

Early Years Services – QA5.1 Interactions with Children and Behaviour Guidance

TRIM Reference: D15/42638 Due for Review: 5 March 2026
Responsible Officer: Coordinator Early Years

Purpose

Surf Coast Shire Early Years is committed to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. We seek to prevent harm of any kind impacting children and young people and have zero tolerance for racism, child abuse and inequality. Children and young people's rights, relationships, identity, and culture must be recognised and respected, their voices heard, and their concerns acted upon. We aim to foster a culturally safe, child safe and child friendly environment for all children and young people we have contact with, deliver services to, or are impacted by our work.

This policy outlines Surf Coast Shire Council's commitment to:

- We believe that positive educator and child interactions are central to ensuring quality outcomes for children's education and care.
- We value the important role our educators and staff play in children's education and care. We equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to enable them to interact positively with the children and promote relationships between children.
- Our educational program encourages children's self-expression, promotes self-reliance, maintains their dignity and rights, gives positive guidance, and recognises their culture, values, and abilities. We regularly reflect on and refine the program as needed in this regard.

Policy Principles

Evidence of link to National Quality Standards: 1.1, 5.1, 5.2

Evidence of link to Education & Care Services National Regulations: 155, 156, 168 (2) (j)

Victorian Children's Services Regulations 2020

Scope

This policy applies to all Surf Coast Shire Council Early Years Services staff members, volunteers, contractors, students and parents/families and other adults attending the services.

Policy

The Early Years Services provides education and care to children in a way that:

- ensures the dignity and rights of each child are upheld at all times.
- Each child is given positive guidance and encouragement towards learning and understanding of 'acceptable' behaviour.
- Education and care programs support each child to feel secure, confident and included, enabling them to express themselves and their opinions.
- Children will be given opportunities to interact and develop respectful and positive relationships with each other and with early childhood staff/educators.
- Children have the opportunity to freely choose activities, solve problems, and have access to learning experiences that develop self-reliance and self-esteem.
- Every child is able to engage with staff/educators in a meaningful way with open interactions that support the acquisition of skills for life and learning.
- Every child's family and cultural values, age, and physical and intellectual development and abilities of each child at the service.

- Each child is guided and supported to manage their own behaviour, respond appropriately to the behaviours of others and communicate effectively to resolve conflict.
- Interactions with each child are warm, responsive and aim to build trusting relationships.

Behaviour guidance

- Staff/educators will have a sound knowledge of child development in order to successfully apply behaviour guidance techniques. Knowledge and skills are updated regularly.
- The dignity and rights of the child must be maintained at all times.
- Staff/educators will actively seek to prevent harm of any kind impacting children and young people and have zero tolerance for racism, child abuse and inequality.
- Regular communication will occur between parents and staff/educators to develop a broader understanding of the child’s developmental level and individual needs within the context of their home environment.
- When a child does not respond to daily behaviour guidance strategies it is essential that staff/educators consult with parents/guardians about developing specific behaviour guidance strategies.
- Guidance towards ‘acceptable’ behaviour, with encouragement freely given.
- Each child will be supported to manage their own behaviour, respond appropriately to the behaviour of others and communicate effectively to resolve conflicts.
- Children are guided with clear, consistent, fair limits for behaviour. Children will have positive behaviour acknowledged.
- Positive behaviour guidance can include the use of natural consequences that are based on the assessment of responses required for each circumstance.
- Punishment is **inappropriate** as a child behaviour guidance technique. No child will be subjected to any form of inappropriate discipline such as corporal punishment, immobilisation or any other frightening or threatening technique.
- If staff/educators, volunteers or students experience difficulty in responding to particular behaviours, they will consult with both the parent(s)/guardians of the child and the relevant Early Years Team Leader for support and guidance, or further training.
- There may be times when additional professional assistance and external support are needed to help a child and family. Staff/educators and parent(s)/guardians may discuss referrals to specialist services. Specialist services may be undertaken to ensure children and families’ needs are being met.
- Staff/educators emphasise the importance of supporting families who are experiencing difficulties, through family-friendly practices. This can include linking families into relevant support networks. Staff/educators will initially discuss with the Early Years Team Leader and families where this is applicable.

Appropriate Physical Contact

The *National Quality Framework Quality Area 5 - Relationships with Children* is about building relationships with children within Early Years Services that are responsive and respectful and promote children’s sense of security and belonging.

The Following *Standards and Elements* provide the context and foundation for appropriate physical contact; as part of the overall interaction and relationships between children accessing the Surf Coast Shire Council Early Years Services and staff, volunteers and students:

<p><i>Standard 5.1</i> Respectful and equitable relationships are maintained with each child</p>	<p><i>Element 5.1.1</i> Responsive and meaningful interactions build trusting relationships, which engage and support each child to feel secure, confident and included.</p>
	<p><i>Element 5.1.2</i> The dignity and rights of every child are maintained.</p>
<p><i>Standard 5.2</i> Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships.</p>	<p><i>Element 5.2.1</i> Children are supported to collaborate, learn from and help each other.</p>
	<p><i>Element 5.2.2</i> Each child is supported to regulate their own behaviour, respond appropriately to the behaviour of others and communicates effectively to resolve conflicts.</p>

Discipline

The term 'discipline' is often associated with punishment and may suggest inappropriate, unacceptable and damaging methods of attempting to control children's behaviour. It can be understood as action taken by adults towards children to stop or change behaviour that is inappropriate or not desired.

Examples of inappropriate discipline

The following are some examples of inappropriate discipline which may constitute a serious breach of the National Law and/or National Regulations and could potentially be considered criminal matters:

- hitting, pushing, slapping, pinching or biting a child
- force-feeding a child
- yelling at or belittling a child
- humiliating a child
- physically dragging a child
- locking children away (or isolating them)
- depriving a child of food or drink
- unreasonable restraining of a child (this may include restraint in a high chair)
- excluding children from events
- consistently moving children to the office or other space away from the play areas
- moving children to another room as punishment
- verbally or physically threatening a child.

Other examples of inappropriate practice are:

- negative labelling of child or family
- criticising a child's actions or behaviours
- discouraging a child from taking part in activities
- blaming or shaming a child
- making fun of or laughing at or about a child
- using sarcastic or cruel humour with or to a child
- excessive use of negative language to a child, such as, "no", "stop that!", "don't...", "you never..."

As Early Years Staff, you have a **Duty of Care** to report inappropriate behaviour in the early year's programs, we have created an Early Years Incident Reporting form, if at any time you witness inappropriate behaviour by other staff members, you are obligated to:

1. Address the inappropriate behaviour immediately (away from children)
2. If it is harmful behaviour as described in the above list, it needs to be stopped straight away.
3. Follow up the inappropriate behaviour with the staff member at the end of the session – find out why this has happened, suggest more appropriate strength-based approaches to guiding children's behaviour.
4. Complete the attached 'Early Years Staff – Incident Report Form' (email this to the teamleaderkindergarten@surfcoast.vic.gov.au)
5. Once the team leader receives the 'incident report' they will follow it up if required and put in strategies to support staff and children.

Definitions

Behaviour Guidance

Behaviour guidance is an integral part of the educational or recreational program in a children's service. Staff members are guiding children's behaviour through their interactions and communication at all times. Behaviour guidance consists of a variety of ways that adults help children learn to guide or 'self-manage' their behaviour. This contrasts with the more traditional 'behaviour management' or 'discipline' approaches that generally imply an adult 'managing' children's behaviour or using punishment, or any discipline which is unreasonable in the circumstances, to control them.

Role of the adult

- Adults play a critical role in guiding children's behaviour.
- They support children to find positive ways to express their interests, needs, views and feelings.
- Children's wellbeing depends on adults understanding the child's behaviour and responding appropriately.
- Children who lack a sense of self-worth or have low self-esteem are often more likely to behave in challenging ways. Children may at times display challenging behaviour when they are having difficulty in expressing their interests, needs and a range of emotions or when they are not getting enough attention from adults.
- It may be appropriate, at times, to involve children in decision making and discussions about their behaviour, however this must be done sensitively with careful forethought.
- Some examples of inappropriate conversations with young children regarding their behaviour include demanding answers to questions such as 'Why did you do that?' and insisting that children apologise for their behaviour.

'Acceptable' behaviour

An important aspect of children's belonging, being and becoming involves them learning how their behaviours and actions affect themselves and others and developing skills to regulate these independently. Developing an understanding of 'acceptable' behaviour and being able to manage their own behaviour (self-regulation) are important aspects of a child's social and emotional development.

Children's appropriate behaviours are acknowledged so children know they have acted appropriately. Positive behaviours are encouraged by diverting children to more appropriate experiences, showing appreciation for appropriate behaviour and building on each child's strengths and achievements.

Discipline

The term 'discipline' is often associated with punishment and may suggest inappropriate, unacceptable and damaging methods of attempting to control children's behaviour. It can be understood as action taken by adults towards children to stop or change behaviour that is inappropriate or not desired.

Family-friendly Practices

Collaborative relationships with families are fundamental to achieving quality outcomes for children. Families have an opportunity to be involved in the service and contribute to service decisions. Respectful and supportive relationships with families are developed. The expertise of families is recognised and utilised; families are supported in their parenting role, and their values and beliefs about child rearing are respected.

Bullying

Bullying is when someone or a group of people with more power repeatedly and intentionally causes hurt or harm to another person or group of people who feel helpless to respond. Bullying can continue over time, is often hidden from adults and will probably continue if no action is taken.

Bullying is not:

- Single episodes of social rejection or dislike
- Single episode acts of nastiness or spite
- Random acts of aggression or intimidation
- Mutual arguments, disagreements or fights.

Related Procedure

Nil.

References

Related Surf Coast Shire Council and Early Years Services Policies

D14/70701	Educational Programs Policy
D15/42648	School Aged Behaviour Guidance Policy
D16/75844	Child Safe Organisation Policy

Related Surf Coast Shire Council and Early Years Services Work Instructions and Forms

D24/112060	Early Years Staff Incident – Report Form
D23/104577	Early Years – Child Safe Code of Conduct – Child Safe Standards
D24/59499	Child Safety Officers Contact List - PDF
D17/54211	Child Safe Reporting Form
D24/59326	Surf Coast Shire Child Safe Reporting Process – PDF

Other References

Education and Care Services National Law 2010
 Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
 National Quality Standard 2011
 ACECQA National; Quality Framework Resource Kit
 Childcare Service Handbook (Department of Education)
 Victorian Early Years Learning & Development Framework,
 Early Years Learning Framework for Australia,
 My Time Our Place
 Victorian Children’s Services Regulations 2020
 National Quality Framework Policy

Document History

Version	Document History	Approved by – Date
Approval Date		General Manager Culture and Community – 1 April 2014
1	<i>Amended</i>	Manager Aged and Family – 8 June 2017
2	<i>Amended</i>	Manager Community Strengthening – 6 December 2018
3	<i>Amended</i>	Manager Community Strengthening – 22 May 2020
4	<i>Amended</i>	Manager Community Strengthening – 22 November 2021
5	<i>Amended</i>	Manager Community Strengthening – 11 April 2023
6	<i>Amended</i>	Manager Community Strengthening – 5 September 2024