

or she willing to use them? Would your spouse prefer not to interact with the FCC children but be willing to support you in other ways, such as by grocery shopping, helping with paperwork, repairing broken materials and equipment, cooking dinner, or spending more time with your own children?

Make your family's needs a high priority, especially after family child care hours. You will undoubtedly have program-related things to do after the family child care children leave. These may include thinking about how the day went, reviewing your plans for the next day, tidying up, and preparing meals for the next day. As important as these tasks are, it is essential for you to have time with your family. Do not forget to line up a substitute for the times you may have to take care of important family business or when you or a family member becomes ill.

Maintain your family's rituals and routines. Put your children to bed and wake them up by following your family's established routines. Give your own children special attention every day, whether by reading a book together, watching a video, or going outside at night to look at the stars.

Help your own children understand how they belong to the family child care program. If your own children are part of the program, help them manage sharing their home, their toys, and their parent's attention with others. For example, if most toys are to be shared, consider letting them choose some that will not be shared. Help them understand that, even though they are your own special children, they must follow the FCC rules during FCC hours.

Take care of yourself. Despite the hard work, being a family child care provider should be an enjoyable experience. Find ways to relax and reduce your stress when you are having a difficult day or things do not go as well as planned. Take a deep breath. Do yoga with the children. Although you strive to be an excellent and professional family child care provider, it is realistic to expect missteps from which you can learn.

Guiding Children's Behavior

Children learn what is expected of them by observing the behavior of the people around them. Children sometimes behave inappropriately when they do not understand or cannot meet adult expectations. Some children act out when forced to follow a schedule that conflicts with their natural rhythms. Others are confused when rules and routines are different from those at home. With adult guidance, children learn to identify their emotions, use language to express strong feelings, and think about consequences before acting.

The words *punishment* and *discipline* are sometimes mistakenly used to mean the same thing. They are actually very different. Punishment is a response to unwanted behavior that places a penalty on the child. Punishment may stop children's negative behavior temporarily, but it does not teach them to manage their behavior, themselves. Discipline means directing children toward acceptable behavior so they learn to control their own

actions. Because discipline is often confused with punishment, the early childhood field often uses the word *guidance* instead of *discipline*. Guidance requires an understanding of child development.

Age-Appropriate Expectations

Knowing what is reasonable to expect of young children at each stage of development helps you know how to respond to children and how to help them understand their feelings and manage their behavior. Some child behaviors that bother family child care providers are actually signs of typical development.

Infants are just beginning to understand that their actions affect other people. As they explore the world, some of their explorations have results that adults do not want. For example, a 5-month old child who rolls from back to tummy may cry because he cannot turn back over again. Infants do not yet have the ability to think consciously about what they are doing or how to express their feelings in acceptable ways. Until they are at least 6–8 months old, infants cannot control their own behavior. They cry to let you know they are hungry, tired, or uncomfortable. They are not crying to annoy or control you deliberately. Comfort them by meeting their needs consistently and lovingly. That helps them learn how to calm themselves and regulate their emotions.

Mobile infants begin to realize that adults do not approve of some of the things they do. They begin to use your facial expressions, body language, and “I statements” to guide their behavior. A simple smile gives the message, “Yes, it’s all right to splash in the tray of water that is on the floor.” Even from across the room a frown can stop a child from throwing a block.

Toddlers are full of energy and eager to assert their independence. They are just beginning to use language to express their feelings. They want to do things independently even if they are not skilled enough. They often test limits and enjoy the power of saying, “No!” even to something they want. They can be possessive and are not yet ready to share. They need adults who understand them; have a sense of humor; and who set clear, realistic limits about which behaviors are acceptable and which are not. Positive reminders help toddlers behave appropriately.

Preschool children are beginning to understand the difference between right and wrong. They can use speech to express their feelings and to solve problems, although they do not always do so. They sometimes act out their feelings or lose control without considering the consequences of their actions. Preschool children need understanding adults to help them use speech, not their hands or feet, to express anger and frustration.

School-age children know the differences between appropriate and inappropriate behavior. However, they are still children, and they sometimes act irresponsibly. At about age 8, they gain an understanding of right and wrong. They are interested in rules and are very concerned about whether problems are handled fairly. They are usually able to tell an adult what is bothering them, and they often offer solutions.

Supporting the Development of Self-Regulation

An important part of growing up is learning how to behave in the ways expected by one's family and community. Children need a lot of time and experience to develop self-regulation, which is the ability to manage feelings and control actions. Young children have intense feelings of joy and excitement as well as feelings of anger and frustration. They do not always have the ability to stop and think about how to express their feelings in appropriate ways.

You can do many things to help children develop and practice self-regulation skills.

Give children opportunities to plan and to follow guidelines. Planning helps children decide what they will do and when. Playing games with rules, using recipe cards to cook, and making wooden bead necklaces with color patterns also support children's self-regulation skills.

Encourage children's sense of independence. Invite children to demonstrate their skills. For example, you might say, "The drawing DVD is on the computer table. Feel free to load the program and use it any time you'd like."

Offer acceptable choices. Choices give children some control over events. Offer them many opportunities to make choices about what to play with, wear, and eat so that they know that they have the power to make choices and that their choices are important to you. Make sure that the offered choices are acceptable to you and reasonable for the child. For example, you might ask, "Would you rather play with the cardboard blocks or paint at the easel while we wait for the other children to finish their naps?" Limit choices for very young children to two alternatives.

Give children plenty of opportunities to develop competence. Invite children to help you with everyday chores, such as setting the table, preparing food, and sorting laundry. Label shelves so children can find what they want and help put materials away. Interpret children's cues to understand what they want to communicate, and respond to children's attempts to express themselves.

Read aloud books that are related to self-regulation. Choose time-honored books that children love, such as *Please, Baby, Please*, by Spike Lee and Tonya Lewis Lee; *When Sophie Gets Angry, Really, Really Angry*, by Molly Bang; *I Ain't Gonna Paint No More*, by Karen Beaumont; *Lily's Purple Plastic Purse*, by Kevin Henke; *Quentin Fenton Herter III*, by Amy MacDonald; *The Grouchy Ladybug*, by Eric Carle; and *It's Hard to Be Five: Learning How to Work My Control Panel*, by Jamie Lee Curtis and Laura Cornell.

Play games that encourage self-regulation. Is it any wonder that so many children's games provide opportunities for children to practice stopping or controlling an action? Play "Statues" and encourage children to stop moving completely when the music stops. "Simon Says" requires children to think before they act. In the game "Mother, May I?" children must ask for and receive permission before they move.

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