

The Department of the Air Force Child & Youth Programs Positive Guidance and Appropriate Touch Procedures

Current as of 4 December 2023

Note: All Child & Youth Program Staff are required to review these procedures as part of orientation and annually thereafter as part of the annual Child Abuse training requirement. (National Association for the Education of Young Children: NAEYC 1B.9 and 1E.1) Additionally, the DAF Child & Youth Programs Positive Guidance and Appropriate Touch Procedures are discussed with families at the time of enrollment. (NAEYC 1E.1)

We are so happy to have you join the Department of the Air Force (DAF) Child & Youth Program (CYP) Team! To enhance your interactions with children and youth, these procedures outline both positive guidance strategies that you're encouraged to use as well as techniques that are inappropriate for use by CYP staff.

It is important to understand that strategies and techniques you may have learned as a child or even used in guiding your own children may not be acceptable in the group care setting while working with the children of other families. In addition, some strategies you may use at home with your own children may not be acceptable while interacting with your children who are enrolled/participating in Child & Youth Programs.

What is Guidance?

Positive Guidance helps children learn the expectations for behavior in a variety of settings. It helps children know what it means to be a member of your classroom/program community, learn social rules, manage conflict, and regulate their emotions. It helps children learn from their mistakes and make positive choices. As you review these procedures, it is also important to think about what guidance is *not*. Guidance is not punishment. It is not about control or making children fear adults. Rather, positive guidance is about knowing the children in your care, understanding their developmental level, and creating the best physical and social environment in which they can learn. An important goal of these procedures is to limit or eliminate the use of suspension, expulsion and other exclusionary measures. (NAEYC 1E.1)

Positive Guidance Strategies:

- **Have appropriate expectations for children's behaviors:** Rules, expectations, or guidelines help create a positive social climate in your classroom and program. Consider involving the children in developing rules and expectations. Limit the rules or expectations to a few key ideas that apply broadly. It is easiest for children to remember a few rules like, "Use walking feet" or "Use kind words."
- **Manage space and time:** As a Child & Youth professional, you arrange and rearrange the physical space and the daily schedule to meet children's needs. An example is moving furniture to eliminate a large open space that children use for running. Another example is providing many activity choices so wait time is minimized. In addition, offering a separate, quiet space for youth facilitates them completing their homework. The way you organize your time and space influences the kinds of decisions children make in the classroom/program. Therefore, you should start with examining your environments (physical space and time) when a child has a problem in the setting.
- **Create experiences that engage the whole child:** If children are bored, over-stimulated, or disinterested, their actions will reflect those feelings. Be intentional and observe children regularly to ensure they are using materials effectively and appropriately, and that your activities and materials connect to their interests and match their developmental levels. For older youth (e.g., school-agers, tweens, teens), include them in decisions regarding materials, activities, and special events offered ensuring their interests are reflected in the program.
- **Capitalize on your relationships with children:** Guidance is based on relationships. It involves recognizing the positive attributes of every child. Strategies for guidance develop as you get to know the children, observe them, and listen to them. Make sure you spend quality time with children, just listening, playing, and enjoying activities together. In youth programs, connections show your support of youth's extracurricular activities and academics.
- **Help children express their feelings:** Adults who help children identify and express their feelings nurture empathy. You might look at a child and say, "I see tears. I'm wondering if you are feeling sad about what just happened between you and Teresa. Would you like me to help you talk to Teresa about it?" You must also be genuine and model your own feelings. On a different occasion you might say, "I'm feeling a little frustrated that I can't get this computer program to work. I'm going to go find someone who can help us."

- **Notice and recognize behaviors you want to see:** An important part of positive guidance is encouragement. You should notice and describe accomplishments or positive behaviors. For example, you might say, “Jonah, I bet you are really proud of yourself for solving that problem.” Or “I noticed that you gave Sonya a turn on the computer. She really appreciated that.” Stop and notice the positive behaviors that happen in your daily interactions with children.
- **Provide short, clear directions to children:** Use a neutral tone of voice when giving simple directions to children. Check to make sure children understand what you told them. Make it a habit to tell children what to do instead of what not to do (ex. “Feet on the floor” instead of “No climbing.”)
- **Provide choices:** Whenever possible, offer children choices. This promotes independence and self-regulation. It also minimizes challenging behavior. Any time you find yourself saying “no,” you might consider offering two acceptable choices instead. For example, you might say, “We use walking feet so we don’t run into people or things. I see you need to move. Do you want to take out the stepping stones or help me move the blocks?”
- **Redirect children to appropriate behaviors:** When an unwanted behavior occurs, your job is to help a child get back on track. “No,” “stop,” and “don’t” do little to help a child know what to do. Instead, redirect them to the behavior you want to see (ex. “Keep the scissors in the art area” or “Walk in the hall.”)
- **Facilitate social problem-solving:** Help children learn what to do when they have a problem. You should help them learn to recognize their problem, come up with solutions, make a decision, and try it out (ex. I see you both want a turn with the tricycle. What can we do?). Engage older youth in problem-solving and program solutions. (ex. I see that Michael and Sarah have been waiting to use the pool table, how can we ensure that everyone has time and access to the pool table and other games?)

Inappropriate Guidance Techniques and Responses to Challenging Behavior: (This list is not all inclusive)

You and all the staff members in your program have a professional responsibility to keep children safe from harm. This includes emotional, psychological, and mental harm. There are certain adult behaviors (often used in the name of “punishment”) that have the potential to inflict harm and model aggression. Under no circumstances, is it permissible for staff to use any form of physical punishment, psychological abuse, or coercion. (NAEYC 1B.4, 1B.8 and 1B.10)

The following practices are prohibited in child and youth programs:

- **Corporal punishment:** Staff may not, under any circumstances, strike, hit, whip, yank, bite, pinch, shove, shake, spank, pull hair or use any other form of physical punishment on a child.
- **Withholding physical needs:** Staff may not, under any circumstances, withhold food, sleep, physical activity or other needs like toileting from a child as punishment.
- **Yelling, shaming, belittling, or threatening a child:** Staff may not, under any circumstances, intentionally make a child fear for his or her physical or psychological safety. Staff may not call children hurtful names, threaten, or humiliate children. Nor, should staff physically intimidate children with their physical presence, expression, or tone of voice.
- **Isolating a child:** Staff may not punish a child by leaving him or her alone (ex. leaving a child on the playground alone because he did not line up with the group) or by putting the child in “time out,” excluding them from participation.
- **Binding or restricting a child’s movements as punishment:** Staff may not punish a child by preventing him or her from being able to move or speak (ex. covering a child’s mouth or hands with tape).

Touch that is OK

- Reassuring touch: Pat on the shoulder or upper back, tousling hair, or gently rubbing the upper back to calm a young child. Reassuring touch is depending on developmental and chronological age (ex. gently rubbing the upper back of a toddler would be considered appropriate, but this same action would be controversial while engaging with a teenager)
- Hugging gently, if the child is comfortable or initiates
- Holding the hand of a young child for safety or reassurance (ex. as you cross the street)
- Helping a child stand up who has fallen on the playground
- Tending to an injured child’s wound

Touch that is not OK (This list is not all inclusive)

- Any form of corporal punishment

- Grooming behaviors that satisfy the adult’s needs at the expense of the child or youth
 - Grooming behaviors are romantic, intimate, or flirtatious in nature and may include kissing, holding hands romantically, intimate hugs, sitting on laps, patting on the buttocks, cuddling on furniture, tickling, lifting or carrying youth as part of roughhousing, fondling and molestation
- Touching any child or youth who does not want to be touched

Responding to unsafe or harmful behavior - safely moving children:

There may be times when a child’s actions are placing themselves or others at risk for harm and CYP Professionals need to physically move the child to mitigate a safety threat. Consider the following examples:

- Two toddlers got out of the fenced in area of the playground and are heading for the parking lot
- A preschooler ran out the front door of the facility
- A school age child is throwing heavy wooden blocks at other children and blocking the exit for other children to get out of harm’s way
- Teens involved in a physical altercation that may potentially cause physical harm/injuries

In these instances, CYP Professionals need to safely relocate a child who is exhibiting unsafe behavior or move children out of harm’s way who might be impacted by the unsafe behavior.

Safe and appropriate ways to relocate a child who is exhibiting unsafe behavior:

Safely relocating children is only necessary to prevent immediate harm. If a child is refusing to move, but not harming anyone or at risk of harming themselves, professionals should not attempt to move the child. There must be an immediate risk for actual harm to the child or others.

There are two main things that CYP Professionals are required to do when safely relocating children:

- 1) Keep an open body posture and neutral facial expression; and
- 2) Tell children what they are doing and why using a neutral tone.
 - Lifting a child that is small enough for the professional to carry in a safe manner without injuring themselves or the child.
 - To avoid injury, squat down to place your arms around the child’s body, using the muscles in your legs to stand and lift them off the ground.
 - For children who are small enough to lift, another example is placing open palms under the child’s arms, lifting them one-two inches off the ground and sliding them over to move them out of harm’s way.
 - When lifting a child, avoid picking them up by their hands, arms, or legs because this can injure the child.
 - Holding a child by the forearm or upper arm while walking them to another area.
 - CYP professionals should avoid holding a child by the wrist, elbow, or other joints to avoid potential unintended injuries to the child.
 - Placing an arm around a child’s shoulder and guiding them to another area.
 - CYP professionals should avoid dragging, pushing or shoving children and youth.

When relocating a child, it is critical to calmly explain out loud what you are doing, such as, “I am picking you up to get you to a safe space. Then I will put you down.”

Moving a child with an open body posture and neutral facial expression looks very different from moving a child with a tense posture and furrowed eyebrows.

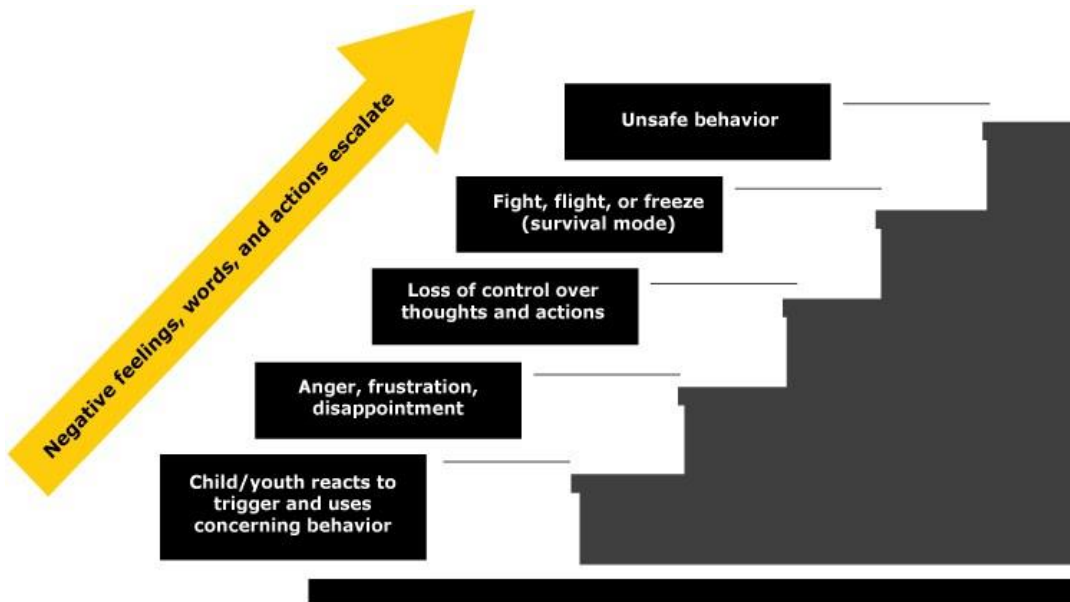
As soon as the child is in a safe location, the CYP Professional shall place the child down or let go of them. These types of physical responses are only to be used to safely move the child in order to mitigate a safety threat. It is **never** used to restrain or restrict the child’s body movements once the child is in a safer location and no longer at risk for harm to self or others. It is also important to remember this measure is never to be used as a disciplinary action or used due to frustration of a staff member. The intent to move a child safely from an environment is to ensure the safety of the child and/or the safety of the other children in the immediate area of the incident.

De-escalation:

Another crucial component of responding to unsafe behavior is de-escalating the situation or bringing the intensity of the situation down. De-escalation is mostly non-verbal, as children using unsafe behavior are typically in a fight or flight state of mind and cannot process words or follow through on verbal directions/requests. Young children's brains are not fully developed for complex thinking or problem-solving. This developmental milestone occurs with adult support. De-escalation requires CYP Professionals to be mindful of their gestures, expressions, movements, and tone of voice, as well as the child's actions and body language.

Children sometimes exhibit behavior that interferes with their relationships with others, ability to learn and/or safely participate in the program. These are defined as concerning behaviors. Since concerning behavior can easily escalate to unsafe behavior, CYP Professionals will also need to use de-escalation with concerning behavior. Think about your response to concerning behavior as your choice to take the escalator or the stairs. If the child is not supported, concerning behavior will continue to escalate to the level of a safety threat. Once a child gets on the escalator, they are going to ride it to the top. It works the same way for adults. The angrier or more upset we feel over a child's behavior, the more our words and actions escalate. Our goal is to support the child as soon as we see a concern. This requires us to avoid the escalator and take the stairs. On the stairs, you can always turn around. On the escalator, you will ride it to the top. The situation escalates and the outcome can damage your relationship with the child and create an unsafe situation.

This diagram shows how a child's negative feelings, words, and actions can escalate into unsafe behavior.



It sounds easy to take the stairs because you are probably not upset right now as you are reading this. In real life, it is very difficult to control emotional reactions to behavior, especially when the behavior is a “hot button” for you and really bothers you. Some things for CYP Professionals to do include:

- Physically taking a step back from the child or situation momentarily
- Taking deep breaths
- Picturing yourself turning around and coming back down the stairs
- Calling for help when you feel frustrated with a situation

The **Department of the Air Force (DAF) Child and Youth Program Inclusion Guide**, November 2021, outlines a variety of tools, resources and strategies to support the safe participation of all children and youth. In extreme cases where children or youth present a direct safety threat to themselves or others, exclusionary measures may be explored. (The DAF CYP Inclusion Guide addresses the use of exclusionary measures while ensuring CYP uses a comprehensive

approach to support the needs of all children and their families, and to adhere to federal and state civil rights laws. (NAEYC 1E.1)

Seclusion:

Under no circumstances, does DAF CYP authorize the confinement of a child or youth alone in a room or area from which the student is physically prevented from leaving.

Suspension:

A child or youth's participation may have to be suspended. Specifically, if a child presents a direct safety threat to himself or herself or others, the child's participation in the CYP may be suspended for the remainder of the program day. Any direct safety threats should be documented and the Air Force Services Center, Child and Youth Programs Division (AFSVC/SVPY) must be notified (within 24 hours) if a child's participation in the program has been suspended for more than 72 hours.

Expulsion/Exclusionary Measures:

Exclusionary measures are not considered until all other possible interventions have been exhausted. CYP procedures for denying care due to an actual health or safety threat, a fundamental alteration, or undue burden are based on procedural requirements under federal law. The ADA Title II regulations contain procedural requirements for DAF CYPs to follow when accommodations needed to include a child represent a fundamental alteration or undue burden on the program. Before such a determination is made, all available resources for use in the operation of the program or service must be considered, and there is agreement that exclusion is in the best interest of the child. Per the DAF CYP Inclusion Guide, installations are required to complete the below steps and submit documentation to AFSVC/VCY. AFSVC/VCY will review documentation and coordinate with the Headquarters, Department of the Air Force Child & Youth Programs. Once the review is complete, a recommendation will be provided to the installation. Only the installation Wing Commander has the authority to deny care to a child. In instances when this happens, the Community Child Care Coordinator should provide parents a list of available and local child care options as well as work with the AFSVC/VCY to help families find care.

Requirements for Denying Care or Disenrollment

- Installations requesting a Denial of Care or Disenrollment must provide supporting documentation with justification for the request. Documentation must indicate reason as a health or safety risk, fundamental alteration, or undue burden
- Installation Counsel Review to Ensure Due Diligence under Law
- Enclosures to the packet must include the following:
 - Program Accommodations Form***
 - Inclusion Action Team Meeting Minutes
 - Medical documentation of required accommodations (as applicable)
 - Kids Included Together® Inclusion Specialist Recommendations
 - Inclusion Support Plan***
 - Support Trackers*** (for disenrollment cases due to unsafe behavior)

What do you do when you see inappropriate guidance strategies or inappropriate touch?

- **YOU MUST TAKE ACTION.** Otherwise, there is a perception of condoning the staff members' behavior leaving the child or youth at risk.
- As a mandated reporter, **if you suspect child abuse or neglect, you must report your suspicions** immediately.

The Department of the Air Force Child & Youth Programs Positive Guidance and Touch Procedures were developed from research-informed resources, including:

- **The Ohio State University Virtual Lab School:** The Department of Defense Child Development Virtual Laboratory School was developed by The Ohio State University for the US Department of Defense's Office of Family Policy/Children and Youth under Grant 2012-48711-20101, 2016-48711-25897, and 2020-48711-32407 of the US Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food & Agriculture.
- **Department of the Air Force Child and Youth Program Inclusion Guide**, November 2021
- **NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation Standards and Assessment Items**, revised 2022.

- **COA Standards, 2023 Edition**

The Department of the Air Force Child & Youth Programs Positive Guidance and Touch Procedures (May 2023)
supersede these previously released documents:

Department of Air Force Child and Youth Programs Positive Guidance and Appropriate Touch Policy, 23 Jan 2023
Department of Air Force Child and Youth Programs Positive Guidance and Appropriate Touch Instructional Guide

Training Resources:

*The Ohio State University Virtual Lab School: <https://www.virtuallabschool.org>

- **“Child Abuse: Identification and Reporting” – Courses available (for each age group and position track)**
 - As a CYP employee, you are obligated to recognize, report, and prevent abuse and neglect. This course will help you recognize, report, and prevent child abuse that occurs in the home, in your program, and in other settings. You will learn about your legal and ethical obligation to report suspicions of child abuse and neglect, procedures for making a report, and important steps you can take to build resilience in yourself as well as in children and families.
- **“Supporting Children with Challenging Behaviors” - Focused Topic Course**
 - There are key factors and practices, called universal supports, that benefit all children, however some children with challenging behavior also benefit from individualized supports. CYP staff who intervene early to address challenging behaviors are fostering positive outcomes for children, their families, and society. This course builds upon your foundational knowledge of developmentally appropriate behaviors, prevention strategies and providing individualized care. The final two lessons address practices for coaches and program administrators.
- **“Social Emotional Learning for Teachers” – Focused Topic Course**
 - Staff members in care settings are often stressed. When staff members learn strategies to identify and manage their stress, it increases their overall well-being. This course helps people reflect on how stress works in their bodies, how they typically respond to stress, and introduces stress-reduction strategies such as belief disputation, emotional reappraisal, controlled breathing and visualization. Learn ways to help build resiliency in yourself and support a resilient workplace for your coworkers and the children in your care.

* Kids Included Together (KIT®): <https://www.kit.org/sign-in/>

- **“Guidance for Unsafe Situations”**
 - This course will cover how to recognize unsafe behavior and give you some practice applying the steps to de-escalate unsafe situations more effectively. Unsafe situations you may face can involve one child using unsafe behavior or two or more youth fighting. We will also discuss some limited circumstances where you may need to physically move a child to protect them. While this course offers general guidance on how to de-escalate unsafe situations, it does not cover every situation a child & youth professional may encounter.
- **“Behavior Conversations: Why is the Why Important?”**
 - Join KIT staff as we discuss the lessons we've learned about how to support behavior. In this session, we'll discuss the process of learning the "why" behind the behavior.
- **“Behavior Conversations: Is My Bias Getting in the Way?”**
 - Join KIT staff as we discuss the lessons we've learned about how to support behavior. In this session, we'll discuss the importance of exploring personal biases when it comes to behavior support.
- **“Behavior Conversations: Can One Strategy Impact Many?”**
 - Join KIT staff as we discuss the lessons we've learned about how to support behavior. In this session, we'll discuss applying one behavior support strategy to meet many needs.
- **“Connect and Redirect: A Strategy to Support Behavior”**
 - This eModule is designed for program staff to understand the brain basics behind a child’s challenging or concerning behavior and learn to use the six steps of the connect and redirect strategy in their response. This strategy will help you acknowledge the child, offer support, and redirect their behavior.
- **“Training of Trainers (ToT) for How to Use the Connect and Redirect Strategy”**
 - In this course, trainers will learn how to facilitate the in-person training “How to Use the Connect and Redirect Strategy,” with the staff you support. *The audience for this course is Training and Curriculum Specialists who have passed the online training Connect & Redirect: A Strategy to Support Behavior.*

- **“Staff Empowerment Series: Using Your Self-Regulation Skills to Respond to Behavior”**
 - Responding to children and youth who are experiencing an emotional crisis is hard! To be effective, you need to recognize your triggers and be prepared to deploy self-regulation skills. In this webinar, we will discuss how to harness the power of self-reflection and use self-regulation to more effectively help children and youth de-escalate.