

Statement on Positive Behavior Guidance in Pre-K for All and EarlyLearn NYC Programs

NYC Department of Education & Administration for Children's Services

Position

The NYC Department of Education (DOE) and Administration for Children's Services (ACS) are committed to ensuring all Pre-K for All programs prepare children and families with the skills and knowledge needed to enter Kindergarten prepared to succeed. With Pre-K for All, children will gain a strong foundation in all domains of development and families will be prepared to support their child's learning and growth.

Pre-K for All and EarlyLearn NYC programs are responsible for structuring an environment and approaching interactions in ways that build positive relationships with children and families. In our pre-K programs, children and families should feel secure, supported, and recognized as important members of a program's community. A child engaged in active learning who feels secure, supported, and valued, is more likely to demonstrate respectful and constructive behaviors and engage in positive interactions. Children's behavior should be guided in a positive way as part of the developmentally appropriate instruction taking place throughout the program.

Children in Pre-K for All and EarlyLearn NYC programs may not be expelled or suspended.

Pre-K for All Programs are expected to implement positive behavior guidance strategies that are grounded in the following practices:

- Teaching staff build nurturing learning environments through the use of developmentally appropriate strategies that advance children's social and emotional development and approaches to learning. For more detail on these domains of development and learning, refer to the [NYS Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core](#) and the [Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework](#).
- Successful positive behavior guidance is built upon strong relationships that are grounded in trust and respect. Programs collaborate with families to ensure the program meets the needs of all learners. Teaching staff and administrators develop strategies to build each child's social, emotional, and behavioral skills based on shared understandings with each family. Establishing regular and ongoing two-way communication with families will create strong relationships that allow for effective collaborations.

Overview of Guidance and Support for Pre-K Programs

The following pages outline additional guidance on positive behavior guidance strategies to support programs in meeting the expectations described above. Behavior guidance approaches, strategies, policies and procedures implemented in programs must align to this guidance. Our guidance currently includes sections on:

1. [Proactive Measures](#)
2. [Positive Reinforcement](#)
3. [Responsive Strategies](#)

In situations where programs need more support to interpret or implement positive behavior guidance strategies, programs should contact DOE or ACS.

- Pre-K for All programs (including district schools, NYC Early Education Centers, EarlyLearn NYC providers, and DOE Pre-K Centers) with questions should contact the DOE Early Childhood Social Worker Team by emailing prekfamilyengagement@schools.nyc.gov.
- EarlyLearn NYC providers should utilize their partnerships with mental health consultants who can provide observation, guidance, and support to teachers in developing a plan to meet a child's individualized social and emotional needs.
 - For questions about children in the birth–3 age range, please contact Teija Sudol at teija.sudol@acs.nyc.gov or 212-393-5029.

Positive Behavior Guidance Strategies

1. *Proactive Measures to Promote Positive Behavior*

Children enter early childhood programs at varying developmental levels. There is a wide range in the behaviors and skills that are considered “typical” for children in this age group. Each child is unique and requires individualization that may be based on personality, ability, etc. These important considerations must be taken into account as programs advance children’s learning and development across all domains. To support each child’s growth in social-emotional and other skills that affect children’s ability to engage with curriculum and program as a whole, Pre-K for All and EarlyLearn NYC programs are required to develop and implement proactive, developmentally appropriate behavior guidance strategies such as those described below.

- [Respectful, caring relationships](#)
- [Flexible and responsive teaching](#)
- [Physical environment and activities](#)
- [Clear expectations](#)
- [Developmentally appropriate instructional strategies](#)
- [Transitions](#)
- Establish **respectful, caring relationships** among staff, children, and families.
 - Communicate and act on the principle that all children are capable of learning and making developmental progress.
 - Consistently use welcoming and positive language and tone, and ensure adults in the program interact positively with each other as well as with children.
 - Acknowledge children’s emotions and provide comfort and assistance when necessary.
 - Explicitly welcome families into the classroom environment and foster daily two-way communications between families and teaching staff.
 - Deepen knowledge of each child’s skills, interests and needs through implementation of an authentic assessment system and regular conversation with families.
 - Acknowledge and respect children’s rich backgrounds, cultures, and linguistic diversity and tailor your practices appropriately to meet these needs.
- Be **flexible and responsive** to children’s skills, interests and developmental needs when planning the curriculum.
 - The flow of the day/daily schedule should include ample time for child-initiated and teacher-facilitated activities.
 - During child-initiated times of the day, empower children to self-select and engage with a variety of classroom centers, learning materials, and companions, encouraging purposeful play.
 - Use information gathered from authentic assessments to develop lessons and activities that build on children’s strengths and interests while addressing their needs.
 - Support children’s active participation by incorporating children’s ideas into instructional activities and encourage children to talk and share their ideas for learning.
 - Encourage children to have freedom of movement by allowing them to choose how and where they sit, stand, or move within small-group and whole-group learning experiences, as long as this does not interfere with other children’s learning or feelings of belonging. Limit the amount of time children are expected to remain sitting during an activity to short periods of about 10-15 minutes at a time.
 - If students do not appear to be engaged during periods of whole-group instruction, consider:
 - Including additional whole-group movement.
 - Increasing student participation.

- Shortening or changing the activity.
 - Reducing the frequency of whole-group activities.
- Arrange and supervise the **physical environment and activities** in ways that promote children's development of approaches to learning, social and emotional skills, and positive behaviors.
 - Arrange the environment to allow children to utilize shared space collaboratively.
 - Stock classroom centers with diverse materials that are suitable for the range of skills, interests, and abilities of children in the classroom. Ensure there is an appropriate amount of resources and that children can access those resources independently. All children should have opportunities to participate without competing for classroom resources or adult assistance.
 - Ensure that each area of the classroom has sufficient space to allow for the number of children that will utilize the space at a given time.
 - Use visual displays (e.g. Tools of Autonomy) that support children in understanding expectations of their behavior during the day, with others, and with the resources in their environment.
 - Tools of Autonomy are the supports in the classroom that support prekindergarten students to develop independence and self-sufficiency. They include center systems or choice charts (that children use to choose their interest area), flow of the day displays (that establish a predictable sequence of events in pictures and words), interactive attendance charts, and job charts (that support children to take turns with routine jobs with modelling and support from the teacher).
 - Other examples of visual displays include using labels for center and resource organization (to assist children in choosing or returning materials after their use), or pictures that remind children of specific behavior expectations (such as a mouth that can remind children to use soft voices indoors).
 - Establish a cozy area reserved for quiet activity, or a way for children to find space for privacy and relaxation.
 - Offer extra support, attention, and modelling when children are engaging in a new activity and gradually introduce new materials and manage resource access to keep children from being overwhelmed.
 - Anticipate problematic behavior by frequently monitoring, or "scanning," the classroom, and proactively intervene to avoid escalation.
- **Communicate clear expectations** for children that help them develop independence and self-regulation skills, and engage in respectful interactions with peers and adults.
 - At the beginning of the year, encourage children to participate in creating a set of expectations for behavior in the classroom.
 - Use positive language to clearly establish and define the desired behavior (e.g. "We share toys with friends" rather than "Don't grab toys from other children").
 - In general, negative language should be avoided when setting or reinforcing behavior expectations. *Very rarely*, using negative language like "no" or "stop" may be appropriate to keep a child safe in an emergency.
 - Explicitly teach children how to use and move through the classroom space/centers, treat their resources and environment with respect, and remind children of classroom expectations frequently, especially at the beginning of the year or before a transition to another activity.
 - Throughout the year, guide children's peer interactions in a clear and consistent manner, so that children come to understand behavioral expectations, the impact of their choices, and have an opportunity to practice conflict resolution strategies.

- Use **developmentally appropriate instructional strategies** to establish a positive classroom culture, help children make meaningful connections, and feel excited and motivated to engage in meaningful activities as well as with adults and other children.
 - Help children develop self-regulation skills and positive relationships by modelling respectful and caring behaviors.
 - When modelling such behaviors, teaching staff should use self- and parallel talk by narrating or describing their actions and children's actions:
 - To explain considerate ways of thinking and acting (e.g. "I notice you don't have a magnifying glass but you look like you want to join the science activity. Would you like some help finding an extra one?")
 - To explain emotional regulation (e.g. "Hmm, you just took the markers from me and I'm getting upset... I wonder, what should I do now? Should I grab for them or ask you to give them back?")
 - Use story-telling, literature, puppetry, etc. to engage children in thinking about the impacts of certain behaviors, and to extend children's empathy and understanding of emotions.
 - Engage children in problem-solving discussion regularly and establish the expectations that children talk with each other to resolve conflicts.
- Plan for successful management of **transitions** at the beginning and end of the day, between activities, into and out of the program, and when starting or ending special education services or specialist activities (when applicable).
 - Give children reminders before major transitions so they have time to finish what they are doing and prepare for the next activity.
 - Make transitions or wait times fun and educational by singing songs, rhyming words or names, or going over the expected behaviors of the next setting. This will keep children engaged in learning and prepared for the next event.
 - Minimize wait times during transitions in order to maximize children's active engagement throughout all times of day.
 - For example, during bathroom routines, rotate small groups of children so that all children can engage in productive learning activities for as much time as possible rather than waiting in line.

2. Positive Reinforcement to Promote Positive Behavior

Positive reinforcement acknowledges and motivates further positive behavior. It is important to let children know that they are making progress toward a desirable new skill to encourage their effort. Positive reinforcement can be done in many ways, and may need to be tailored for individual children. Children demonstrating new and more complicated behaviors may need additional reinforcements.

Examples of developmentally appropriate ways to reinforce positive behaviors include:

- Using **social reinforcements** such as praise, smiles, encouragement, or even a well-timed high-five or a thumbs up.
 - Praise should be specific and provide meaningful feedback, especially when the behavior is relatively new to the child (e.g. “You were very thoughtful to share the toys with your friend. He seems really happy that you included him in the game”). Avoid more general feedback (e.g. “good job”).
 - A high-five or thumbs up are appropriate non-verbal reinforcements for behaviors that are clearly encouraged (e.g. the child has been working on sharing and you notice them share their toys from across the room. You catch their eye and give them a thumbs up immediately following the positive behavior).
- Using **activity reinforcements** as a reward for desired positive behaviors, such as being able to choose a song or activity for the group or during center time.
 - There should already be room in the curriculum for following children’s interests or ideas for learning. These reinforcements are therefore a logical way to incorporate positive reinforcement into the program.

3. Responsive Strategies to Promote Positive Behavior

Pre-K for All and EarlyLearn NYC programs are required to develop and implement strategies for responding to behavior that is disruptive to other children or unsafe for the child and/or others. This does not apply to behaviors of intentional risk-taking appropriate for learning new physical skills, such as walking on a balance beam or climbing a rope ladder during gross-motor activities, with adult support and supervision. Teaching staff should collaborate with a child’s family to help the child develop solutions to demonstrate positive behavior or practice appropriate alternative behaviors, consistently and in various contexts. Programs should communicate with families throughout the process of positive behavior guidance to exchange information about strategies and progress. All strategies for guiding children to appropriate behaviors should be implemented in a calm, consistent, and non-punitive way to support children’s social and emotional development and approaches to learning.

- [Understand contributing factors](#)
- [Offering choices](#)
- [Redirecting or providing acceptable substitutes](#)
- [Supporting the child’s sense of security, self-regulation and self-soothing skills](#)
- [Limiting negative attention](#)
- [Logical consequences](#)
- [Replacement/alternative behaviors](#)
- [Modifications to program structures](#)
- [Additional support](#)

- Program staff members should **work together with families and others to better understand the factors contributing to a child's behavior**. Ask the question: "What is this child trying to communicate when they demonstrate this behavior?" Factors contributing to a child's behavior may include:
 - Programmatic structures or conditions such as the flow of the day/daily schedule, arrangement of the classroom, noise level, etc.
 - The child's feeling of security within the classroom or the condition of their relationships with adults or peers.
 - The child's unique circumstances. For example:
 - The child has not yet learned appropriate behaviors for social interactions and may be grabbing toys instead of asking or hitting when upset.
 - The child is going through a transition at home and experiencing emotional distress as a result (e.g. a new baby in the family) or has experienced trauma.
 - By consistently observing and documenting children's behavior, teaching staff may identify the situations that trigger disruptive or unsafe behaviors and help determine the factors that contribute to such behavior.
 - A cycle of *observation* (collect and annotate evidence), *planning* (analyze the evidence and use it to inform your practice), *implementation* (make planned changes to your practice or program), *reflection* (observe the effect), and *adjustment* (make improvements if needed) should be used in any response plan for behavior guidance.
 - Cycles of assessment and planning are already in use within programs through the implementation of authentic assessment systems, and can be leveraged to plan for positive behavior guidance.

Depending on the contributing factors, some strategies to respond to unsafe or disruptive behaviors include:

- **Offering choices** to allow children control over their own behavior, such as choosing which toys to put away or where to sit at the lunch table.
- **Redirecting or providing acceptable substitutes** to help children identify options for their behavior, such as when a teacher may notice there are too many people at an activity table and suggest a child engage with a different activity while they wait for a turn.
- **Supporting the child's sense of security** and development of **self-regulation or self-soothing skills**.
 - Staff may collaborate with the child and family to strengthen the child's relationships with children and adults in the program.
 - The child may be encouraged to bring a "security object" (e.g. blanket, teddy bear) to help feel more comfortable in the classroom.
 - The child may be encouraged to utilize the quiet space or create a space for privacy in the classroom where children can calm down from feelings of anger or frustration.
 - The child can be encouraged to practice breathing techniques, getting a drink of water, or other strategies that assist in processing strong emotions or related negative physiological responses.
 - The child may be encouraged to self-soothe using sensory materials or objects, such as sand or water play, or any other activity calming to the child's senses.

- **Limiting the amount of negative attention given to children** by ignoring non-disruptive inappropriate behavior and focusing on the positive.
 - Staff may choose to ignore non-disruptive behavior and continue to focus children on another learning activity. Positive behaviors should be reinforced with positive attention.
 - A strategy of actively ignoring a child's behavior should not be utilized in isolation or to the extent where it becomes a detriment to a child's well-being. This strategy does not replace the expectation that teachers and program staff actively engage all children in the curriculum and encourage their participation in the program.
- **Implementing logical consequences**, where a child's access to an activity or resource is restricted in direct response to an unsafe or disruptive behavior.
 - The severity of the consequence should be appropriate and relevant (e.g. not being able to stay at the water table because they continue to pour water on other children).
 - This strategy may be used along with redirecting or providing acceptable alternatives.
 - This strategy may be used along with encouraging a child to utilize a quiet space for a limited period of time.
- Helping the child develop **appropriate replacement or alternative behaviors**.
 - Staff may use different strategies depending on the program's philosophy and the unique needs of the child and family. One possible strategy for programs and families is outlined below:
 1. Identify the inappropriate behavior in a non-judgmental, factual way.
 2. Calmly communicate with the child about the impact of the behavior on him/herself and others.
 3. Help the child identify contributing factors and identify an appropriate alternative behavior or way to address the situation.
 4. With the child, develop strategies for demonstrating the appropriate alternative behavior, along with any supports the child may need (for example, a phrase or visual cue that the teacher and student agree on to help remind the student to use the alternative behavior).
 5. Collaborate with the child's family throughout the process.
 6. Celebrate with the child when he/she makes progress over time.
- Modifying programmatic structures as appropriate.
 - Staff may make **modifications to daily schedules** (such as scheduling center-time to take place earlier in the day) **or the physical environment** (such as moving the quiet and noisy centers further apart in the classroom) to accommodate the needs of children and minimize their frustration throughout the day. This can be an effective support for a group of children or individual children.
 - Programs may not shorten the school day of any child unless the program receives approval from the DOE's Division of Early Childhood Education and written consent of the child's parent or guardian. In particular, any proposed changes that would modify a child's access to the program by temporarily shortening the length of a child's day must be planned with the support of your program's assigned Early Childhood Social Worker or Program Specialist, in collaboration with the child's family. These changes can be implemented only with voluntary written consent of the child's parent or legal guardian on a form provided by the Social Worker or Program Specialist informing the family of the option of continuing with a full-time program. This written plan must outline the strategies that the program will use to aid the child to return to full access and program participation within a specified timeline (not to exceed three weeks). Programs may only place children on shortened schedules if they follow these

procedures and if the child's parent or legal guardian consents. Parents' written consent to a shortened schedule must be kept on file and be made available upon request. Programs may not shorten the school day of a child as an alternative to suspension.

- Any changes to programmatic structures must not discriminate against any child or family, where a child or family's right to successfully engage in a full day of high quality pre-K is limited due to any characteristic or perceived characteristic of that child or family.
- After implementing these positive behavior guidance strategies with the support of an assigned Social Worker or Program Specialist, the program and family may need **additional support from an outside agency**.
 - These supports include, but are not limited to, parenting or family support classes, professional learning opportunities for program staff, psychological evaluation or collaboration with the [Committee on Preschool Special Education \(CPSE\)](#).
 - In some cases, the outside agencies may not be able to provide services to the child or family immediately. In these cases, the child may require more direct supervision for a period of time. This will help ensure a safe, nurturing environment for the child and his/her peers.
 - For a child who already has an IEP, contact the child's parent or legal guardian and the [CPSE](#) to discuss scheduling a new IEP meeting to consider whether any changes to the IEP are needed to support the child's development.
 - For a child without an IEP, the behavior can most often be addressed using the positive behavior guidance strategies described above. However, a referral for preschool special education evaluations may be appropriate if a child is not making meaningful progress even with the interventions that the pre-k program has implemented. In these cases, speak with the parent about making a referral to the [CPSE](#) for preschool special education evaluations.

Additional Resources for Programs

1. The [NYS Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core \(PKFCC\)](#) and the [Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework](#) describe outcomes and goals for children within the domains of learning and development. The benchmarks and guiding principles provide the basis for developmentally appropriate expectations for young children's learning and the underlying principles of practice for Pre-K programs.

2. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) provides a common language around effective, positive interactions in pre-K classrooms, and is a strong tool to support teachers with guidance on effective interactions that are aligned to this Statement on Positive Behavior Guidance in Pre-K for All and EarlyLearn NYC Programs.

- For more information about the CLASS tool, including regional trainings that are offered in New York City, please visit [Teachstone's website](#).

3. An authentic assessment system is a formative collection of qualitative student data (i.e. student observations and work samples) that measures student progress across developmental domains to inform instruction. Authentic assessment systems support teachers to:

- Strategically collect observational data and student work samples.
- Analyze that information along a developmental continuum.
- Consider next steps for planning instruction that is responsive to the needs of individual children and groups of children.

Pre-K for All programs are required to use a developmentally appropriate, valid, and reliable authentic assessment system to monitor developmental progression and plan instruction. The Division of Early Childhood Education provides online subscriptions and resources to assist teachers in authentic assessment work. For more information about the DOE-approved authentic assessment systems, please email prekassessment@schools.nyc.gov and/or visit the following links.

- Work Sampling System ([WSS](#))
- Teaching Strategies GOLD ([TS GOLD](#))
- High Scope Child Observation Record Advantage ([COR Advantage](#))

4. The following websites have useful resources that Pre-K and EarlyLearn NYC programs can use to understand and support children's social, emotional and behavioral development:

- [Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning](#)
- [Technical Assistance Center for Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children](#)
 - [Toolkit](#)
 - [Resources](#)
- [Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation](#)
 - [Teaching Tools for Young Children with Challenging Behaviors](#)
- [Collaborative Problem Solving](#)
 - [Materials](#)
- [Center on the Developing Child](#)
- [Trauma Smart](#)
- [Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative](#)

5. *The following books can be used to support social-emotional learning and to understand behavioral expectations:*

- *Will I Have a Friend?*, by M. Cohen.
- *Llama Llama Misses Mama*, by A. Dewdney.
- *Wemberly Worried*, by K. Henkes.
- *The Kissing Hand*, by Audrey Penn.
- *When I Feel Good about Myself*, by Cornelia Maude Spleman (and others in the series)
- *Knuffle Bunny Too: A Case of Mistaken Identity*, by M. Willems.
- *How Do Dinosaurs Go to School?*, by Yolen & Teague.
- *Me I Am!*, by J. Prelutsky.