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## POSITIVE PLAY WITH CHILDREN

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- Quality Communication with Children
- Ideas for Positive Behavior and a Good Learning Environment
- Ideas for Good Self-Esteem



Brownsville Parks & Rec  
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT  
PROGRAMS

# POSITIVE PLAY WITH CHILDREN

The goal of any positive program for children, is to facilitate learning of skills through **FUN** and **ACTION!**

*Focus should be on: Action, Participation, and Learning which results in FUN FOR ALL.*

Through play children can learn:

- Self-identity
- Patience
- Teamwork
- Friendship
- Creativity
- Critical thinking
- Self-expression
- Positive attitudes
- Coping with stress
- Interaction with others
- Acceptance of others



## CONFIDENCE

*"Play is the language of kids"*

Children, who live with criticism,  
learn to condemn.

Children, who live with hostility,  
learn to fight.

Children, who live with fear,  
learn to be apprehensive.

Children, who live with encouragement,  
learn to be confident.

Children, who love with praise,  
learn to be appreciative.

Children, who live with approval,  
learn to like themselves.

Children, who live with recognition,  
learn to have a goal.

Children, who live with honesty,  
value trust.

Motivating Kids Through Play (Bunker, Johnson, Parker 1982)

**Effective Programs are built on a solid, child-centered foundation, which includes many aspects of playing with children.**

- COMMUNICATE WITH CHILDREN POSITIVELY AND EFFECTIVELY
- ESTABLISH POSITIVE BEHAVIOR & AN EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
- HANDLE DIFFICULT CHILDREN EFFECTIVELY
- ENCOURAGE, PRAISE, & RECOGNIZE CHILDREN

# QUALITY COMMUNICATION WITH CHILDREN

It is important that ALL interaction with children is playful in nature and varied. Children have short attention spans and get bored easily.

*Children love to use their imaginations, planned activities should encourage that as much as possible. "It's okay to be silly" attitude wanted!*

## Remember:

- Eye contact– bend or kneel when possible
- Simplify vocabulary
- Use creative SoUNds to your advantage!

**PROPS** - puppets or toys to make sound

**VOICE INFLECTION**– change it, have fun (volume, quickness, and pitch)

**USE DESCRIPTIVE WORDS**– explode, pop, freeze, dart, whirl, pounce, creep, slither, wriggle, fierce, bubbly, tiny.

- Gestures – quiet body language for control  
– large body language to create EXCITEMENT!
- Movement– unusual movements; skip, jump to attract attention
- Change positions– kneel or squat if you normally stand
- Use rituals– or mini games as attention-getters:

**"FLASH FLOOD"** everyone has to get on something immediately (carpet squares, bench); you too counselors the flood is coming!

**"DEAD ANTS"** everyone immediately falls (safely) to the floor on back, with hands and feet in the air.

- Collaboration– "clap once if you can hear me" repeat until everyone hears (use pitch and tone for fun)
- Establish Transition Procedures-

**Announcements:** last turn, one minute left til...

**When moving** from one activity to another [hop, crawl, bear walk, slithering snakes, blind centipede: where they walk hands on shoulders of child in front, eyes closed except

- "Magic Word" use one with theme as an indicator when children are to move after listening.
- End on a high note. Change activities often before children have a chance to get bored. It is better to leave an activity when they are having fun and wanting more than it is to wait until they are tired of it.
- Know your cartoon characters! Use them in communication and pretend play.
- Use humor-Role play– be enthusiastic– Use fantasy and Imagination

## P R E T E N D ... Y O U A R E ...

- ... a game show host when asking a question
- ... garbage monsters when cleaning up
- ... a little kid wanting them to come play
- ... photographer that the "camera is on"
- ... using a pretend microphone for them to speak into
- ... trying to "beat the clock" to finish on time
- ... a magician, animal, object, etc. (THEMES)
- ... speaking gibberish– use nonsense words  
Ker-shoosh, smackerdoodle, mucktuck, ker-fluff

- Let them know HOW you want them to listen:
  - listen as you practice
  - come here & listen
  - stay where you are & listen
  - stop and listen

# USING WORDS TO CHALLENGE CHILDREN

Children loved to be challenged!

Here are some helpful sentence starters to help challenge your children in a good way:

- What are two ways...
- Let me see you...
- Show me how...
- How would you...
- Now try...
- Find a way to...
- See what you can do with...
- Show me a different way to...
- Who can...
- See how many times you can...
- What would happen if...
- Create, invent, discover ways to...
- Make believe you can...
- How else can you...



## ENTHUSIASM

*“even the most awesome program will fall short without enthusiasm”!*



## YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

it's more than games.

**Model behavior and attitude – you never know what little eyes are watching and which little ears are listening.**

# ESTABLISH POSITIVE BEHAVIOR & A GOOD LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

**The best quality work will fall short if it isn't provided in a positive learning environment.**

*Establish behavior expectations early.*

*Communicate expectations to children.*

*Monitor behaviors so expectations are met.*

*Follow through with corrections.*

*Behavior guidelines help avoid discipline problems AND help create a "safe" learning environment.*

*Results in children and staff having a positive experience.*

## HOW?

### **Remember Children learn best when:**

- They are having fun
- Activities are well organized to maximize action
- They feel safe-physically and psychologically
- Activities are modified to match their ability level so they are successful
- Basic skills are stressed to make the activity less complicated and stressful.
- They get a lot of repetitions in "child-like". Too many rules often stifles a child's creativity, physical and social development, resulting in less enjoyment.
- Self-esteem is enhanced.

1. **State Rules Positively (avoid words like "don't", "never", and "can't").**
2. **Explain why rules are necessary (let children have some input on creating them)**
3. **To encourage promptness always start on time.**
4. **Be consistent and fair in behavior expectations and providing correction.**
5. **Make sure children understand rules and consequences. Post rules if possible.**
6. **REINFORCE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR IMMEDIATELY rather than giving attention to only negative behavior.**
7. **Wait for the "go" signal, after an explanation, before starting an activity. Make your "Go" signal FUN could be "dynamite", "awesome", or "snicker doodles".**
8. **Take advantage of "teachable moments" when opportunities arise to teach or reinforce positive behavior.**

# ESTABLISH POSITIVE BEHAVIOR & A GOOD LEARNING ENVIRONMENT



## 9. Establish a “listening” routine.

- If equipment like a ball is used, it must be placed in a specific location (behind back, between feet) this avoids bouncing , rolling balls, distraction while someone is talking.
- If interruptions or side-talking is a problem establish routines where only the person holding an object can speak.
- Establish a “listen position”- sit, kneel.

10. Use a key word like “freeze” for stop. Expect for them to stop within a reasonable amount of time (5sec) If the leader gets in the habit of repeating the stop signal 3 or 4 times children will also accept that as standard.

11. Once the activity has started try to keep verbal explanations under 1 min.

12. Establish rules for getting, putting away materials to teach responsibility. PLACE not throw!

13. Establish non-verbal signals as a subtle reminders of misbehaviors. Break time signal, quiet signal, listening signal— peace sign, finger to lips, pull on ear, etc.

14. Establish boundaries:

<u>Environment</u>	<u>Physical</u>	<u>Verbal</u>	<u>Behavioral</u>
Out of bounds	Side hugs	Kind words	Eyes on the speaker
Off Limits	No sitting on laps	Be respectful	Cheer others on
	High fives	No cursing	Support each other
	Body space	Manners	Take turns-share
		Good sportsmanship	
		No put downs (self or others)	

## FAILING TO PREPARE IS PREPARING TO FAIL

16. As children leave, ask them to tell you one thing they learned or liked today before getting a goodbye "high five".

17. Fun ways, hand signals for High Active or Loud Physical games:

- Form a line
- Line up in files
- Quiet/Listen
- Circle Up

18. Sport tips for various ability levels.

- Vary the body parts used (progress from two hands to one hands)
- Vary the levels, skills
- Vary the time involved.
- Vary the speed (start slow progress to full speed, "beat the clock")
- Vary the number of people involved. (alone, progress to partner, small groups: mirror, matching, action reaction, follow the leader)
- Vary the direction- forward, backwards, sideways
- Add an object
- Add movement -start stationary then progress to performing while moving
- Increase number of ways of doing it ("show me 3 ways to ...)
- Vary the size of space- throw farther, dribble in smaller space
- Vary equipment- size, weight, height, number
- Vary rules- every player must touch the ball before scoring
- Break complex skills into parts
- Add sound effect for young children
- Let children make their own games- give them some equipment with a few ground rules and see what they come up with.

### "SECRET PLAYER"

Choose a "secret player" of the day:

At the beginning of the activity, choose in your mind one child to be the "secret player of the day". Review to the group behavior expectation (listening, respectful, etc.) If the "secret player" meets the standards, reveal who it was and the entire group gets a reward (special privilege favorite game, etc.) Knowing they might be the "secret player" will encourage all children to want to be "it". If the child doesn't meet the standard DON'T reveal who it was.

# IDEAS FOR BUILDING SELF ESTEEM

Children as well as adults learn best when they feel competent and have a positive self image.

It is our responsibility to establish an environment where self-esteem can flourish.

*Children use adult feedback & evaluation to regard their competency, provide lots of positive encouragement and set realistic standards.*



**Each child needs to feel:**

- Unconditionally valued
- Loved
- Accepted
- Competent
- Talented
- Worthwhile
- Dignity
- Respect



SELF ESTEEM



LOVE &



ACCEPTANCE



SAFETY &



SECURITY



FOOD



WATER



SHELTER



**\* PHYSICAL NEEDS \* SAFETY NEEDS \* LOVE & BELONGING \* SELF-ESTEEM \* SELF-ACTUALIZATION \***

**Let children learn through FUN and ACTION!**

**To have a high success rate, modify activities to make them developmentally appropriate.**

**When possible, find ways to give children choices.**

**Ask children to tell something they like about themselves or another in the group.**

**Assist them in setting realistic goals– hitting the target 5 out of 10 times.**

**Teach children how to use “positive self-talk” rather than negative destructive self-talk.**

**Create a “mistakes are OK” learning atmosphere.**



# IDEAS FOR BUILDING SELF ESTEEM

\* PHYSICAL NEEDS \* SAFETY NEEDS \* LOVE & BELONGING \* SELF-ESTEEM \* SELF-ACTUALIZATION \*

**REWARD VALUES & EFFORTS** not results: “way to go!”, “good work!”, “doing great!”, “you did it!”, “good for you!”, “top notch”, “dynamite!”

Add the word “YET” to the “I can’t” syndrome. Encourage them to keep trying without giving up.

*“you can’t do that yet, but keep trying with lots of practice and hard work you will”*

**Celebrate Successes:** pat on the back, high fives, side hugs, group clap, etc.

**Be attentive to children’s Psychological needs:**

- Never embarrass, put on the spot, humiliate or devalue.  
SHOUT PRAISE– whisper criticism
- Pick 2 or more to be “it” when playing “it games” - when one of the “its” has a disadvantage they won’t be singled out if you always have 2 or more.
- Use a practice round for in slow motion for new or complex skills
- Never use “captain’s choice” method for selecting groups
- Be aware of cultural differences.
- Start with simple activities and individual skills to build trust and confidence before progressing to high trust complex activities or games.
- Use children’s names when speaking with them.
- Look for them doing something right- “you worked really hard today”
- Reinforce effort and improvements– not results. Things worth have are deserving of effort.
- Avoid making comparisons with other children regarding size, ability, and physical attributes.
- Avoid praising a child on their physical development– it may make underdeveloped children feel inferior or uncomfortable.
- “Miracle” Band-Aids work wonders in healing stomach-aches and hurt feelings in very young children.
- “Happy face” stamps on the hand give children courage to try hard when it is difficult.

# IDEAS FOR BUILDING SELF ESTEEM

\* PHYSICAL NEEDS \* SAFETY NEEDS \* LOVE & BELONGING \* SELF-ESTEEM \* SELF-ACTUALIZATION \*

Use a lot of “warm fuzzies”- ADD specific praise to:

- Very good
- Much better
- Super!
- That’s different
- Excellent!
- All right!
- Fantastic!
- Super Effort
- I knew you could
- Right on!
- You figured it out!
- How exciting!
- You made my day
- Good for you!
- Now you got it!
- Wonderful!
- Very nice
- I like that
- Great!
- Well done!
- Awesome!
- Terrific
- Bingo
- I’m proud of you
- Marvelous
- What a good listener!
- Magnificent!
- Way to go!

“Right on— you used your hips when you threw the ball!”

“Great job cleaning up the art supplies you did awesome!”

NON-VERBAL “warm– fuzzies”:

- High fives
- Smiles
- Thumbs up
- Shake hands
- Nod
- Behind the back high fives
- Ruffle hair
- Pat on the back
- Clapping
- Winks
- Low fives
- Give me 10

Avoid creating situations where children are singled out in front of others to perform a task, especially if they are just learning.

Interact with highly skilled and less skilled in the same manner— give every child feedback and encouragement. Show confidence in their ability to learn.

Rotate leaders and helpers.

Encourage action by avoiding elimination activities or modify games to have ways to “get back in”.

Ask for input and invite questions— listen attentively when they are speaking.

Acknowledge interests and accomplishments

# IDEAS FOR BUILDING SELF ESTEEM

\* PHYSICAL NEEDS \* SAFETY NEEDS \* LOVE & BELONGING \* SELF-ESTEEM \* SELF-ACTUALIZATION \*

**How to choose or assign teams that avoid situations where self-esteem can be destroyed.**

- Stand on one leg– lefts go to one team– rights to the other.
- Birthdays
- Eye Color
- Sounds– animal sounds: “quacks” “moos” “barks” “meows” find each others.
- Shirt colors
- Food Preferences– do you like hot dogs or pizza best, or for a healthier option bananas vs. apples.
- Number children– evens to one side, odds to the other.
- To get even numbered groups start by having them select a partner, then each pair joins another pair, add another pair to get 6 or a group to get 8...
- Choose a partner. One stands on one line and the other on another line, you automatically have 2 teams.
- Pick a partner– one stands and one sits– sitters to one team standers to the other.
- Put names of children on cards– randomly select number required for teams.
- Playing cards– children select a card,- hearts, clubs, spades, diamonds form different teams. Or select by numbers.



# HANDLING DIFFICULT CHILDREN

— FAIR — CONSISTENT — UNDERSTANDING —

Communication, quality content, and presentation will go a long way in avoiding problems when working with children. However, there are those who at times will test the skills of any adult.

Having some “tools” in the kit for dealing with such situations will help staff deal with them positively and effectively.

## CHILDREN MAY PRESENT THE FOLLOWING CHALLENGES:



- Clinging to the instructor
- Not wanting to leave Mom or Dad
- Inattentive
- Interrupting
- Hyperactive
- Overly shy
- Disrespectful of people or rules

- Cries easily
- Gets frustrated easily
- Overly aggressive
- Overly competitive
- Wanders away from the group to play elsewhere
- Unable to handle losing or getting out
- Temper tantrums

- Not following instructions
- Whining
- Makes big issues out of minor hurts
- Teasing, Bullying, or making fun of others
- Show off
- Always has to be first or the best

### Suggestions:

Private discussions— handle discipline privately to avoid the risk of embarrassing the child or reinforcing negative attention seeking.

### Redirect Behavior:

- Give a task (demonstrate, lead a group, choose an activity)
- Give EXACT instructions in the POSITIVE! (please walk, quietly, slowly, get 2 and return...)
- Have the child repeat instructions back to ensure understanding.

# HANDLING DIFFICULT CHILDREN

— FAIR — CONSISTENT — UNDERSTANDING —

Suggestions continued:

Empower:

- Have children reflect on their behavior— how they acted, why; why it needs to change.
- Ask them for suggestions on how to improve
- Allow the child to assist in establishing a behavior goal, a simple plan for reaching those goals and consequences for good or bad behavior choices

*“What is it that you need to do to have a good day?” Child: “Behave”*

*“Ok, so tell me what you will do to behave” Child: (may need prompts) “be a good listener and follow directions”.*

*“How are you going to be a good listener? Child: by catching a bubble when the staff is speaking, and keep my hands to myself in line”.*

*“What will happen if you choose to behave?” Child: I will get to tell my mom I had a good day and have fun with my friends in camp”*

*“Very good, What happens if you choose to misbehave?” Child: “I will have to take a break and lose a privilege at home.”*

*“Now we want to have a good day so let’s make good choices, be a good listener and have fun, ok? Deal? Child: Deal! (high fives)*

*It is important to have the child be as specific as possible but they need your guidance to get there. If you accept the answer at “behave” then you have missed a teaching opportunity.*

- Give the child choices. “You can say positive things to your friends or you can take a break”
- Allow older children to resolve issues through discussion coming up with a solution, some may need adult guidance— be careful not to dictate a solution.

# HANDLING DIFFICULT CHILDREN

— FAIR — CONSISTENT — UNDERSTANDING —

**Suggestions continued:**

**Group/Team Responsibility:** - only do this if you are competent in processing, conflict resolution, problem solving.

- Group huddle to discuss respectfully and quietly the behavior that is affecting the group.—mediate prevent feeling attacked by others sharing with “I feel” statements and identify the behavior that is disliked not “you”

- Make the child responsible to the group– not just the staff

“the group or team needs you to... so we can...”

- For older children having group consequences adds peer pressure to behave appropriately.
- Guide children to take ownership for what is learned and responsible for carrying out actions that will indicate ownership has been taken.

**As a last resort, remove a privilege**

- Remove from group
- Separate friends
- Be careful not to take too much away the child may not be motivated to improve.

**Provide High Success Rates**

- Provide maximum opportunities for small successes-
- Praise small success—Reward effort not just results.
- Be intentional. Watch for positive behavior in all children but especially those frequently in trouble– reward the positive

Ignore negative attention seeking behavior when possible if it is not disruptive or a safety concern.

- Whining– praise clear articulate speech; redirect whining “I can’t understand your words when you whine like that” (it’s ok to mimic if you are being silly avoid mocking).

# HANDLING DIFFICULT CHILDREN

— FAIR — CONSISTENT — UNDERSTANDING —

## Suggestions continued:

### Taking a Break:

#### • Encourage use of calm down strategies:

- Take 3 deep breaths
- Count from 1-10 (repeat if needed)
- Find a trusted person to talk to about what is bothering you
- Give or get a hug
- Draw a picture of why you are angry
- Jump up and down for one minute
- Think of a peaceful place
- Look at a picture of a peaceful place
- Listen to or play music
- Sing a song
- Talk to yourself: “be calm”, “I can handle this”
- Tense and relax your muscles
- Feel your pulse
- Visualize yourself calming down

#### • Offer group break if behavior is overexcited— Reading, Meditation, Yoga

*Yes, children really do like yoga and stretching when they are taught some fun kid yoga moves!*

- Make sure the child knows what the behavior is that resulted in a break from the group.
- Be consistent for all children—what is inappropriate for one is inappropriate for another.
- Rule of thumb is one minute for each year of age— max 7 minute break
- Only effective when doing an activity the child wants to do

### Befriend the Child

- Ask about their day, family, how they feel— show that you care
- Do something special for them
- Be aware that overt attention may cause others to feel jealous.

# HANDLING DIFFICULT CHILDREN

— FAIR — CONSISTENT — UNDERSTANDING —

**Suggestions continued: excerpts from How to play with Children (1992)**

- **Simple request for the behavior to change— be specific about what the inappropriate behavior is.**
- **Stop talking mid-sentence to get attention**
- **Stand next to the misbehaving child**
- **Exaggerate voice or body language to gain attention**
- **A firmer, but pleasant request for behavior change**
- **Identify misbehaviors “you seem bored...frustrated...like you’re having trouble paying attention”**
- **Group huddle if a group problem.**
- **Self-Break for the child (allow children to initiate their own break time)**
- **Break form activity as decided by the staff**
- **Follow Behavior Management Guidelines if negative behavior continues.**



## YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

it's more than games.

**Model behavior and attitude – you never know what little eyes are watching and which little ears are listening.**