



Our Position Statement on the importance of understanding children's behaviour

Our priority at Adventure is to ensure children's well-being is protected and enhanced so that they can engage and learn. Within this we see children's behaviour as being a key way that we as adults can observe how they are feeling. In the absence of the child's ability to skilfully articulate how they are feeling we must rely on interpreting their observable actions and behaviour in order to help them to regulate their emotions.

Adventure is a place where children come to play. We actively promote social play and social communication. By encouraging social-play we, by definition, encourage conflict as this is part of social interaction. If ten children can choose from ten different play spaces and resources there is less likelihood of children arguing or coming into contact but then children will not develop a) the ability to mediate conflict b) the social skills required to play alongside and with others and c) resilience to overcome challenges. So as much as we do not promote conflict we do enable it and that helps us to teach children how to mediate conflict.

At Adventure we believe that in a flashpoint of behavioural action children do not have capacity to process language, adult intervention or expectations of what is right or wrong. At this moment, children's brains do not allow them to connect cause with effect; their lids have flipped. They are in fight, flight or freeze mode. We therefore believe that one of the most effective ways that we can help children to manage their behaviour is by having realistic expectations of them.

Young children feel many, many different emotions – most of which they cannot name, understand or control. As they explore these feelings and experiment with how they respond to them they will show these feelings through actions – or observable behaviours.

The way children behave is a direct attempt – be it consciously or unconsciously - to communicate the feelings and emotions they are experiencing. Young children experience a whole range of emotions; more than just a contrast between happy or sad but anger, confusion, frustration, embarrassment, shock and excitement to name a few.

We cannot control the emotions children feel or the actions that they take as a result. Our role is to help them to recognise how they are feeling and to help them to learn how to regulate their own emotions. We must interpret not only the emotions children are expressing through their behaviour and actions but to think about why they might be experiencing that emotion.

One way in which we can help children on their journey to self-regulation is to keep our expectations realistic to their developmental stage and to reflect on their experiences in life so far. High expectations of behaviour are important. At Adventure, 'high expectations' means developmentally appropriate, consistent and realistic expectations.



The statements below are our interpretations of the Early Years Outcomes statements:

By the time they have just turned 2 we expect children to:

- Respond to other people's emotions with their own emotional reactions
- Find it difficult to manage anger or frustration
- Need ongoing mediation and support to respond to boundaries
- React when they are reminded that everything is not theirs

By the time they reach the age of 3 we expect children to:

- Express how they are feeling through their body language, words and actions
- Respond to other people's emotions with actions
- Respond to emotions with actions that could hurt or harm others
- Co-operate with some boundaries and routines

By the time they turn 4 we expect children to:

- Say how they are feeling using their words to name their emotions
- Respond to emotions with actions that could hurt others' feelings
- Wait their turn, take turns or share things with support
- Adapt their actions to the situation or some changes in routine

It is only when children leave Adventure and start at school at the age of 5 that we should be expecting children to:

- Realise they have hurt someone and become upset, embarrassed or try to comfort them as a result
- Show awareness of boundaries and behavioural expectations
- Begin to negotiate and solve problems without aggression

If they can do these things consistently before they leave Adventure this is welcomed but not expected as this is not what children will typically be able to do consistently all of the time.

We, however, must be consistent with our approach and consistent with our expectations of children's behaviour. Consistency requires realism. It is not fair to expect too much of children. It only adds to the confusion and inconsistency.

We use a range of strategies which are chosen to help children to regulate their own emotions, to defuse situations, to protect adults and other children and to enhance children's well-being.

Strategies can often be used in conjunction with each other and different strategies will have more effect with certain children at certain times in certain situations. There is no one magic approach but there are lots of different strategies to try. The strategies include mediating, emotion coaching, tactical ignoring, validation and restrictive physical intervention.



When everyone involved follows a consistent approach the child gets the same message and the same response to boundaries being pushed. It is the same as co-parenting – everyone needs to back each other up and not undermine someone else.

The approach that is advocated in this policy is based on the thoughts and work of a number of different childcare practitioners. A reading list to give a basis of understanding would include:

Heather Shumaker (2012) *It's okay not to share...and other renegade rules for raising competent and compassionate kids*, Tarcher/Penguin (in particular Rules 2, 4 and 23)

Janet Lansbury blog posts (www.janetlandsbury.com)

Note

In addition to the approaches we must use there are also approaches and strategies we must not use.

Physical chastisement, or the threat of, is not permitted for any reason. Our role is to defuse the situation not escalate it. We cannot get into arguments with three-year olds! The best way to fight a fire is with water, not more fire!

We **must not** use reward or retribution models under any circumstance. As much as these are used within schools and at home they are not models that we believe in at Adventure and therefore are not sanctioned for use. For clarity the reward and retribution model are outlined below as an example of what we do not do and a justification as to why not.

Reward Model

Giving children tangible rewards (eg stickers or charts) as praise for good behaviour motivates them to do it more.

We do not use this model because:

1. It can increase a child's reliance on external motivating factors – children only do the positive actions for the purpose of getting the reward. If the reward is removed the child can then lack the ability to self-motivate and show no internal desire to repeat these positive behaviours.
2. It can create inequality issues where other children feel aggrieved that they have not been rewarded for exhibiting the positive behaviours too – the 'why haven't I got a sticker?' situation.
3. It can increase the likelihood of an explosion if the child cannot handle the emotions that comes with praise and reward.
4. It can increase good behaviour as a negative competition - wanting to be better than another child – which, as in all competition, can lead to withdrawal from the 'competition' or situation if the child does not believe they will achieve or be



recognised; or can lead to trying to get others into trouble to increase their chances of getting limited rewards.

5. It is reliant on an adult always noticing and rewarding. It can lead to confusion for the child is not every exhibited positive behaviour is then rewarded.

Retribution Model

Children should not get away with bad behaviour and must face 'the consequences' or be punished.

We do not use this model because:

1. If, as the research by neuro-scientists indicates, all behaviour is communicating a feeling or emotion then we risk punishing children for attempting to communicate or for having feelings.
2. It can damage the emotional well-being of the child – shame, humiliation and guilt are awful emotions to feel – it is not our purpose to put that onto children or to make them feel bad about themselves.
3. We do not wish to punish a child for responding to not having their basic needs met (ie being hungry, tired, feeling unsafe etc). We must use the behaviour as a reminder of our role in not neglecting their needs.
4. It is important that we safeguard the emotional well-being of the child not abuse it
5. It can lead to modelling a heightened emotional response in ourselves including a sense of physical threat and intimidation and a child feeling powerless.