

**MAGIC GARDEN**  
**Positive Behaviour for Learning: Fostering Social Competence Policy**

**Rationale**

As children learn to make sense of their world and develop working theories they develop an understanding of themselves in social contexts. Development of social and emotional competence begins in infancy and is essential for children's everyday well-being as well as for engagement and learning in the centre. Emotional and social competence reflects the child's capacity to integrate behavioural, cognitive and affective skills with emotional expression, social problem solving and contextual social behaviour.

Social and emotional competence for children encompasses:

- Impulse control – developing skills to take turns and negotiate,
- Emotional regulation – to understand their own emotions and how to appropriately respond to the emotions of others,
- Anticipation of the reactions and needs of other people,
- Respectful engagement with people, places and things.

Central to the teacher's role is forming a circle of relationships with one another, with parents and with the children. This means that the relationships are reciprocal. In the adult/child relationships, both the child and adults develop their personal potential as partners and co-constructors of learning.

Just as parents influence children's social development in direct and indirect ways (Parke & Slaby 1983), so teachers also influence children's social development both directly and indirectly. Teachers who understand their own strengths and weaknesses is as important as understanding the child. One of the truly great educators of our time, Haim Ginnott, commenting on the powerful influence we have on children, said:

*It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanised or dehumanised.*

A coordinated, whole-centre approach to identifying strategies for providing considered and consistent responses to challenging behaviours enables children to feel safe, well cared for, and confident.

Research confirms that authoritative, democratic discipline produces children who are more self-controlled, self-confident, independent and social, both in preschool and in later years. It is more likely that children who are reared under an authoritative approach will accept expectations that are fair and reasonable, rather than arbitrary, and so they will voluntarily observe fair standards that are expected of them. A combination of nurturance and control, encouragement, demandingness, and communication provides the emotional and social context required for optimal development. (Baumrind, 1967)

## Goals

1. For teachers to recognise the classroom as a community – including the children and their families, the curriculum and the physical environment, are key to creating the conditions for children’s positive social behaviour and development. Teachers maintain relaxed alertness to the tone of the room, and provide content that engages children in rich and complex problem solving, with opportunities to bring to the surface or represent what is experienced or learned and practice their growing social competence. If this occurs unwanted or ‘mistaken’ behaviour is diminished. Teachers’ observations, self-reflections and dialogue with colleagues and families are central to predicting and preventing problem situations. Continuing mistaken behaviour requires planned strategies in consultation between parents and teachers.
2. For teachers, parents and children to work towards common expectations and understandings of social and emotional competence, for them to be:
  - secure in their relationships with others, with a strong sense of belonging
  - happy and settled, and familiar and comfortable with centre routines
  - able to identify and express their own emotions
  - confident in relating to other children and adults
  - initiating conversations with others and asking questions
  - considerate and supportive of younger children
  - independent problem solvers and negotiators
  - learning to respect the views and opinions of others
  - displaying increasing levels of co-operation and responsibility
  - involving the children in developing and maintaining the rules, limits and boundaries.
3. To acknowledge that learning to behave is a developmental task like any other – although it is far more complex than any other skill a child will learn. Behaviour is a form of communication serving a purpose. Teachers need to consider:
  - children’s individuality within the context of their environment in making timely and consistent appropriate responses,
  - precipitating factors of behaviour such as type of activity, time of day, and group dynamics, are paramount to prevention,
  - children’s intent to obtain peer or adult attention, a desired object or activity or sensory stimulation,
  - children’s attempt to avoid a difficult, boring or easy task, a physical demand, an activity the child doesn’t like, or a peer
  - it may be mistaken behaviour which is derived from insufficient expertise about how to act maturely in the complex situations of life.
4. To use knowledge and understanding of family perspectives, cultural contexts and dispositions to respond to the unique characteristics of each child. Teachers experience and value the role of parents and whānau and endeavour to have consistent aspirations for learning and behaviour between home and the centres.
5. To liaise with parents, and where appropriate family and whānau, and other professional agencies for children who require additional support with learning and

development. Timely two-way communication allows exchange of relevant information.

6. To undertake regular centre reviews to ensure that policy and practice are aligned to support children's well-being and social competence. Professional development is targeted for teachers to keep up to date with current research, theory and practice about social competence and related issues.

### **Principles of practice**

Teacher's practices to support children's social and emotional competence are to include:

- knowing children well and being sensitive to their dispositions for learning and well-being
- engaging in interactions that are consistently caring, respectful and responsive to children's feelings
- knowing when to comfort, reassure and support children in a calm, considered and unhurried environment
- having high expectations for children's learning and behaviour
- showing respect for, and valuing, different cultural perspectives to learning behaviour
- actively listening to children's ideas, encouraging them to express their feelings. providing space and time for children to retreat, recharge and observe
- recognising the importance of daily rhythms to children's well being and security and alert children to changes in routines and vary the pace of the day according to their needs and temperaments
- establishing, explaining, and discussing rules and expectations with children, using pictorial prompts as appropriate
- the rules, reasons and/or consequences as appropriate
- encourage children to resolve their own conflicts with support and guidance
- modelling desired behaviour and appropriate words "Can I have a turn please? Gentle with our friends."...
- encouraging independence and providing opportunities for children to lead and take responsibility.
- a sensitive and responsive process for welcoming children and their whānau
- transitions that focus on continuity and belonging for children and their whānau
- opportunities for formal meetings and interviews about children's learning and development
- teachers writing learning stories about children's developing social competence
- involving parents in review of policies associated with social competence and behaviour
- providing healthy foods
- seeing social conflict as opportunities for teaching and learning. Helping them cope with adversity.

### **Strategies for practice**

**What works well** is individualised guidance. Individual focus and the warmth of the interaction increase the child's capacity to hear and respond deeply to a teacher's

suggestion. Remember children will behave in ways that have worked for them in the past. There is always a pay off for them. It is always worth their while.

- **Every child** has a healthy, trusting, secure relationship with one or more teachers in the centre.
- **Optimal intervention:** Teachers need to be adaptable with children to know when to intervene. The teacher responds in different ways to different situations. Use professional instinct and observation based on best judgement in any situation. There are no certainties because individuals are unique.
- **Children need to know that adults usually do as they say.** Don't do phony talk – instead of “we don't” say “I don't want you to”. Be real and genuine. Be direct – say what you mean/want to say and then move on. Be firm, consistent and clear – state what you want to happen and then change the subject to a topic or activity of interest and value to a child.
- **Consider the content of the intervention between teachers and children.** Meaningful sustained relationships have substantive content. Teachers focus on what the children are learning, planning, and thinking, as well as their interest in each other, rather than negative behaviours.
- **Speak to the behaviour.** Describe what the child has done i.e. say what you saw not a generalisation of the child – “good boy”. Specify the behaviour rather than just praising the child. Say it like you mean it without empty threats or inappropriate consequences. Be specific. . Don't get caught in power struggles.
- **Children will bring their behaviour into line with the “definition/reputation” others have of them.** Talk to them as if you have the confidence in them to be sensible, capable and confident. Spend some time with the child every day talking about things other than the past problems. Envision the child the best they can be and then engage with them that way. Having respectful, clear, honest dialogues/interactions conveys the general belief that they are capable of being sensitive. Do not force a child to apologize. This is teaching them to be phony.
- **Use non-verbal communication.** Sitting close, touching, smiling, hugging or simply joining in all show that their behaviour pleases you. Remember that words may be clearer than non-verbal behaviour, so use words first, immediately you notice a desired behaviour.
- **Attend immediately** you notice a desired behaviour and be enthusiastic. If you delay, other behaviours may occur that cause you to withhold attention.
- **Be consistent and stay firm**
- **Teach coping skills.** Forewarn children that there will be times that they will hurt themselves, feel uncomfortable, unwell, sad etc. Let them know that this is normal and that this too will pass.
- **Teach social understanding – cognition and knowledge and emotion regulation.** Be alert to opportunities to recognise and articulate how other people

might be feeling. Take opportunities to arouse children's feelings of empathy as this becomes a self-reference point for how they will react when they experience a similar situation. Offer simple, brief phrases and model the tone of voice they might use to solve a conflict/ engage with another child/ negotiate a win : win outcome.

- **Bullying behaviour must be stopped immediately.** Develop relationships with the bully about something else. Teach other children how to respond to the bully gracefully. Teach children how to justify their position on something, why they are taking a certain position.
- **Have a strategy for supporting social competence.** – Use buddies/pairing – give children a specific task to do together to build relationships. Don't accept excuses for children not wanting to work together – be firm. They need to learn to be flexible and get along with all sorts of difficult people in their lifetime.

### **Dealing with continued mistaken behaviours**

- Teachers seek more information through observation, through literature, through conversation with the child, other teachers, parents and whānau;
- Teachers reflect and consider if the goals, principles and strategies outlined in this policy are being actioned, and then,
- At the most serious level of mistaken behaviour seek help from outside agencies to inform and support teacher/ whānau.
- Create a coordinated individual guidance plan.

### **The plan:**

- work with parents using a positive approach, (this may include new methods of handling behaviour for parents);
- work as a team to develop a plan of action and decide who will have prime responsibility for working with the child within the centre;
- implement the plan;
- structure the environment to support the child;
- consistently work with the child in positive ways;
- notice every sign of progress, however small, noting what strategy works and what doesn't work. Share the information with other teachers, and parents;
- give the intervention strategies time to work ( at least four weeks);
- review and modify the plan as necessary;
- maintain confidentiality and respect the child's right to dignity and protection at all times.

### **Unacceptable practices**

Where unacceptable practice by staff with children is identified, the disciplinary measures outlined in the employment agreement will be followed.

Unacceptable practices include:

- inflicting verbal or physical punishment;
- isolating children out of sight of teachers or children;
- depriving children of food or drink;

- immobilising children;
- depriving children of warmth, shelter or protection;
- using frightening, threatening body language or degrading actions,
- labelling children with derogatory words;
- using loud, aggressive, abusive and threatening language;
- shaming or comparing children;
- ignoring unacceptable behaviours.

Relate this policy to:

- Child Abuse Prevention Policy
- Curriculum, Learning, Assessment, and Planning Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Communication Policy
- Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008 (SR 2008/204)
- Readings and reference books as gathered in the policy planning folder, 2012
- *Positive Foundations for Learning: Confident and Competent Children in Early Childhood Services*, ERO, October 2011.

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