



What Does “Discipline” Mean at River’s Edge Forest Play?

At River’s Edge Forest Play, we understand that **discipline means to teach and guide**—not to punish. The word has been widely misunderstood over time, but at its root, discipline is about helping children learn how to navigate challenges and make choices that support their growth and relationships with others.

Punishment, including timeouts, exclusion from activities, or adult outbursts, does **not** support healthy emotional development. These tactics can trigger a child’s **stress response** (fight, flight, freeze), rather than help them develop new strategies for self-regulation. We believe there is no place for fear-based discipline in a child’s life.

The REFP Approach: Connection Before Correction

At REFP, it is a **privilege and responsibility** to support children as they grow emotionally, socially, and cognitively. Our guides are trained in child development and trauma-informed practice. We focus on **co-regulation**, empathy, and modeling appropriate behavior.

We understand that young children are learning:

- How to express big emotions with words instead of actions
- How to share space and materials with others
- How to recognize that their actions affect others
- How to repair relationships when something goes wrong

When a child hits, pushes, yells, throws something, or says something unkind, here’s what we do:

1. **Ensure safety:** We first check in on the child who was affected.
2. **Connect with the child who is dysregulated:** We kneel down, meet them at eye level, and calmly say something like,
“I see you’re really upset. At REFP, we are kind to each other. Pushing hurts, and it makes your friend feel sad.”



3. **Support reflection:** We give the child space to explain, reflect, and consider how things could be handled differently.
4. **Guide repair:** We ask the child how they might help their friend feel better and how they can respond differently next time.

This is what **discipline the REFP way** looks like: *respectful, relational, and rooted in real-time learning.*

When Challenges Arise

Some children may join our program with behavioral challenges such as frequent hitting or pushing. We are equipped to support these children with compassion and consistency, and we work **closely with families** to create individualized strategies.

In rare cases, if we feel that a child's needs exceed what we can safely and appropriately support in our setting, we will have an open and collaborative conversation with the family. Our goal is always to help the child thrive—and in most cases, **REFP is exactly the right place** for that growth to happen.

We also acknowledge that witnessing challenging behaviors can be hard for other children. However, this is also an opportunity to teach empathy, boundaries, and healthy communication—skills that build strong, emotionally intelligent humans.

Open Communication

We believe in transparency and partnership with parents. If you have questions or concerns about your child's behavior—or how we're supporting the group—we welcome your input. We have an **open-door communication policy** and truly believe that working together creates the most supportive environment for all children.