions to resolve conflicts

Ask yourself whether the strategies you are using accomplish these goals.

You want infants and toddlers to internalize ways to treat themselves, others, and their environment. Then they will not need others to control them. With your help, toddlers will be on their way toward self-regulation with you as a co-regulator. Use one or more of the following 10 strategies to prevent challenging behaviors and help children learn emotional and social skills.

- 1 Know child development milestones so that you have reasonable expectations.** There is often a disconnect between what adults believe infants and toddlers can do to control their behavior and the realistic developmental abilities of children. This is called the *expectation gap* (Zero to Three, n.d.). This gap leads to adults' *and* children's frustration and stress.
- 2 Support children's secure attachment to you.** Secure attachments free infants' and toddlers' emotional energy for loving and learning. Your sensitive, kind responsiveness helps them develop a secure attachment to you and models empathy. Your kindness also models prosocial behavior for children to imitate.
- 3 Be emotionally warm and kind.** Warmth is an adult characteristic that meets infants' and toddlers' great need for affection, builds a sense of self-worth, and predicts a young child's ability to manage strong emotions and behavior (Moran, Turiano, & Gentzler 2018). Warmth includes affection, as well as heartfelt and sincere concern for children's well-being. It is the opposite of rejection, aloofness, and unloving voice tones. Infants and toddlers know when you genuinely enjoy them and love being with them.
- 4 See and say the positive.** Use encouragement, not praise. Encouragement uses specific words with an admiring tone of voice. Praise includes comments such as "Good girl," "Good job," and "That is great!" Often, infants and toddlers are not sure what you are referring to when you use praise. Encouragement, on the other hand, inspires children to continue the behavior and teaches them vocabulary and concepts. When an infant pats another peer *gently*, say, "Kate, you are patting Liliana so gently. Look at Liliana's face. She is smiling. Liliana likes that." When you comment on a positive behavior, you are both affirming the kind child's behavior *and* helping children take the perspective of another.
- 5 Use emotion talk and empathy as well as perspective-taking strategies.** Show compassion and empathy for young children's emotional displays with your face and body. Really listen to infants and toddlers. Read their emotions and comfort them, while helping them learn to express and manage difficult emotions. Help children read each other's emotions; aid toddlers in taking the perspective of other children.
- 6 Be a co-regulator with infants and toddlers.** Be the copilot who helps calm children when they become distressed: hold and rock an upset child, and model how to think through problems rather than come apart emotionally. If a toddler drops to the floor and falls apart emotionally (a tantrum), use empathy statements and say, "I know you are feeling sad (angry, frustrated). You really wish you could have the whole box of crayons, but Vir needs some, too. I will help you choose your favorite color."
- 7 Assume and see the good intentions.** A toddler who wraps his arms around another toddler may cause them both to tumble down, and you may just see them fall. Assume good intentions.