Understanding Conflict, Big Feelings, Behaviour& Child Safety at our Preschool

How we support preschoolers to develop social and emotional skills

At preschool, children are learning how to make friends, communicate their needs, manage big emotions, negotiate, solve problems and understand how their actions affect others.

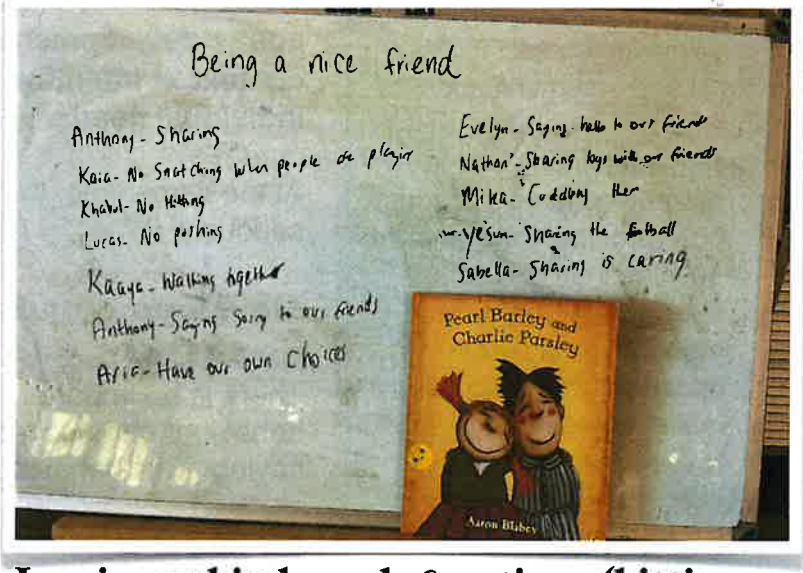
These are **developing skills**.

Sometimes children communicate through their bodies before they have the language, impulse control or emotional regulation to communicate in other ways.

This is why our approach is grounded in the philosophy: **Behaviour is communication.**

However, understanding behaviour does not mean accepting unsafe behaviour. Our responsibility is to hold both things together: **We understand the developmental reason for the behaviour AND we protect children from harm.**

This is an important part of our child-safe practice.



Is using unkind words & actions,(hitting, pushing, biting or punching) 'normal'?

Behaviours such as hitting, pushing, biting and occasional physical reactions, along with unkind verbal reactions, can occur during early childhood, as children are developing emotional regulation, communication and social problem-solving skills. This does not mean that these behaviours are desirable, appropriate or something we simply ignore. It means that educators understand that a young child's physical response may be an expression of:

- frustration
- anger
- fear
- excitement
- overwhelm
- difficulty communicating
- difficulty waiting or sharing
- sensory needs
- difficulty understanding another child's perspective
- an attempt to protect personal space
- difficulty entering or maintaining play
- impulsivity
- difficulty managing a transition or unexpected change.

Child safety remains our priority

A **"behaviour is communication"** philosophy does not replace child safety responsibilities.
Our responsibility is to ensure children are appropriately supervised and protected from harm while also supporting children who are developing social, emotional and communication skills.
This means educators:

- actively supervise children
- anticipate potential conflicts
- position themselves strategically
- monitor group dynamics
- intervene when a child is at risk of being hurt
- respond promptly to incidents
- provide first aid where required
- comfort and support the child who has been hurt
- support the child who has used physical behaviour
- identify patterns and triggers
- review supervision and environmental factors
- communicate with families appropriately
- document incidents according to service procedures
- develop additional strategies where a pattern indicates further support is required.

While the service cannot guarantee that a child will never experience an accident, injury or physical interaction with a peer, the service has a responsibility to take reasonable precautions, provide adequate supervision and respond appropriately to identified risks and incidents.

Therefore, educators do not automatically interpret a preschool child's unkind or hurtful reaction through an adult lens. **Instead- an educational lens. A preschooler hitting another child is not viewed in the same way as an adult assaulting another person.**

We consider the child's:
age → developmental capacity → communication → context → intention → regulation → environment → individual needs.

At the same time, the impact on the other child is taken seriously.

Developmentally understandable does not mean OK

There is an important difference between saying,"This behaviour can occur during typical development" and saying "This behaviour is acceptable."

We do not say:
"They are only little, so it doesn't matter."

Instead, we say:
"This is a skill the child is still developing, and we need to teach and support a safer way to communicate."

We also do not label a child:
❌ "He's aggressive."
❌ "She's a biter."
❌ "He's a hitter."
❌"She's mean"

Instead:

✅ "The child is experiencing difficulty communicating in this situation."
✅ "The child is still developing emotional regulation."
✅ "The child needs support to use an alternative strategy."

This allows us to address the behaviour without defining the child's identity by it.

Supervision is not simply "watching"

Effective supervision means educators are actively engaged, aware and responsive.

Educators consider:
Who is playing together?
What are the dynamics within the group?
Where are potential conflicts likely to occur?
Which children may need additional support?
Are there environmental factors contributing to the difficulty?
Can an educator position themselves to intervene early?
Are there communication or sensory needs that need to be considered?

Supervision is adjusted according to children's ages, abilities, skills, group dynamics, environment and the level of risk present.

We look beyond the behaviour

If a child hits, pushes, bites, punches, or expresses unkind words, educators ask: ***What happened before?***

Was the child:

- trying to enter play?
- protecting a resource?
- overwhelmed?
- unable to communicate?
- experiencing a transition?
- responding to another child's behaviour?
- seeking sensory input?
- tired or dysregulated?
- experiencing a change?
- struggling with impulse control?

What was the child communicating? Perhaps:
"Stop."
"Move away."
"I want that."
"I need help."
"I don't know how to join."
"That's too much."
What skill can we teach?

We may teach:
"Stop."
"My turn."
"Help please."
"I don't like that."
"Can I play?"
"Move back."
"I need some space."



Inclusion and disability

Children with disability or developmental differences may require additional support to develop communication, regulation and social skills.
We do not assume that physical behaviour or antisocial communication is automatically a consequence of disability.
Nor do we assume that a child with disability cannot learn alternative strategies.

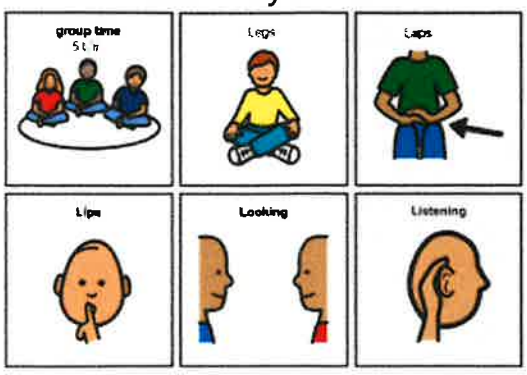
We presume competence.

We ask:
"What can this child do?"
"How does this child communicate?"
"What is this child trying to communicate?"
"What adjustments will enable participation?"
"What skills can we explicitly teach?"
"What environmental barriers can we remove?"

A child may communicate through:

- spoken language
- gestures
- facial expressions
- visual supports
- sign
- AAC
- body movements
- objects or pictures
- behaviour.

Our responsibility is to recognise and respond to the child's communication system.



Supporting the child who has experienced the behaviour

Every child has the right to feel safe.
When another child speaks unkindly, hits, pushes, bites, punches, **the child who has experienced the behaviour is not expected to simply accept it because the other child is still learning.**
Both children have learning needs, and both children deserve support.

For the child who has been hurt, frightened or upset, educators may:

Create physical safety

The educator moves between the children where necessary, separates the children calmly and ensures the child has space to feel secure.

Provide emotional safety

The educator stays connected and acknowledges what happened:
"You are safe. I'm here with you."
"That was frightening."
"You didn't like being pushed. I will help you."

Give the child a voice

Children are supported to communicate what they need.

They may say:
"Stop."
"Don't touch me."
"I need space."
"I need an educator."

Children who communicate non-verbally are supported to use their own communication system.

Give children choices

Where appropriate, educators may ask:

"Would you like to play somewhere else?"
"Would you like me to stay with you?"
"Do you want to continue playing or find another space?"
This restores a sense of agency and control after an unexpected physical interaction.

Equity, not simply equality

Inclusive practice does not mean expecting every child to respond in exactly the same way.

One child may need:

- additional visual information
- a communication device
- explicit teaching
- sensory regulation opportunities
- movement breaks
- additional transition support
- reduced language
- an educator to co-regulate with them.

Another child may be able to independently use words to solve the problem.

The goal is the same: safe, respectful participation.
The pathway may be different.

We support BOTH children

Our approach does not position one child as "*the problem child*" and another as "*the good child.*"

Instead, we recognise that two children may have very different needs following the same incident. One child may need help learning, "I can use words instead of hitting." The other may need help learning, "I can tell someone when I feel unsafe."

Both children are learning.
Both children deserve dignity.
Both children deserve support.
Both children have a right to participate.
And both children have a right to safety.

Support the child to return to play

We do not want a child to feel that they must permanently avoid particular peers, play spaces or stop participating because another child's behaviour occurred.
Educators support the child to re-enter play when they are ready and when the environment is safe.

Teach protective strategies

Children gradually learn that they can:

- move away
- use a strong voice
- say "stop"
- protect their personal space
- seek an educator
- communicate that they need help
- choose another play space
- ask an educator to support a social interaction.

We do not expect young children to physically defend themselves. The responsibility for maintaining safety remains with the adults.

Building agency without placing responsibility on the child

There is an important distinction between empowering children and making them responsible for preventing another child's behaviour.

We can teach a child:
"You can say stop" without saying "You should have told them to stop."

We can teach:
"You can move away and find an educator", without suggesting, "You should have moved away sooner."



We can teach children protective and communication strategies while making it clear that adults are responsible for providing safe supervision and responding to unsafe behaviour.

What happens when a child is hurt?

When emotional or physical behaviour occurs, educators respond to both children.

For the child who has been hurt:

We:

ensure immediate safety
provide comfort
assess whether first aid is required
acknowledge their feelings
reassure them
support their sense of safety
provide opportunities to communicate
document the incident according to service procedures
communicate with families as required.

For the child who used the physical behaviour:

We:

maintain safety
regulate alongside the child
avoid shame or humiliation
acknowledge the emotion
establish a clear boundary
identify the communication behind the behaviour
teach an alternative strategy
support repair and reconnection.

Behaviour, incidents and child protection are not the same thing

In a preschool setting where little brains are still developing:
Young children are still developing social boundaries, communication, impulse control and emotional regulation.
An isolated, developmentally understandable, peer conflict, is generally approached as a behaviour guidance, learning and safety matter, rather than applying adult concepts of bullying & assault behaviour to young children. This is ground in brain development research.
However, this does not reduce our child safety responsibilities.

A physical behaviour can be developmentally understandable and still require a safety response.
Educators remain responsible for:
Protecting children
Providing appropriate supervision
Responding to injuries
Recording incidents appropriately
Recognising patterns of concern
Reviewing environmental and supervision factors
Responding to suspected abuse or neglect
Following child protection legislation and service procedures

Where behaviour is frequent, severe, escalating, causing significant injury or occurring within concerning circumstances, educators consider whether additional assessment, support or escalation is required.

Our goal is skill development, not punishment

Our goal is not simply, "Don't hit." We want children to develop the skills underneath that expectation.
We want children to learn:

I can say stop.
I can ask for help.
I can communicate what I need.
I can manage big feelings with support.
I can listen to another person.
I can negotiate.
I can solve problems.
I can respect another person's body and space.
I can repair relationships.
I can try again.



How families can support this at home

When your child experiences conflict, you can try:
"I can see that you were upset."
"You deserve to feel safe."
"What happened?"
"What did you need?"
"What could you say next time?"
"You can always come and get an adult when you need help."



Caption

When your child has used physical behaviour:
"I won't let you hit. I will keep everyone safe."
"You were really angry."
"Let's work out what you were trying to say."
"What could we do instead next time?"

The message we want children to receive is:
"Your feelings are okay. Hurting people is not okay. You deserve to be safe. I will help you learn what to do instead."

Our commitment to families

Our approach is based on a simple but important principle- **Understanding behaviour does not mean ignoring safety.**

We can simultaneously say:
"This behaviour is developmentally understandable" and "We must keep children safe."
"This child is still learning" and "We need to teach a safer response."
"This behaviour is communication" and " Using unkind words, hitting, biting, pushing and punching can hurt people and require an appropriate safety response."
"Every child is capable" and "Every child has the right to be protected."

We don't define children by their behaviour. We use behaviour as information to understand, protect, teach and support children to develop. Every child deserves to feel safe, heard, included and capable of learning.
We can protect the child who has experienced the behaviour while maintaining the dignity, privacy and right to inclusion of the child who displayed the behaviour.

And we can support families to advocate strongly for their own child while respecting the privacy, safety and dignity of every other child and family in our preschool community.

When something concerns you, please come to us. Working together allows us to understand, protect, teach and support every child.

Parent & Family Code of Conduct – Responding to Incidents Between Children

We understand that hearing your child has been hurt, frightened or involved in a difficult interaction can be upsetting.

Families have every right to raise concerns, ask questions and seek reassurance about their own child's safety, wellbeing and the strategies educators are putting in place.

At the same time, every child and family within our preschool community has a right to privacy, dignity, confidentiality and respectful treatment.

For this reason, concerns about incidents between children must always be brought to an educator, Responsible Person, Educational Leader or Director, rather than being addressed directly with another child or their family.

Adults do not discipline another person's child

Parents, carers, family members and visitors must not attempt to discipline, reprimand, question, confront or correct another child in relation to an incident.

This includes:

- reprimanding another child
- raising your voice at another child
- questioning a child about what happened
- asking a child why they hit, pushed, bit or hurt someone
- demanding that a child apologise
- instructing another child about consequences
- threatening or intimidating a child
- physically intervening to discipline a child
- describing or labelling a child as “naughty”, “violent”, “aggressive”, “a bully”, “a biter” or similar
- discussing the child's behaviour where they or other children can hear.

Behaviour guidance is the responsibility of educators- Educators have knowledge of the children's developmental needs, individual circumstances, communication abilities and support strategies. They are also responsible for maintaining appropriate supervision, confidentiality and professional behaviour guidance practices.

Families should not approach another family about an incident

Families must also not approach, confront, question or contact another child's parent or family about an incident that occurred at preschool.

This includes approaching families:

- at arrival or collection
- in the preschool grounds
- outside the preschool
- through telephone calls or text messages
- through social media
- through parent messaging groups
- through another family
- at community events or preschool functions.



Caption

We understand that families may naturally want to know, "Which child did this?", "What did their parents say?", "What consequences did they receive?", "Has this child done this before?"

We can talk with you about:

- ✅ your child
- ✅ what happened to your child
- ✅ how your child was supported
- ✅ any injury or first aid provided
- ✅ how we are supporting your child's sense of safety
- ✅ relevant supervision and environmental strategies
- ✅ what your child can do if they feel unsafe
- ✅ what educators will do to support your child.

We cannot discuss another child's:

- ❌ identity
- ❌ diagnosis or disability
- ❌ developmental needs
- ❌ family circumstances
- ❌ behaviour history
- ❌ support or behaviour plans
- ❌ consequences or interventions
- ❌ confidential information.

Why is this boundary so important?

Children deserve to attend preschool without fear of being confronted, questioned, labelled or disciplined by another child's family.

Likewise, families should be able to arrive at preschool without fear of being confronted by another family about an incident involving their child.

These boundaries help us maintain a preschool community where:

children feel safe

families feel safe

confidentiality is respected

children's dignity is protected

disability and developmental differences are not disclosed or judged

educators can investigate incidents appropriately

conflict between adults does not become conflict between families

children are not labelled according to behaviour they are still learning to manage.

Inclusion, confidentiality and disability

This is particularly important within an inclusive preschool community.

A child may require additional support because of communication, sensory, developmental, disability or other individual needs.

Another family may observe a behaviour without knowing the context behind it.

Families should therefore not make assumptions about another child's development, disability, diagnosis, parenting or family circumstances based on an incident.

A child's confidential information cannot be shared simply to explain or justify their behaviour to another family.

We can acknowledge another family's concern while maintaining confidentiality.

For example:

“We understand that you are concerned about what happened to your child. We are actively addressing the situation and have strategies in place. We cannot discuss another child's individual circumstances, but we can talk with you about how we are supporting your child's safety and wellbeing.”

Confidentiality does not mean concerns are being ignored. It means we are meeting our responsibility to protect the dignity and privacy of all children and families.

We want families to raise concerns

These expectations are not intended to discourage families from speaking up. Quite the opposite. If something concerns you, we want to know. Families are important partners in keeping children safe. We ask only that concerns are directed through the appropriate channels so they can be addressed respectfully, confidentially and fairly.

See something → tell an educator.

Your child tells you something → tell an educator.

You are worried about a pattern → speak with the Director or Responsible Person.

You need more information about your child's safety → ask us.

Please do not investigate the incident yourself by questioning another child or family.

Our shared responsibility

A safe preschool community depends on educators and families working together.

Educators are responsible for: **supervision → child safety → behaviour guidance → documentation → communication → confidentiality → appropriate follow-up.**

Families support this by: **raising concerns → communicating respectfully → protecting children's privacy → allowing educators to manage** incidents → following the service's complaints process where concerns remain unresolved.

Together, we can model the same respectful conflict-resolution skills that we are teaching our children.

Our commitment to families

Our approach is based on a simple but important principle- Understanding behaviour does not mean ignoring safety.

We can simultaneously say, “This behaviour is developmentally understandable” And “We must keep children safe.”

We can say, “This child is still learning” And “We need to teach a safer response.”

We can say, “Behaviour is communication” And “Hitting, biting, pushing and punching can hurt people and require an appropriate safety response.”

We can say, “Every child is capable” and “Every child has the right to be protected.”

What should I do if I am concerned?

If your child tells you they have been spoken to unkindly, hit, pushed, bitten, punched or otherwise hurt at preschool, please bring the concern directly to us.

You can say, "My child has told me something happened today. Could we please talk about it?"
or
"I'm concerned about my child's safety and would like to understand what happened and how they are being supported."
Educators will listen to your concerns and follow the service's appropriate processes.

If you remain concerned, you can ask to speak with the Responsible Person, Educational Leader or Director and follow the service's feedback and complaints procedure.

Social media and parent groups

Incidents involving children must not become topics for speculation, identification or discussion through social media or parent messaging groups.

Families should not post or share information that could identify:

- another child
- another family
- an alleged incident
- a child's behaviour
- disability or developmental information
- confidential information learned through the preschool community.

If you have a concern, bring it to us rather than taking it to other families or online.

This allows the concern to be addressed by the people who are responsible for children's supervision, education and safety.



Caption

If you witness something that concerns you at Concord West Rhodes Preschool, please find an educator and allow us to respond.

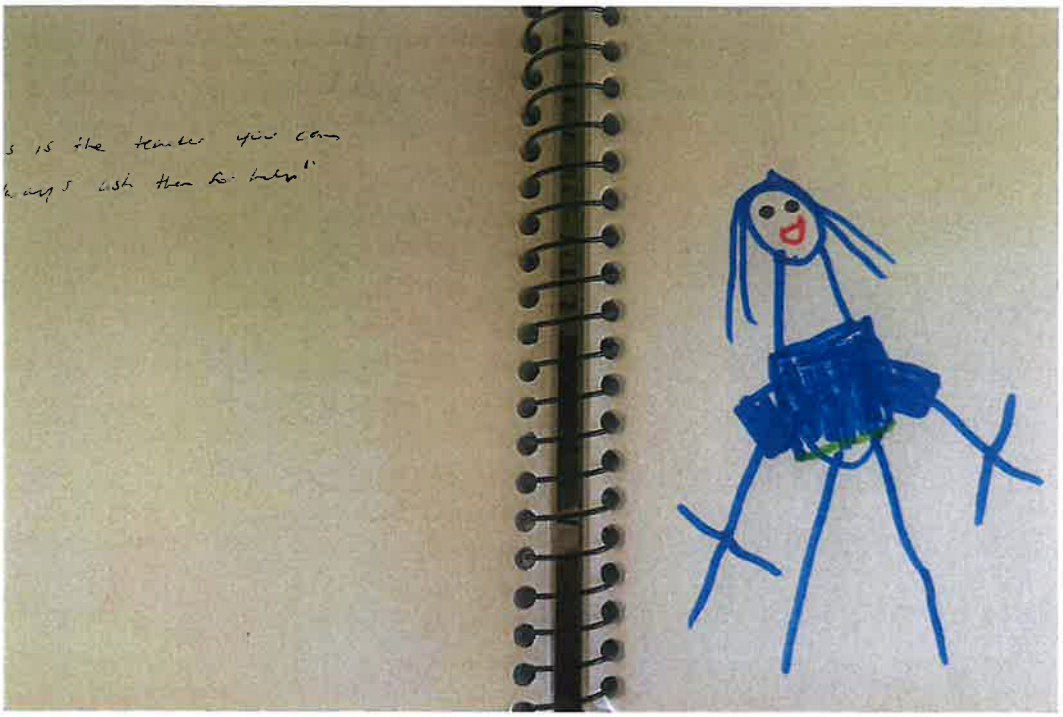
If immediate intervention is required to prevent serious harm, adults should seek educator assistance immediately. The responsibility for managing the situation remains with the service.

Thank you for taking the time to read this extensive, but important newsletter. We hope that it helps you understand our strategies in working with big feelings, conflict, challenging behaviours and general developmental norms for children of this age. It will also guide our communication with families during our upcoming Orientation for 2027.

At our preschool, we purposefully have both classes of children mixing together within a program of choice and dual play environments. This maximises opportunities for social connections and within this, opportunities for learning. It also increases opportunities for conflict, frustrations and big feelings to occur. Supporting this learning in a highly surmised environment like preschool begins to prepare children and families for the larger school playground environments.

Mentioning here too, fourth term can be a tricky term, with big feelings developing over the transition to school and the unknown coming from change, along with the impending 'missing' of preschool. Change is a difficult thing to navigate for children, and adults. As adults, we have hopefully learnt a variety of strategies to help us cope. Children however, are still learning these.

Torwards the end of last term we noticed some huge behaviour changes in a couple of our preschool friends. Upon being curious, we found out they were moving house. Others had their preschool friend move interstate. Children can't always articulate the reason for their big feelings, but one thing us educators notice are the small and big shifts in behaviour.



Caption

Behaviour is communication.

Adults in a child's world can be the detective and help understand what is causing it. They then become the first aider and support the child(ren) into calm and then into processing and learning.