

# GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH BEHAVIOR

Because everyone is unique, it is not useful to treat everyone the same. There are, however, some basic guidelines when dealing with behaviors at any age. Here are some:

## **Clear and Consistent Messages**

People will notice if you say one thing and do another, or have a double standard. If you talk to children and youth about the hazards of smoking, and then they see you smoking, you will lose respect in their eyes.

## **Clear and Consistent Norms**

When discussing rules and norms, try to stay away from the word “No” or “Not”. Instead of saying “don’t tease others” change it to “treat each other with respect” or “Encourage each other”. During the discussion with children and youth you may identify what not to do, but that is only a way to define what to do – which is written down.

## **Clear and Consistent Boundaries**

We all want to be liked and we all want to be respected. How that looks with our peers is different than how it is when working with children and youth. Since they are not our peers, we need to have boundaries. Some examples are to turn down friend requests on Facebook from children and youth in your program, swearing, or telling crude jokes with them as you would with your friends. It is a different type of relationship that takes some practice to find the balance so that you can be a supportive adult rather than a peer.

## **Hold Yourself and Others Accountable to Norms**

Don’t let things slide. If there is a norm that swearing is not allowed in the program, then keep your language clean. Call children and youth on their language as well. The same goes for how people treat each other. If the standards are high, then people will rise to those standards. Likewise, if the standards are low, then people will sink to them.

## **Bottom Line: Norms of Respect and Safety**

It is not necessary to have rules for every little thing. The bottom line is to treat oneself, others, and the space safely and with respect. Just about everything can fall under these two basic ideas.

## **Dealing with Behavior Starts with Relationships**

Take the time to talk with, listen, interact, and play with children and youth. There is no substitute for someone who gives his or her full attention. Feel free to be playful at times. Have fun and enjoy the company of those in your program.

## **The More We do for Them, the Less They do for Themselves**

Give children and youth as much responsibility as they can handle. Younger children need more structure, while adolescents can be part of planning and carrying out programming. When there is a conflict, help them work through it rather than taking care of it for them. That way they can learn how to manage a conflict rather than come running to an adult every time they get into an argument or disagreement.

**From: Gateways to Opportunity (2011). *Level 1 School-Age and Youth Development Credential: Training Curriculum, Participant Manual*. Springfield, IL: Illinois Department of Human Services and Illinois Network for Child Care Resources and Referral Agencies, by Laurie S. Frank (pre-publication copy)**