

## Guidance and Discipline Policy

by St. Thomas Early Learning Center

Professionals who work with young children expect to be met with challenging behavior from time to time. During the first five years of life, children are just beginning to learn how to handle their own intense emotions and conform to the behavioral expectations of society. As parents and teachers know, this is a lengthy process.

At STELC, we define challenging behavior as any behavior that

- Interferes with children’s learning, development and success at play
- Is harmful to the child, other children or adults
- Puts a child at high risk for later social problems or school failure

It can be direct (e.g. hitting, pushing, biting, kicking) or indirect (e.g. teasing, ignoring rules or instructions, hiding or running away from staff, excluding others, name calling, destroying objects, having temper tantrums).

The STELC staff sees working with children’s challenging behavior as an integral aspect of our job. The word *discipline* has, as its root meaning, “instruction” or “training.” This meaning, rather than punishment, is the foundation for our approach to guiding children’s behavior. We accept that young children will sometimes display their emotions or try to achieve their goals in unproductive or immature ways. That is simply a part of being very young. Much of children’s most valuable learning, especially in a group setting, occurs in the course of behavioral problem solving. This approaches we use vary by age group, but have the following elements in common:

**Adults model positive behavior.** We show that we can accept, control and express feelings in direct and non-aggressive ways; we let children know that we are not afraid of their intense emotions and will not punish, threaten or withdraw from them.

**Teachers design the physical environment to minimize conflict.** We provide multiples of toys and materials for groups of children, define classroom and outdoor areas clearly to allow for both active and quiet play and strive to maintain an appropriately calm level of stimulation.

**Teachers maintain age-appropriate expectations for children’s behavior.** We attempt to minimize unreasonable waiting and transition times, and limit the length of large group and teacher-directed activity times according to children’s developmental levels. We give children large blocks of uninterrupted time during which to make their own activity choices.

**Teachers establish simple rules, or expectations, for the classroom community.** Children participate in this process early in the school year. When issues arise, adults and children can reference the “Be safe, Be kind, Be respectful” guidelines as reminders about what kinds of behavior facilitate life in a group setting.

**Adults closely observe and supervise children’s activities and interactions.** With our high ratios of adults to children and our emphasis on attentive observation, we can often intervene to guide children before situations escalate.

**Adults help children verbalize their feelings, frustrations and concerns.** The staff will help children describe problems, generate possible solutions, and think through logical consequences of their actions. The adult role is to be a helper in positive problem solving. We want children to value cooperation and teamwork. We help them to learn peaceful, productive approaches to interacting.

**Children whose behavior endangers others will be temporarily supervised away from other children.** This is not the same as the practice of using a “time-out” for a child. An adult will help the child move away from a group situation. the child will then process the problem verbally with the staff member and any other concerned parties. An adult will stay close to any child who is emotionally out of control and needs private time to regain composure.

**Discipline, i.e., guidance, will always be positive, productive, and immediate when behavior is inappropriate.** No child will be humiliated, shamed, frightened, coerced or subjected to physical punishment or verbal or physical abuse by any staff member, student, or volunteer working at STELC. Every member of the STELC professional staff understands and follows our disciplinary approach as well as the standards on guidance and management in our state licensing regulations.

**When a pattern of behavior persists that endangers self, others, or property, or significantly disrupts the program, we will work with a child's family to find solutions, up to and including referral for outside services or exclusion from the STELC program.** Exclusion will always be a last resort, after all other possible interventions have been exhausted and there is agreement that a different setting is in the best interest of the child. In that circumstance, the program will work with the family in accessing services and, as able, securing an alternative placement. Our actions will comply with federal and state civil rights laws.