

Behavior Strategies for Library Programs



Sara Forward, LICSW

Social Emotional Learning Project Coordinator

Vermont Afterschool, Inc.

sforward@vermontafterschool.org

Overview of healthy social skills gained between 3rd to 5th grade:

(Note, this is a spectrum of skill which children will acquire at varying levels and at their own speed)

Eight-Year-Olds may:

- Develop greater confidence and find pleasure in independence and mastery of tasks
- Gravitate toward friends of the same gender
- Have energy and enthusiasm for their assignments, especially trying new things (and may be quick to change interests)
- Love surprises and benefit from changing jobs and challenges to match their energy
- Begin to understand the feelings of others and to try social problem solving when conflicts arise
- Enjoy being part of a group and group games

Nine-Year-Olds may:

- Question the workings of the world around them
- Develop a more realistic view of themselves
- Become interested in “fairness” and hold peers accountable to game rules
- Be dramatic / indirect in their expression of feelings “This is boring!” (translation: this is hard)
- feel impatient with adults and see possibilities for ways they might change their world and run things differently

Ten-Year-Olds may:

- Still value opinions of adults and enjoy family and staff led activities
- Crave attention from both peers and adults
- Have energy for trying new things and work well with peers
- Enjoy working at something with persistence and learning to do it better
- Respond well to having their contribution to the community recognized

Eleven-Year-Olds may:

- Be passionate in their beliefs and sense of justice
- Negotiate social cliques and benefit from clear, consistent guidance from adults around peer pressure and bullying

- Have meaningful friendships with the opposite gender
- Practice “distancing” in a healthy way with trusted adults through eye-rolling, shrugging, “whatever” posturing (establishing physical and social safety in face of new social norms)
- feel less grown up than they sometimes wish

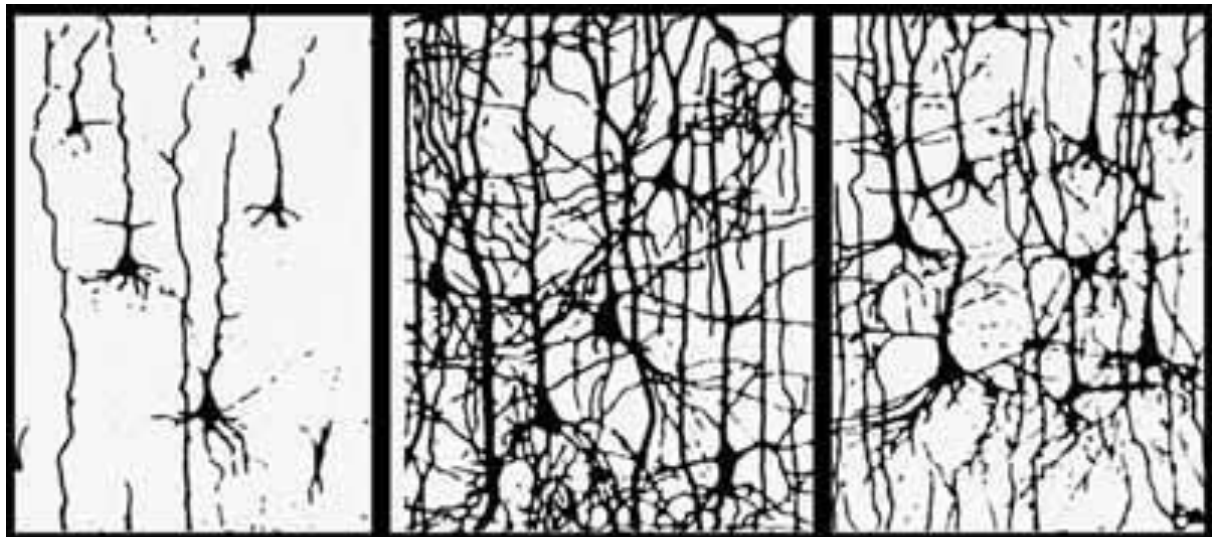
Twelve-Year-Olds may:

- have meaningful relationships outside their peer or core group
- be interested in caring for or tutoring younger children
- have energy for learning new things
- be invested in service learning and projects in afterschool
- crave leadership opportunities and ways to show responsibility

Remember healthy development is individual and that we must teach social skills to the child’s developmental **STAGE not AGE.**

Physiological Changes ages 8-12:

- **age of puberty: 8-14 years in girls, 9-15 years in boys**
- **hormones are causing bodily changes and may affect mood regulation and impulse control**



At Birth

6 Years Old

14 Years Old

Synaptic Density in the Human Brain

A Super Staffer is...

All Ears, a Mirror, a Kind Heart, rooted (in adulthood), Full of Energy

Pause and Ponder: What positive quality do you most often bring to your work?

Two Components of Behavior Management: Proactive and Reactive Strategies



Offense and Defense: you and the students in your care are on the same team. You are in a game against the challenging behavior. Your role is as the coach. The child's role is as the star player.

Proactive Strategies:

- TEACH ALL CHILDREN ABOUT FEELINGS AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO SHARE (this is important for internalizers and more introverted children).
- Teach the Golden Rule
- Give students structured, positive same-gender group experiences (Girl Talk, Boy's Tribe, Girls on the Run).
- Notice internalizers and externalizers and support **BOTH** in your program

Internalizing behavior – negative behaviors or feelings that are focused inward. They include fearfulness, social withdrawal, and somatic complaints (headache, tummy ache)

Externalizing behavior – negative behaviors or feelings that are focused toward others. They include fighting, running away, defiance, and swearing.

Remember: Girls are more likely to exhibit internalizing behaviors. Boys are more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviors.

- Use Pre-teaching of desired behaviors and ways to handle emotions during program

Brainstorming and Pre-teaching around challenges relevant to your content area:

What opportunities for social skill-building will arise as staff teach your content area? What challenges might students face? What pre-teaching will bolster desired behavior (coping, frustration tolerance, persistence, etc.)?

Pause and Ponder: What content area do you teach in afterschool? What specific behaviors or feelings will come up for students during that lesson?

Content Area (Legos, visual art, drama, etc):

Feelings students may experience:

Desired behavior:

Example of Pre-teaching:

“Today we are practicing something new. When you are doing something new, sometimes you don’t get the results that you want. You might feel frustrated. It’s normal to feel frustrated when you are trying to get better at something. It takes practice to learn new things and patience with yourself and your team. Let’s take a minute to think up ideas about what we can do when we feel frustrated so that everyone has a plan for how they will handle it when things don’t work the first time.”

Common pre-teaching applications:

- when children are working in groups
- before a big-group game or activity
- when there is a race or competition with a winner and loser
- when children are practicing a skill, moving from novice to master
- when you are teaching a multi-age group



Reactive Strategies: Ideas for Responding to Challenging Behavior in the Moment

Remember that these are necessary to keep children safe but in-the-moment responses don’t help children to develop pro-social skills such as cooperation, empathy, and self-control. Those lessons must be taught when a child and caregiver are calm.

General Guidelines:

- Stay Calm.
- Keep the child (and peers) safe while allowing him or her a chance to cool down.
- Avoid public confrontations (stakes are higher, you both lose social clout)
- Respectfully remind or redirect
- Intervene as early as possible to avoid melt-downs
- Avoid negotiating in the moment
- Offer limited choices when possible (make sure to give child time to decide)

Defiance / Refusing:

Staff response:

- 1) Move to child’s level with calm movement
- 2) Model taking a deep breath
- 3) Repeat directive with simple reason for request (“It’s time to go to the gym, please join the line”)

If child ignores or continues to defy....

- 4) Staff says in calm, gentle voice, "It looks like you are choosing not to listen. You get to decide what you want to do. I'm going to give you a minute to think about it. You can either choose to get in line or choose not to listen. I can't think of another choice but if you think of something else that will work for us both, let me know."
- 5) Walk away from child for 1 to 2 minutes.
If child follows directive (or comes very close to following) provide labelled praise
If child cannot / will not follow directive you might:
 - Invite student to share his or her feelings. Start with your observation of the physical and make a suggestion of what feeling a child might be having. ("I'm noticing that you chose not to listen and that your fists are balled up at your sides. It looks like you're angry. Is that right?") Validate the emotion, then ask, "How can I help?"
 - Try to get child to say "yes" to three different questions ("Looks like you are feeling sad, is that right?" "Looks like something happened with your friend Emma, is that right?" "It looked like something happened at the snack table, is that right?")
 - Remove peers from space

Disrespect to leaders: (Use even tone, neutral body language, don't ask questions)

- Try re-directing child to expressing his or her feelings.
Child: "I hate afterschool and I hate you! I don't have to listen to you!"
Staff: "I can see that you are really upset. You might be feeling angry or frustrated. I'm going to give you a minute to calm down."
- Re-direct to a calm-down space. "Sounds like you are frustrated. You can take the space you need in the calm-down castle for now."
- If child is challenging your directions, you might say something like, "Morgan, take a seat. You can read or draw for now."
- Delay consequences until child is calm and include him or her in process of repairing.

Inappropriate language:

- Address the feelings behind the words instead of the words.
- Delay consequences until child is calm.
- When child is calm, explain that some words make other people feel uncomfortable or aren't respectful. Validate the feeling child was having and brainstorm other words to use, "You and your friends were feeling silly. What else could you call your friend that wouldn't get you into trouble or make others feel uncomfortable?"

Aggression with peers: (Handle as though BOTH children have experienced trauma)

- Comfort hurt child first and model checking in with hurt child.
- Talk with aggressive child alone first, NOT with the peer involved (avoid public)
- Reassure child that he or she has time to calm down and offer support (non-verbal proximity, calm-down basket, feelings cards) in expressing feelings