

Clover Kids Toolbox

Section C

Developing Positive
Learning
Environments and
Group Management
Strategies



Clover Kids

Where children experience the joy of learning
in a supportive, creative, challenging and fun environment.



Setting Yourself Up for Success: Positive Learning Environments

Creating Positive Learning Environments

It is important for Clover Kids leaders need to consider the developmental stages and needs of 5-to-8-year-old children as they plan educational activities. When creating positive learning environments for educational activities to take place, it is critical for leaders to consider child learning theory and practices, general K-3 ages and stages, and behaviors that are common of kids in the K-3 age group.

In general, 4-H educational activities for 5-to-8-year-olds will be positive learning experiences for children if they

- provide one adult or older youth to every six children. Some activities will require fewer children to every adult. Because of the variation in development in this age group, it is important to have a low child-to-adult ratio in learning situations so that each child receives the individualized adult attention needed to be successful in learning experiences. Involving parents/care providers in helping with the group is beneficial and encouraged.
- involve children in selecting and planning activities. When learning activities are self-selected rather than assigned by adults, children are more likely to maintain interest and to integrate new skills and knowledge within what they already know. Involving them in the selection of learning activities builds their confidence as learners, fosters personal initiative, and encourages the development of curiosity and creativity. Based on the planned educational objectives, Clover Kids leaders can identify activity options and help children make decisions about what they want to do.
- encourage children to talk and work with each other. With guidance, children can learn skills that help them develop respect and understanding of other people. They can also learn to negotiate and apply rules of living and working together. Children talk as they learn and learn best when they are engaged in activities that allow them to practice, demonstrate, explain, and apply their learning.
- sequence activities in short 15 - 20 minute time blocks. Vary the pace of activities so that children are not expected to engage in one type of activity for too long; children at this age have short attention spans. Have several small activities available to children and intermix quiet activities with those that require movement and active participation.

- have adults serve as positive behavior models. As children begin to look outside the home for guidance and support, adults with whom they come in contact regularly become influential sources of new information, skills, and points of view. These adults have tremendous influence in helping children feel good about who they are and what they can do.
- acknowledge and connect with children on an individual basis. Children should be greeted when they arrive at a gathering and leaders should be intentional in saying something positive to each child at each gathering to help bolster children's self-confidence.
- promote cooperation rather than competition. It is not appropriate for children age ages 5 to 8 to participate in contests where they are judged. It is appropriate, however, to display their work and recognize their participation. If done fairly and honestly, this can promote a sense of pride and a feeling of accomplishment.
- use positive guidance and discipline. Children in early childhood years are learning self-control. They benefit from adults who use positive approaches to help them behave constructively. Teach children skills for appropriate social behavior such as taking turns, dividing and sharing resources, and working cooperatively.
- provide individualized learning as well as learning in small and large groups. Include a sufficient variety of learning experiences to accommodate the varied ages, stages, interests, and needs of participating children. Parallel activities may be needed to allow children at different stages to participate in ways that suit their developmental needs. Some may choose to work alone on an activity while others choose to work in groups.

Encouraging Creativity

Children show creativity in many ways. One might be a tinkerer who likes to take things apart so the items can be examined and understood. Another might be an explorer wanting to know what is under, behind, inside, and on top of everything. A third child might be a collector of stones, bird nests, sticks, insects, sea shells, or whatever is of interest.

Most children naturally have a high degree of creativity. Too often, however, their natural creative talents are ignored or discouraged before they are fully developed. In an effort to make children fit in and belong, we often reward conformity and sameness instead of celebrating unique and creative differences.

When we hear about creativity or about a creative person, we often think of great artists, writers, humorists, musicians, or scientists. But creativity means far more than talent in art, music, writing, or science. All people can be creative. Creative people see new and different relationships, or new solutions to problems, and come up with results that are original or different. Original thinking, discovery, imagination, curiosity, experimentation, exploration, and invention are the ingredients of creativity. Always encourage children's creativity.



Clover Kids

Where children experience the joy of learning
in a supportive, creative, challenging and fun environment.



Setting Yourself Up for Success: Parent/Care Provider Involvement

Parent/Care Provider Involvement

Parents/care providers are a vital part of the Clover Kids program. Their active engagement is essential to the program's success. Parents/care providers are a good source of help for your program, but your attitude in recruiting their help is important. Leaders must align parents'/care providers' interests, skills, and capacities with the needs of the Clover Kids program. They must know you believe they are critical to their children's learning and the program's success.

Leaders can help parents/care providers

- understand the vision and mission of 4-H and the Clover Kids program;
- assist their children in celebrating all degrees of personal growth, no matter how big or small;
- engage in the 4-H program; and
- utilize their skills, capacities, resources, and interests in beneficial ways to support Clover Kids programs and their children's learning.

Typically, parents/care providers are willing volunteers. "Nobody asked me" is the most frequent response given by people who do not volunteer. Encourage parents, grandparents, older siblings, aunts, and uncles to become visibly active in Clover Kids programming. An important role of leaders is to assist family members in understanding they have many things to contribute to the program's overall effectiveness. Often it is the leader who encourages the parent/care provider and child to work on a project involving them together in a new shared experience. This is one of the best things leaders can do for children and their parents/care providers.

Why Is Parent/Care Provider Engagement Important?

- Children enjoy activities more when their parents/care providers are involved.
- Parent/care provider volunteers have a feeling of contribution to their child, the group, and to the community.
- Parent/care provider volunteers gain an understanding of the program and can become active advocates for Clover Kids and 4-H programs.
- Many parent/care provider volunteers become Clover Kids leaders.
- Parents/care providers can save leaders time and effort by sharing program responsibilities.

How to Interest and Inform Parents/Care Providers

- Greet parents/care providers by name when they drop-off and pick-up their child.
- Involve parents from the very beginning in the organization of the group.
- Phone, e-mail, or visit parents/care providers to talk about the program.
- Hold Clover Kids meetings in children's homes.
- Invite parents/care providers to specific meetings and events.
- Plan special events for parents/care providers and their children.

If individuals feel it is your organization and not theirs, they will feel no obligation to volunteer. Let parents/care providers know you are there to assist them become more actively involved with their children via Clover Kids programs.

Successful Parent/Care Provider Recruitment

- The first rule of recruiting is to be friendly and sincere.
- A good recruiter always reveals the purpose of the call, e-mail, or visit.
- You must explain the worthiness of the proposition before the parent will act.
- Prospective volunteers need to see some challenge in a task if they are to undertake it.
- A key point in recruiting is explaining who the proposition will benefit: their children, their families, their community, and Clover Kids and 4-H programs.
- Assure the prospective volunteers that the task is achievable and manageable.
- Before volunteers are fully committed, they need to know what is expected of them and when the task is to be completed.
- Highlight available training and on-going support offered by County Extension staff and Clover Kids leaders.
- When the facts are completely discussed, get a commitment from them.
- As soon as the volunteers have agreed to the task, you need to review their immediate responsibilities.
- The final and continuing step is to say, "Thank you!"

When you talk with parents and care providers, you learn many things about their children that will be helpful in planning children's learning experiences. Parent/care providers also like to know about their children's activities. Remember, it is important you keep confidences of both children and adults and only share information that is relevant to the program.



Clover Kids

Where children experience the joy of learning
in a supportive, creative, challenging and fun environment.



Setting Yourself Up for Success: Positive Guidance and Communication

Misbehavior is a normal part of childhood and it is an opportunity to teach correct behavior. Handling misbehavior in a positive, calm, and supportive manner will help the child learn to avoid the misbehavior in the future and replace it with appropriate behavior.

Children misbehave for many different reasons, but the most common are:

- They aren't getting their needs of belonging, mastery, independence, and mastery met.
- They don't know what is expected.
- They haven't learned what is appropriate in the given situation.
- They forget what to do.

Positive Guidance

When we work with children ages 5 to 8 there may sometimes be a need for positive guidance to address children's misbehavior. A positive approach to guidance clearly defines expectations for behavior by setting limits and using reasonable consequences that are connected to the behavior. The purpose of positive guidance is to teach children to develop their own inner guidance system so they will function responsibly on their own. We want children to become self-disciplining individuals. There are several successful methods for positive guidance and the key underlying element of all of the methods is support for the child.

Positive guidance works well with school-age children. Guidance is

- helping a child learn to get along with others,
- teaching a child to behave in an agreeable way, and
- helping a child learn self-control.



Guide children by

- focusing on do's instead of don'ts,
- building feelings of confidence,
- giving choices,
- giving the security of limits,
- listening to yourself and the child,
- setting a good example, and
- showing your concern in ways a child can understand.

An effective Cover Kids leader is always aware of the importance of positive reinforcement and practices it often. There are numerous ways to show positive reinforcement. "Catch" children being good and let children know you appreciate their positive behavior.



Clover Kids

Where children experience the joy of learning
in a supportive, creative, challenging and fun environment.



Techniques of Guidance and Communication

Children learn to communicate from the people around them. Often our communications consist of giving them instructions, correcting their behaviors, and telling them information. Keep in mind that children gain or lose self worth from the tone of voice and gestures used, as well as the words spoken to them by others.

Putting it in Words

We have the ability to *influence* children by our words and actions. We cannot *control* children. What we can control, however, is what we are going to do. When we want a child to behave in a certain way, put it in terms of what *you will do* when the child is behaving.

- I will take anyone outside who has a coat on.
- I will set snack on the table for everyone who has washed their hands.
- I will play a game with anyone who has cleaned up his/her activity area.

Talking "With" Instead of Talking "At"

It is important to remember to talk with children rather than talking at children. Instead of directing children to do something like "wash your hands", focus on talking with children having intentional learning conversations. Talking with children using who-what-when-where-why-how phrases improves their language development, problem-solving skills, and critical thinking skills. For children who do not enjoy washing their hands, an example learning conversation might look like this..."We're about to eat snack after playing outside in the sandbox. Why do you think it's important for all of us to wash our hands before eating?"

Choices

Children need to learn to make healthy choices in order to grow up to be independent, responsible individuals. By including choices in the Clover Kids program, you allow children to make decisions and experience the consequences of those decisions. Children maintain their sense of power over themselves, but still behave within the boundaries you set.

- You can sit in the blue chair or the red chair. You decide.
- You can wear your coat or carry it. You decide.
- You can either wash your hands and eat snack or do a puzzle. You decide.

Additional Communication Strategies

Doing this is more effective. . .

Say what you want them to do.

"I want you to sit on the chair."

"Keep the sand down in the box."

"Ride around Mike and the toy trucks."

Give reasons and explanations.

"You need to sit down and wear your seatbelt in the car because, if I stop suddenly, you may bump your head."

Give simple but specific directions.

"You need to clean up now. Put paper on the shelf and the crayons in the drawer."

Make appropriate physical contact in guiding the child.

Lightly touch the child's arm.

Kneel or sit down at his/her level.

Look the child in the eyes when talking to him/her.

Reflect the child's feeling.

"You're really angry. Do you want to tell me why you're angry?"

Allow them time.

"In five minutes you'll need to clean up because it is almost time to go home."

Respect the child's individuality; do not compare to others

"What vibrant colors you have in your pictures, Paula."

than doing this. . .

"Don't stand on the chair."

"Don't throw sand."

"Don't bump into Mike."

"Don't stand on the seat."

"Take care of that mess."

Don't yell at him/her from across the room.

"Don't hit Carrie again."

"Clean up right now!"

"Robert's picture looks neater than yours."



Clover Kids

Where children experience the joy of learning
in a supportive, creative, challenging and fun environment.



Do's and Don'ts of Communicating with Youth

Do. . .

1. Speak in a calm, kind voice. Keep your voice and facial expression pleasant.
2. Speak directly to the child keeping eye contact
3. Speak in short, meaningful sentences that the child can understand.
4. Demonstrate respect for the child.
5. Try to express your request in a positive way. This helps the child learn a more acceptable way of communicating.
6. If possible, get down to the child's physical level by bending down or sitting on a low chair so that you are speaking face to face.
7. Answer the child's questions or give instructions as simply as possible.
8. Allow children to make choices that are appropriate to their age and ability
9. Describe behaviors that are appropriate for the situation.
10. Identify behavior as inappropriate; accept the child even though you do not condone his/her actions.

Do not. . .

1. Become emotional or yell at the child.
2. Call to the child from across the room.
3. Speak too fast or use words a child might not understand.
4. Make fun of the child.
5. Say, "Don't do that!" It is better to say, "Please do it like this so you don't spill paint on your new shirt."
6. Speak from above the child giving the impression of power or control because of being "bigger".
7. Confuse the child with more information than is necessary.
8. Give children opportunities to choose if you can't live with their choices.
9. Make a child feel inferior by saying, "You're a big boy/girl now. You shouldn't act like a baby."
10. Make a child feel less-than by identifying the child as bad. "Only bad children do things like that."



Clover Kids

Where children experience the joy of learning
in a supportive, creative, challenging and fun environment.



Setting Yourself Up for Success: Group Management and Positive Discipline

Group Management and Positive Discipline

There are two helpful techniques to consider when thinking about children and their behavior: group management and positive discipline. Group management is what we do to set the children up for success. It is the critical planning step that we take for every learning activity. Group management allows us to eliminate possible misbehaviors by preparing the learning environments, the children, and program volunteers for success.

Positive Discipline, on the other hand, is what we do when a child exhibits inappropriate behavior. It is our responsibility to "teach" the child how to behave appropriately in a given situation.

Setting Limits

How much freedom do you give youngsters? What limitations do they need? Children must understand the limits in which they should behave before they can understand their misbehavior. Children usually cooperate better when limits are few and enforceable, and when they have freedom to make decisions within the boundaries of these limits. Involving children from the beginning in the development of the rules for behavior may make them more likely to follow them.

When setting limits consider the following:

- Is this limit necessary for the child's safety?
- Is this limit necessary for the protection of property?
- Is this limit primarily for the convenience of adults?
- Does this limit prevent trying new things and experimenting?
- How can the limit be positively enforced?



Clover Kids

Where children experience the joy of learning
in a supportive, creative, challenging and fun environment.



Quality Group Management Strategies Including Children with Challenging Behaviors

A common concern expressed by Clover Kids leaders is how to effectively include individuals with challenging behaviors within activities. Frequently heard frustrations include coping with children who ignore directions, who wander away from activities, who do not participate in activities, or who disrespect peers and activity leaders. Here are some strategies which can be implemented to ensure that all participants are supported in a positive, proactive manner.

Plan Ahead

Be on the lookout for stumbling blocks or situations that may trigger problem behaviors. For example, don't leave food out on the table in plain view that kids shouldn't eat and don't leave materials or props out that you don't want children to use.

Avoid IDLE Time

Waiting in line or waiting one's turn to use supplies are all times when problem behaviors can occur. If supplies are limited, have alternate activities to keep everyone active doing other tasks or playing educational games.

Keep Rules Simple

Keep rules simple and make sure everyone understands them. Discuss and demonstrate how the rules can be followed. Involve children in creating the rules and they will respect them more. Children may use poor judgment so check for compliance and understanding. Decide in advance how you and the children will know if a rule is being followed. Don't just have a rule, without deciding how you'll know when the rule is being observed or broken. Only have rules that are enforceable.

Make Expectations Clear

Be consistent with all children regarding expectations. Review the schedule at the beginning of group gatherings. Communicate expectations for each activity or project. Remember many children, especially those with special needs, may lack the internal organization to provide environmental order. Establishing routines at potentially high stress times (beginning of meeting, transition times, ending, etc.) can help a lot. When possible,

be sure to explain in advance when changes to the schedule or expectations will occur. Do not excuse inappropriate behavior because an individual has a special need, but be sure that expectations are appropriate.

Reduce Distractions and Disruptions

While working on projects or eating, turn off music or other distractions. Make changes in routines slowly; avoid sudden endings to activities. Try to always communicate with children about upcoming changes by saying things such as "three more turns" or "five more minutes"; use a timer to provide a visual of the passage of time. Time your requests of activities to fit with the child's schedule; don't take a highly stressed child and expect them to focus on a complex task. Provide transitions for moving from high energy to low energy tasks. Break things down into small tasks and vary activities. Remember, too, to keep activities to 15 - 20 minutes in length.

Minimize the Chance of Bad Days

Post routines in plain sight to serve as a reminder of the sequence of activities to follow; use charts or other reminders to help children know what they are supposed to do. Check for hidden rewards for misbehavior. Remember that most often the more one-on-one adult-child or child-child time is better for development. Encourage and support friendships between children by allowing time for fun activities.

Don't Wait for a Crisis

Check periodically to make sure activities are progressing positively. Address problems while they are manageable - don't wait for a crisis - intervene when you suspect a problem may be starting.

Be Clear and Specific in Communicating

- Start activities for kids to model behavior. For example, if you want a child to pick up materials, stand next to the child and pick up the first item. Pick up another item and hand it to the child and say, "You pick up the rest. I'll be back in five minutes to make sure everything is put away."

- Give specific instructions. Rather than saying, "Listen when I talk to you," instead say, "Please sit down and look at me when I ask you to listen."
- Make definite statements rather than asking a question. Rather than saying, "Are you ready to quit?" instead say, "In five minutes you need to put away your materials and quit for today."
- State word requests in positive terms. Rather than saying, "Shh, don't talk so loud," instead say "Whisper please."
- Only request one thing at a time and make sure you have children's attention.

Respect All Participants and Their Choices

Recognize and explore preferences. Present instructions and information in ways that each participant can understand. Pay attention to individual responses to activities. Encourage respect for peers and leaders at all times. Pay attention to participant likes and dislikes. Respect the choice not to participate in some activities. Explore ways to make involvement easier, such as encouraging small steps toward involvement in activities that initially may seem difficult or confusing. Emphasize children's strengths.

Be Fair

When activities are planned, keep all participants in mind. Consider how everyone can participate at least partially in games, events, or programs. Keep in mind that clear instructions facilitate all types of learners in reaching their highest potential.

Maintain Dignity

Respect participants' dignity. Behavioral issues and personal hygiene issues should be addressed privately. Concerns and fears should be taken seriously and discussed confidentially with children. Help kids to identify and communicate feelings before a conflict occurs. Be honest with yourself. If you are feeling at a loss, or feel you are losing patience, ask for help from other staff or outside resources.

Involve Parents/ Care Providers

Communicate with parents/care providers for overall consistency and support. Ask for ideas and strategies for working with their children. Encourage parents/care providers to be involved with program activities to provide additional support for their children and the group.



Clover Kids

Where children experience the joy of learning
in a supportive, creative, challenging and fun environment.



Group Management Practices that Support Children's Positive Behavior

Group management is critical to a K-3 program. Those with quality group management practices have many opportunities to program with children. Those without quality group management practices spend most of their time "policing" children and, therefore, have limited opportunities to program. It is important for leaders to prepare quality group management techniques prior to every activity and every gathering. The goal of group management is to create child friendly environments that support children's positive behavior.

Be prepared.

- No one likes to wait, especially young children; have all activity supplies ready and set up.
- Have back-up activities ready in case something doesn't go as planned or the children finish early.
- Have something to do for those who finish an activity early while they wait for others to complete the activity.
- Work with all leaders so everyone knows their roles. For example, one leader can prepare an activity while another is leading an activity.
- Plan transitions to move the group from one activity to the next.
- Plan a system for cleaning up after activities are completed.
- Have a "cue" to get everyone's attention; turn off/on lights or hold three fingers in the air and say "1, 2, 3, freeze" (practice the cues over and over throughout the gatherings so the children understand them).

Be comfortable.

- Make sure you understand the activity and are comfortable sharing it with children. If you're not comfortable, adjust the activity to suit your needs or facilitation style.
- Make sure you run-through each activity before presenting it to the children; practice helps you aware of needed adjustments.

Keep a good "flow" to the gathering.

- Have a balance of sitting and action activities; too much of either will make children restless or bored.
- "Read" the group. If they are getting restless, change the pace of the activities.
- Stop problems before they escalate; use a code phrase like "let's huddle" to bring the children together for discussion.

Keep things hands-on.

- Children learn best with hands-on activities; learn by doing.
- Lectures aren't effective with this age group.

Make it entertaining and fun!

- Children love to laugh; make the group fun! Children who are enjoying themselves are less likely to exhibit inappropriate behavior.

Keep a smile on your face!

- If trouble situations arise, handle them quietly, calmly, and friendly.
- Keep your attitude light and positive.
- Don't make a big deal out of small things.
- Tell jokes.
- Smile often!

Be flexible.

- Keep in mind the developmental level of the age group. What you think is interesting may not be to the children; be prepared to adjust your plans accordingly.
- Have an index card box prepared with songs and games to play.
- Memorize at least one quick "finger play" or action song that is fun and you can do at a moment's notice.

Use your voice to obtain attention!

- Talk quietly; do not yell.
- Make sure you have their attention before you speak.
- Have a cue ("If you can hear my voice, please raise your hand.") to get their attention; don't try to yell above the noise.
- Keep a light happy tone.
- Repeat directions several times.

Use your physical presence strategically.

- Be animated and fun to watch (entertain)!
- Stand in strategic locations (by the children who are not paying attention).

Have a system for getting supplies and activities started.

- Dismiss children from the group by color of shirt, number of pets, etc.
- Sing a song or play a game when children have to wait.

Encourage active adult participation.

- Children feel more comfortable and engaged in an activity when everyone participates.



Clover Kids

Where children experience the joy of learning
in a supportive, creative, challenging and fun environment.



Redirecting Children's Behavior

Provide children clear and specific instructions on any behavior changes needed. Offer support to the young person including encouragement and redirection. Remember to use the **I-CARE** sequence when redirecting children's behavior.

Interrupt—Be willing to interrupt or break up a process of misbehavior if you see it starting. Use a code word like "huddle" to call the children aside for a brief talk; stay calm.

Cool off—Allow kids time to cool off before having to solve problems. Briefly separate him/her from the group. Take time to calm down and gain your composure.

Affirm—Start with trying to understand the child's feelings. Listen, communicate you understand, and acknowledge how they feel.

Redirect—Steer the child in a new direction, suggest an alternative or compromise. Try to seek an option that works for everyone involved.

Educate—Explain the natural consequences of the misbehavior. Take time to review what happened immediately before the misbehavior occurred. This is an important clue in preventing the misbehavior in the future. Talk with the young person about the misbehavior as a mistake and help him/her come up with other ways the situation could have been handled differently.

Remember that many children require clear choices. Be firm and simplify moral choices between good/bad, kind/mean, etc. Do not, however, label the child, but rather emphasize the behavior (not the child) was inappropriate and provide the child with alternative positive behaviors.



Clover Kids

Where children experience the joy of learning
in a supportive, creative, challenging and fun environment.



Positive Discipline During the Gathering/Meeting

Discipline means to teach. All strategies must help the child learn correct behavior for it to be positive discipline. In positive discipline, we establish boundaries in which the child is expected to behave. When they go outside of these boundaries, we want children to try to change their behavior with minimal input from adults so they learn how to identify inappropriate behavior and deal with the consequences of their decisions. Consider the following options for disciplining children with dignity.

CHOICES

When a child acts inappropriately, provide the child with two choices of correct behavior. This allows the child to maintain "power" while still behaving appropriately within the boundaries that have been set. By ending each choice with the words "you decide", we let the child understand that they get to make the decision, which maintains their sense of power.

Important aspects of using choices

- Some children are not used to making choices so giving them two options makes it easier to make a decision.
- Children are allowed to make choices/decisions as long as they don't cause a problem for themselves or another individual.
- Only provide choices that are realistic; you have to abide by what the child decides, so think carefully before you speak!

Examples:

- "You can wash your hands and eat or you can do a puzzle while we eat. You decide."
- "You may speak respectfully to me now or wait until later to talk to me. You decide."

QUESTIONS

When a child misbehaves, you ask "questions" of him/her regarding how he/she is going to handle things. By asking questions, children are given the opportunity to think about what happened, maintain their sense of power, and come up with a solution. Using questions tells the child that we have confidence in their abilities to make choices.

- "I see you yelled at Jimmy and now he doesn't want to play with you. What are your thoughts about how you can show Jimmy you are sorry for yelling?"
- "I see you haven't washed your hands for snack. I'm going to give snack to everyone who has washed their hands. Given you don't want to wash your hands, I was wondering what you were planning on doing during snack time when everyone else is eating."