Behavior Guidance for Infants and Toddlers

**EEC Regulation 7.05 (5, 7-8)** Educators must provide guidance to children in a positive and consistent way based on an understanding of the individual needs and development of children by:

1. **(a)** encouraging self-control and using positive guidance techniques, such as recognizing and reinforcing children’s appropriate behaviors, having reasonable and positive expectations, setting clear and consistent limits, and redirecting;
2. **(b)** helping children learn social, communication, and emotional regulation skills they can use in place of challenging behaviors;
3. **(c)** using environmental modifications, activity modifications, adult or peer support, and other teaching strategies to encourage appropriate behavior and prevent challenging behaviors;
4. **(d)** intervening quickly when children are physically aggressive with one another and helping them develop more positive strategies for resolving conflict;
5. **(e)** explaining rules and procedures and the reasons for them to children, and where appropriate and feasible, allowing children to participate in the establishment of program rules, policies and procedures;
6. **(f)** discussing behavior management techniques among staff to promote consistency.

(7) Educators must direct child guidance to the goal of maximizing the growth and development of children and protecting the group and the individuals within.

(8) The following practices are strictly prohibited:

1. **(a)** spanking or other corporal punishment of children;
2. **(b)** subjecting children to cruel or severe punishment such as humiliation, verbal or physical abuse, neglect, or abusive treatment including any type of physical hitting inflicted in any manner upon the body, shaking, threats, or derogatory remarks;
3. **(c)** depriving children of outdoor time, meals or snacks; force feeding children or otherwise making them eat against their will, or in any way using food as a consequence;
4. **(d)** disciplining a child for soiling, wetting, or not using the toilet; forcing a child to remain in soiled clothing or to remain on the toilet, or using any other unusual or excessive practices for toileting;
5. **(e)** confining a child to a swing, high chair, crib, playpen or any other piece of equipment for an extended period of time in lieu of supervision; and
6. **(f)** excessive time-out. Time-out may not exceed one minute for each year of the child’s age and must take place within the educator’s view.

**The Rationale for the Regulations**

One of the most important skills for success in learning and in life is self-regulation, the ability to control one’s own feelings and behavior. The stages of infancy and toddlerhood are prime learning times and must be intentionally supported by educators in their choices of environment, activities, materials, and personal interactions. Using behavior guidance instead of punishment will ensure the developmentally appropriate progression of self-regulation at the different stages.

**Meeting and Exceeding the Regulations**

A focus of infant and toddler development is the exploration and discovery that occurs as they learn more about the world around them. Much of this exploration and discovery can look like misbehavior as infants and toddlers put inappropriate things in their mouths, disregard verbal instructions to focus on their own interests, practice cause and effect by pushing things (or peers), and even bite others to see what happens. It becomes important for educators to understand infant and toddler development and to anticipate typical behavior as within the normal ranges. Any restrictions and limit setting should be balanced against continuing to encourage curiosity and exploration in a safe setting. Too much emphasis on control may discourage continued exploration and learning.

As young infants begin to move about, it is important to create an environment that minimizes “no.” Remove items that can choke or injure the infant and protect infants and toddlers from inadvertently harming one another as they learn that poking, prodding, hitting and biting others to learn more about them is hurtful.
Some strategies that may be helpful in promoting positive behavior for infants and toddlers include:

**Setting realistic expectations**
- Understand that older infants and toddlers are struggling for autonomy, are egocentric, have difficulty expressing themselves, need to test limits, and are experimenting to learn about their world.
- Expect typical behavior and keep expectations reasonable.
- Keep activities appropriate so infants and toddlers are both challenged and feel successful.
- Understand and accept individual temperament.

**Providing positive interactions**
- Be a calm, sensitive influence.
- Model empathy and caring skills for infants and toddlers to imitate.
- Word statements positively, telling children what they can do, not what they can’t do.
- Provide positive reinforcement in verbal and non-verbal ways, such as, hugging, smiling, and holding.
- Model simple words or signs to express their needs.

**Creating an environment that promotes positive behavior**
- Provide consistency and predictability in expectations, care and routines.
- Have sufficient materials and duplicates of favorites. Don’t expect infants and toddlers to share.
- Rotate toys regularly to provide new interests.
- Minimize waiting.
- Provide safe opportunities for exploration and independence.
- Provide space to be alone.
- Group activities into similar areas to allow for small group or independent play.
- Provide children for transitions. Provide a five minute warning and use a transition song or signal.
- Provide indoor and outdoor active play daily. Licensed programs must provide at least 60 minutes of active play per day. Provide climbing, movement and dance opportunities.
- Provide many sensory activities, including items to mouth.

**Managing challenges**
- Observe children to discover more about their behaviors.
- Provide two choices (“You can put your coat on or I can help you put your coat on.”)
- Start a sentence with “yes,” instead of “no,” confirming that you know what the child wants (“Yes, you want to go outside now. We will go outside after rest time.”)
- Redirect or distract children.

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**Why Do Children Bite?**
- Oral exploration
- Teething
- Hunger or fatigue
- Lack of awareness that biting hurts
- Frustration, anxiety, stress
- Inability to express feelings or needs verbally
- Mimicking behavior
- Inexperienced peer interactions
- A way of showing affection
- A need for autonomy or control
- Exploring cause and effect relationships

**What Can I Do If Biting Continues?**
- Document biting in a log, noting patterns (time, child involved, area of room, activity child is doing)
- Observe for possible causes of biting.
- Say a firm, “No, Biting hurts.”
- Model empathy and caring for the child who was bitten.
- Implement solutions to possible causes of biting:
  - Provide sensory activities, teething items.
  - Reinforce “gentle touches.”
  - Identify pattern and intervene.
### Resources

- **Caring for Infants and Toddlers** by Derry G. Koralek, Amy Laura Dombro, Diane Trister Dodge, Teaching Strategies, 2005.
- [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org) for Behavior and Development articles.
- [www.askdrsears.com](http://www.askdrsears.com) for Discipline and Behavior articles.