Principles for Developmentally Appropriate Guidance


The Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children adopted a position statement in 1989 to give direction to the use of developmentally appropriate guidance with young children aged birth to eight.

The importance of guidance techniques that are based on sound child development principles is made even more important by events of violence in our schools and society. By responding to classroom conflicts in ways that teach rather than punish and include all in the group, rather than exclude some from the group, teachers of young children are contributing to a more peaceful world.

The position statement is intended for use by administrators, teachers, and all other caregivers of young children. The term “teacher” is used in a general sense to refer to all adults who care for young children. Guidance is defined as an approach to children’s development in which conflicts are viewed as teaching and learning opportunities; the adult helps children learn from their mistakes, rather than punishing them for the mistakes they make, assists children to learn to solve their problems, rather than punishing them for having problems they cannot solve.

Principal One The teacher uses guidance in order to teach children democratic life skills.

Example: Two children argued and then hit each other over sharing new miniature family figures. The teacher separated the children to cool them down; then brought them together to resolve the conflict. After talking, the children (with the teacher’s help) decided that one child would have two adult figures run “the store.” The other child would bring his figures to “buy food.” This was not the solution the teacher anticipated but the children were satisfied and it resolved the conflict in a positive manner. The children agreed that it is better to use words or get the teacher rather than fight.

Principal Two The teacher regards classroom conflicts as mistaken behavior and uses conflicts as teaching opportunities.

Example: A child wet his pants on the playground. Two classmates saw him and made fun of him. His teacher got him dry clothes and then had a guidance talk with the two students. She told them she once wet her pants at school and asked if they’d ever had an accident. They talked about how the boy probably felt and the teacher asked them to think of some ways they could help the boy feel better. Later the teacher saw the children playing together.

Principal Three The teacher works to understand the reasons for children’s behavior.

Example: Children do things (a) to see what will happen; (b) because they have been influenced by others; or (c) because they have trouble in their lives that is beyond their ability to understand and manage. Each reason may have a different way of guiding children to better behavior. For (a), a child may mark on a table and the teacher might show them where
to get soapy water to remove the marks and where to get paper to use with the markers. For (b), a child swears about another child’s behavior. The teacher responds by saying “He made you feel upset and you can tell him or me, but you don’t need to call names.” For (c), a child may have irritable behavior at the beginning and end of the week. Talking with a parent shows that the parents are separated and the child lives with different parents during the week and on the weekends. The staff work together with the parents to make the transitions more understandable and less traumatic for the child.

Principal Four The teacher builds and maintains an encouraging classroom in which all children feel welcome as fully participating members.
Example: Children were being too noisy as they walked down the school hallway. The teacher helped them discuss during a class meeting about how to remember to walk quietly. Children decided to walk “like mommy & daddy elephants” who must walk on tiptoe so they don’t wake the babies.

Principal Five The teacher uses developmentally appropriate practice to prevent institution-caused mistaken behavior.
Example: This behavior is often the result of pressures teachers feel to “get children ready for the next level.” Our job is to provide the best possible classroom experience they can have, e.g., group activities that do not have too much sitting or listening; classwide projects that are not too easy for some and too difficult for others; schedules that have balanced routines and efficient transitions; expectations and assessments do not cause children to feel like “winners” or “losers.”

A teacher set up centers for blocks, dramatic play, writing, art, music, science, and technology. Time was allocated for an open center time, following an academic focus time. Children recorded in journals with early writing and art what they intended to do in each center.

Principal Six The teacher functions as a professional rather than a technician.
If children exhibit challenging behavior and the teacher is not aware what happened, he can take time to determine what action to take. “I am really bothered that the water got spilled out of the aquarium. We need to fill it up quickly and then we’ll talk about what happened.”