What to Look for

in a High-Quality, Inclusive, Preschool Prosocial Learning Environment

One of the greatest benefits for children experiencing quality early care and education with other children is that he or she has the opportunity to develop his or her social skills. It is well known that children who can make and keep friends with adults and with other children are more likely to be successful in school and in life (Ladd, 2005). Quality early learning environments offer ongoing opportunities and supports for ALL children to develop appropriate "prosocial" skills.

What are "prosocial" skills?

The behaviors that we want children to exhibit-such as sharing and helping- are often called "prosocial" behaviors. Our ideas about what these behaviors look like are influenced by our own cultural beliefs and our knowledge of child development. Teachers, administrators, families and other adults working with young children often find it much easier to describe the behaviors that they DO NOT want to see children exhibiting. We often complain about children who bite, hit, scream, and curse. We need to identify, however, how we DO want children to act when alone and with others, so that we can clearly communicate these expectations to the children. How we WANT children to act, according to our knowledge about child development and our own cultural beliefs are often called "prosocial" behaviors. As outlined in early learning standards such as National Head Start Child Outcomes (2000) and Foundations: Early Learning Standards for North Carolina Preschoolers (2004, NC DPI), prosocial behaviors for 3, 4, and pre-K 5 year olds include the behaviors described in this brochure.

References and Resources

Brault, L. & Brault, T. (2005). *Children with challenging behavior: Strategies for reflective thinking.* Phoenix, AZ: CPG Publishing. 1-800-578-5549.

Center for Evidence-based Practices: Young Children with Challenging Behavior: http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/summit_home.htm

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Childhood http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel

www.challengingbehaviors.org. *Excellent website with downloadable strategies and supports.*

Conscious Discipline. *Becky Bailey, PhD, Loving Guidance, Inc.*, phone (800) 842-2846, website: www.consciousdiscipline.com

Developing Emotional Intelligence in Young Children: Implications for Violence Prevention (notebook compiled for workshop) *Early Childhood Resource Center, Research Triangle Institute*, phone (919) 541-8027, website: www.rti.org/child

"Foundations of Early Learning Standards for NC Preschoolers and Strategies for Guiding Their Success" (Published October, 2004) *NC Dept. of Public Instruction*, Publications, website: www.ncpublicschools.org/success/downloads/foundations.pdf

Ladd, G. (2005). *Children's peer relations and social competence: A century of progress.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Lucy Daniels Preschool *Cary, NC,* website: www.lucydanielscenter.org

Partnerships for Inclusion, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center *UNC-Chapel Hill,* website: www.fpg.unc.edu/~pfi

Project Enlightenment. *Raleigh, NC,* website: www.projectenlightenment.wcpss.net

Reframing Discipline and Preventing Discipline Problems. *Videos from Educational Productions*, phone (800) 950-4949, website: www.edpro.com

Second Step. *Curriculum developed by the Committee for Children, an international nonprofit organization located in Seattle, Washington*, contact Committee for Children, phone (800) 634-4449, website: www.cfchildren.org

"Young Exceptional Children (monograph series), Practical Ideas for Addressing Challenging Behaviors" website: www.dec-sped.org *(look under publications, monograph series)*

Visit the North Carolina Preschool Demonstration Programs to see effective practices at work. Visit http://www.osr.nc.gov and http://www.ncsip.org/programs/literacyprogram.html

Information compiled by Patsy Pierce, Ph.D. (CLDS) and Norman Alllard, Ph.D. (DPI) and reviewed by Pat Porter, Ph.D. (CLDS) and Trish Mengel, National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center

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Exceptional Children Division | **Mary N. Watson,** *Director*

North Carolina
Office of School Readiness | **John Pruette,** *Director*

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A Guide for Administrators, Teachers and Families

In general, we would like preschool children to learn to:

- Be respectful of themselves and others
- Work and play alone and in groups
- Solve conflicts using words
- Express strong emotions in acceptable ways
- Make decisions ethically and intelligently (Head Start Outcomes Framework)

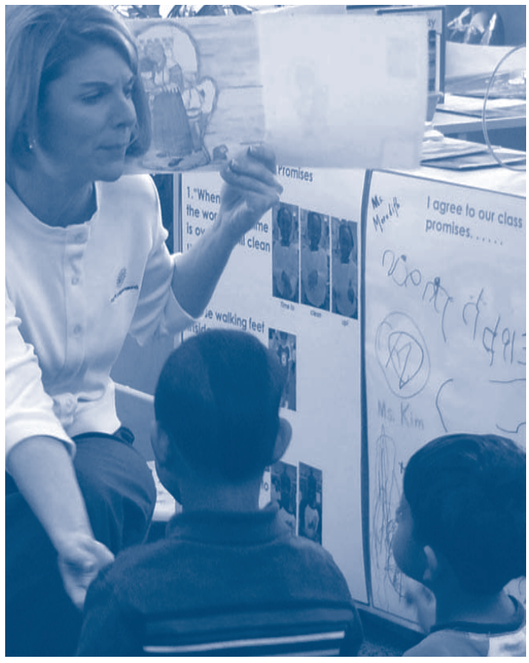
In order to exhibit these prosocial skills, preschool children need to develop the following abilities as outlined in *Foundations: Early Learning Standards for North Carolina Preschoolers* (2004, NC DPI).

Children start out developing prosocial behaviors by developing a "sense of self". They begin to:

- Show self-confidence, persistence, self-direction
- Regulate, recognize, & express emotions
- Enjoy playing alone and with others
- Cope with change and adversity
- Express and manage anger appropriately
- Use pretend play

As children grow and learn, they develop a "sense of others". They begin to:

- Recognize personal uniqueness and that they are a member different group
- Approach others easily and show comfort in interactions
- Seek out others for help
- Develop awareness of personal behavior
- Work to resolve conflicts
- Show interest in others, responding to their feelings, recognizing and respecting similarities and differences
- Follow social rules, routines, and daily schedules



Promoting Prosocial Behaviors

Environment

- Attend to placement of well-defined centers and traffic patterns
- Offer multiples of popular materials and toys
- Ensure predictable routines and smooth transitions with little waiting time
- Place "sign-up" sheets in centers and a picture schedule that children can follow
- Provide quiet and active areas and activities throughout the day
- Adapt activities and give opportunities for choice
- Help children define personal space and provide a safe, observable place where a child can be alone when needed
- Display books, pictures, and posters about feelings and problem solving

Adults

- Have appropriate expectations, clear limits, logical consequences
- Communicate these expectations in multiple, clear ways. Tell and show children what you WANT them to do, not always what you don't want them to do
- Offer opportunities for children to practice prosocial behaviors
- Acknowledge when they do behave appropriately. "Catch 'em when they're good!"
- Develop partnerships between the child's family members and teachers
- Discuss family and school behavioral expectations
- Know what "pushes our buttons" and ask for help
- Remain calm, don't blame behaviors on other events, don't think about removing the child as the only response, try to see the child's perspective
- Teach/model appropriate behaviors, words, social skills/rules:
  - Reflect on what children are doing
  - Label their feelings
  - Ask open ended, action questions; give suggestions
  - Encourage children to make classroom rules, e.g., "use walking feet"; "be a friend"
  - Have real conversations with children – show that you really care about them

For the children

- Discover and use their interests, learning styles, temperaments
- Know their developmental abilities and build on these
- Examine their physiological needs: fatigue, hunger, allergies, "wiggles"
- Help them to become responsible for their own behavior
- Teach them to use their words, or other communication system to express themselves, especially their strong feelings. You may have to actually give them the appropriate words, phrases, and behaviors to communicate their emotions.
- Make social-story books where the children talk about helping and being friends with one another

When adults have used environmental and positive behavior supports for at least three months and a young child continues to display particularly challenging behaviors, parents and professionals should work together to make appropriate referrals to specialists such as the Exceptional Children's program within a local education agency.