Apply: Setting Boundaries

As a school-age staff member, you will work with children to set boundaries and expectations for behavior. Knowing there are rules and limits, children will be more inclined to feel open to explore and experiment, and will feel supported when they face challenges.

Below are suggestions on how to write effective behavior expectations taken from this lesson. After reading through the suggestions, create your own set of positive behavior expectations for your school-age learning environment.

- State the expectations clearly and in language that children can easily understand. Use vocabulary that is developmentally appropriate and be as clear as possible.
- Make the expectations reasonable and achievable. Expectations and boundaries are designed to support positive behaviors, so they should be written to help children be successful.
- Be consistent in the way the expectations are enforced. Hold all children accountable for their behavior in the same way. Be consistent by always following through with rewards or consequences as noted in the expectations.
- Have a combination of broad and specific expectations. An example of a broad behavior expectation would be, “Respect yourself.” This one expectation can encompass many behaviors. You can also create very specific boundaries depending on the needs of the program or learning environment.
- Be positive in the way you write the expectations. Always reinforce the positive behavior instead of focusing on the challenging one. For example, instead of “no yelling,” you could use “always use an appropriate volume level.” This tells children the behavior you want to see without using the word “no” or stating the challenging behavior. This can also help support children’s good decision making, as “appropriate volume” outside may be different than inside. Rules like “use walking feet” often apply in certain settings, but not in others.

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