

## Guidance and Discipline



Learning to find a comfortable place among others is a complicated process that constantly changes and develops over time, especially when talking about young children. At *Ashland Preschool*, we try to minimize this uneasiness by providing a child-friendly environment, appropriate activities, and sufficient materials to meet the needs of each child. However, even careful planning cannot prevent all misbehaviors from occurring, and it is important to understand that conflicts are a natural occurrence as children try to relate to one another in a group setting.

*Ashland Preschool* uses discipline as an opportunity to help and guide children in the difficult task of learning how to get along. Our program staff looks at misbehaviors from a positive perspective, because much can be learned from these adverse situations. These conflicts can be looked upon as opportunities to seek and give comfort, search for and create solutions, identify and understand emotions, collaborate with peers, and develop self-control. Above all, we strive to create an environment where children are safe and know they will be cared for and listened to, not just by teachers and support staff, but by one another as well.

Many techniques can be used for assisting children through conflict resolution. The technique will differ depending on the age and developmental level of the child, and the severity of the situation. However, the ultimate goal is to guide and encourage the child to become a problem solver, and develop a desire to make decisions based on their knowledge of “right” and “wrong.”

Following are examples of discipline techniques that we have found successful. We invite and encourage you to try these as well when dealing with your children. As always, we are available to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

☺ **Limit Setting-** In order for children to build trusting relationships and feel confident to explore, they must clearly know what is expected of them. Classroom and playground rules are therefore few, basic, clear and concise. Expectations of each child will expand as their overall abilities develop.

☺ **Consistency-** Children need to know what to expect from the situation they are placed in. Therefore, limits and expectations are clear and consistent. This enables the child to anticipate, predict and change their own behavior accordingly. It is also important to handle a particular conflict situation the same way each and every time it occurs. Deviation from the way situations are handled will be confusing for a child.

☺ **Tone-** “You are safe, the problem is under control, and we can work it out.” This is the kind of message a child must receive from any intervening adult. A firm, kind, serious tone with a relaxed demeanor reinforces this message, and makes them feel secure.

☺ **Modeling-** Children learn from the role models they come in contact with. It is imperative that we set an example of being caring, compassionate individuals who are able to express our own needs and feelings clearly and calmly. More importantly, a child should see us respond to conflict situations in the same way we would like them to. For example: “That hurt my arm when you hit me with that truck, and I did not like that. Come sit with me and tell me with your words why you did that.”

☺ **Passive Intervention-** This technique gives the child the opportunity to work through their own problems. If a situation does not escalate to destructive or aggressive behavior, a teacher or staff member may choose to observe the children who are seeking a solution. An adult’s presence can serve as a gentle reminder to use “words” instead of actions. If additional intervention is necessary to facilitate a resolution, it is as non-intrusive as possible.

☺ **Physical Intervention-** Intentional physical harm is not allowed. Children will be physically stopped when hurting each other. Once the well-being of the children involved is established, the attention will focus on resolving the conflict.

☺ **Identify the Problem-** “You both want the shovel.” A simple statement can name the problem, diffuse tension, and help problem-solving begin. It also helps both children develop empathy for each other’s feelings.

☺ **Validate Feelings-** It is hard to think clearly when overcome by emotion. Before a resolution to a conflict can occur, it is necessary to identify and acknowledge the emotion before any other “learning” can occur. Example: “I will not allow you to hit, but tell me why you are so angry.” It is imperative that all children involved in a conflict be honestly listened to.

☺ **Offering Options/Solutions-** Reflective thinking can be helpful in resolving conflict. “There is only one dump truck. Can you think of a way to use the truck together?” “Everyone wants a turn riding the tricycle. What can we do to make it fair?” “John is crying from that push you gave him. What can you do to make him feel better?”

☺ **Redirection-** If a child is requested to stop a negative behavior it is accompanied by a suggestion for an appropriate behavior with which to replace it. “You may not pour the sand on the floor. If you want to pour, here is a bucket to pour the sand into.”

☺ **Natural Consequences –** Natural consequences is an effective way to eliminate unwanted behaviors. Children see the results of their actions and begin to modify it accordingly. “You dropped all of your paper cuttings on the floor. Let’s get the dust pan and broom and sweep them up.”