

Wild Lilac's Guidance Policy

At Wild Lilac, the term “guidance” is used to describe the non-punishing methods in which teachers support children’s behavior in positive directions so that they learn to respect themselves and others while developing self-regulation skills. In contrast to traditional discipline practices that seek to control students’ behavior, our guidance practices support students by acknowledging and responding to their needs. Teachers intervene to keep the environment safe and constructive in a way that models respect for others. Wild Lilac teachers never use withholding food, threats of withholding food, coercion, bribing, physical intimidation or physical punishment in our guidance of children.

We use four basic guidance strategies designed to both teach children self-regulation and build their self-esteem:

- 1. Honoring natural consequences.**
- 2. Setting respectful and consistent limits.**
- 3. Validating all feelings.**
- 4. Using a problem solving approach to social conflict.**

Honoring Natural Consequences

Natural consequences are consequences to actions that happen naturally, without intervention by an adult or more sophisticated peer. An example of an adult honoring a natural consequence in a guidance scenario follows.

Scenario: *It is winter and adult and child are going outside. Adult reminds child to get his coat before he goes outside. Child does not want his coat and chooses to go outside without the coat.*

Natural Consequence: *The child is cold and uncomfortable.*

Follow Up Support: *They must go inside to get a coat. Next time they go outside they have an experience to talk about and reflect on if the child says he does not want his coat again.*

At Wild Lilac, teachers honor natural consequences by allowing them to play a role in guidance. When children have opportunities to make choices and experience the consequences of their choices they learn the value of thinking through their actions and making positive choices rather than merely learning to do what they are told. At Wild Lilac, teachers empower children to make developmentally appropriate choices and support them through the natural consequences that follow. Honoring natural consequences in guidance is an important way in which teachers and children share power in the classroom.

Setting Respectful Limits

Wild Lilac teachers maintain limits and expectations in the classroom that are developmentally appropriate. Teachers guide the children in following the principles of respect for self, respect for others, and respect for the space and materials. Teachers model safety and respect for children in the classroom at all times. Wild Lilac teachers prepare classroom environments in a way that allows children to independently access a wide variety of materials. This minimizes challenging behaviors because it provides many different ways to engage in the classroom. The daily rhythm of the classroom is structured to provide the children with consistency so teacher expectations are clear and easily predictable.

Validating Feelings

Validating feelings is an important part of Wild Lilac teachers' roles as guides. Teachers describe the feelings they see to help children connect language to the feelings they experience and they react with calm compassion to all feelings. When a child is upset (regardless of the reason) a teacher stays close by the child and responds to the child's needs. Wild Lilac teachers will not ever ask children to calm down or to stop crying.

Problem-Solving

Wild Lilac teachers use a constructive, social problem-solving model to address conflict between children in the classroom. Teachers consistently use this problem-solving model, step by step, so that the children learn to predict the steps of problem solving; over time, they require less and less teacher support in problem solving and utilize the model independently. After using this model for a few months, children need little adult intervention and often solve their problems on their own. Wild Lilac teachers understand and value the fact that children are competent and capable people who are able to work out their social issues with the appropriate support. Wild Lilac teachers stay close by during problem solving dialogues to provide extra support as needed.

Approaching the Children Calmly.

Example: Seth and Samuel are struggling over a toy. The teacher approaches quickly, but calmly, and notes what s/he is seeing. For example: "*Hey, I see you two are struggling.*" A warning voice is only used if children are out of a teacher's reach and a child is in harm's way. The teacher places his/her body between the children and uses gentle touch to get the children's attention. The teacher crouches down to the children's level and remains neutral in his/her intervention.

Acknowledging the Children's Feelings

The teacher lets the children know what their emotions look like to him/her.

Example: Seth and Samuel are clearly not agreeing. Seth says, "No!" to Samuel and Samuel is crying. The teacher says something like: "*Oh, Seth. You seem really upset.*"

And Samuel, I see that you are crying. You look really upset too."

The teacher uses this time to demonstrate empathy for any and all feelings from the children by listening to them and making comforting noises and gestures. The teacher guides the children in using their words by modeling this behavior; s/he substitutes any hurtful or judgmental language with language that explains the children's feelings.

Example: Seth says, *"Samuel is stupid and I hate him!"* The teacher might say: *"I hear that you are really mad and you two are having a problem."*

Gathering Information

The teacher asks open-ended questions. The teacher does not lead the children to give a certain account based on what the teacher thinks s/he saw, but rather takes into account the children's version of what happened.

Example: The teacher asks Seth and Samuel: *"What is happening?"* or *"What is the problem?"* one at a time and gives them an opportunity to tell their version of the scenario.

Restating the Problem

The teacher restates what s/he has heard from everyone involved and states what s/he perceives the problem to be. The teacher asks the children if s/he understands the situation the way they are experiencing it.

Example: The teacher says to the children: *"I heard Seth say he was using this doll. I heard Samuel say he wants to use this same doll. Is that what is happening?"*

Finding a Solution

First, the teacher asks the children for solutions.

Example: The teacher asks the children, *"What can we do to solve this problem?"*

The teacher listens to each response and asks the children if there is a solution on the table that will work for everyone involved. If the children are unable to reach a consensus, the teacher may ask other children for suggestions or may offer some solutions that s/he thinks might feel fair. The teacher is also aware that the problem is the children's problem and the solution must work for them, and may not always make sense to the teacher, the important thing is that it makes sense to the children.

Providing Follow-Up Support

When a solution is agreed upon, the teacher stays nearby and is always prepared to give follow up support to guide the children in honoring the agreement. The teacher also acknowledges the children's feelings that come out of problem solving.

Sometimes this intensive level of social negotiation can be emotionally overwhelming for children, especially as they become familiar with this process, so the teacher always attempts to be sensitive to the feelings that might arise after a problem solving session.

Understanding Challenging Behavior in the Classroom

When challenging behaviors are not resolved using the above described guidance strategies, teachers use *functional assessment* procedures to discover patterns and better understand the behavior. The functional assessment tool allows teacher to see behavioral patterns by documenting the antecedent, behavior, and consequence of different problematic scenarios.

When challenging behaviors persist for a child, the child's teaching staff may develop an Individualized Support Plan (ISP) that will be reviewed and approved by the child's family to support the child with appropriate behavioral interventions. The functional assessment tool and the ISP can be found in our assessment guide: Assessment of Children at Wild Lilac CDC located in the Employee Handbook. All child assessment information is kept in confidential folders accessible only to the child's teaching staff and the child's family.

Wild Lilac's Position on Time-Outs

Wild Lilac does not use or condone the use of time-outs as punishment. We believe time-outs send the message that children are only welcome in the group when their behavior is desirable, and that they will be isolated if their behavior is undesirable. This can be damaging to a child's self-confidence and emotional health. In fact, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) includes the use of time-outs in a list of harmful disciplinary measures, along with physical punishment, criticizing, blaming, and shaming. Our approach empowers the child to work with us in exploring their feelings, solving problems, and creating agreements. We intend to send the child the message that – no matter the situation – the love, respect, and commitment of teachers as trusted adults is unconditional.

Honoring Each Other, Honoring Ourselves

It is important for parents/guardians and caregivers to honor and respect their own needs as well as the needs of the child. Adults who sacrifice their own needs to an uncomfortable degree may become resentful, sad, and angry. Children may feel their pain and act out. An adult who sets reasonable limits rooted in respect for self and child instill security and confidence in the child. At Wild Lilac, teachers honor the children's feelings and needs while also honoring their own. Wild Lilac teachers work hard to maintain an environment where every person, adult and child alike, has the space and support to be his or her kindest, most patient and respectful self as a member of the school community.