



Indicator: All teachers teach and reinforce positive social skills, self-respect, relationships, and responsibility for the consequences of decisions and actions. (5123)

Explanation: Prosocial behaviors are crucial to children's well being (Pruesse, 2008). In order to use prosocial skills appropriately, learners need more than specific skills. They also must be taught to make judgments about the environment to decide which skills to use when. It is the teacher's role to teach prosocial behaviors, provide activities that foster appropriate skills, provide necessary assistance, and develop a social network that supports children in their efforts.

Questions: What are prosocial behaviors? What can teachers do to promote and teach prosocial behaviors?

What are prosocial behaviors?

Prosocial behaviors allow a child to interact with others, including their peers, in a successful and appropriate manner (Wardle, 2003). A prosocial interaction is beneficial to one, the other, or both parties involved. Prosocial behaviors tend to be divided into three categories: sharing, helping (e.g., acts of kindness, rescuing, treating others with respect), and cooperation (e.g., working together to reach a goal and promote relationships) (see Marion, 2003). Prosocial behaviors are crucial to children's well being (Pruesse, 2008).

In order to use prosocial skills appropriately, learners need more than specific skills. They also need the ability to navigate specific situations and select the skills appropriate to those respective situations. In order to choose appropriate skills to use in a situation, the student must understand both the situation and the consequences of a particular set of behaviors (see Cartledge & Milburn, 1986). According to Copple & Bredekamp (2009), young children are capable of engaging in truly cooperative play with their peers and forming real friendships. However, development of these important social skills is not automatic for children. They need coaching and supervision to learn and maintain appropriate behaviors with others. To prevent behaviors that are undesirable (such as bullying or drug use), teachers should include instructions that teaches and reinforces the students' "social/emotional competency: self-awareness, responsible decision-making, relational skills, social awareness, and self-management" (Redding, 2014b).

What are the best practices for teaching prosocial behaviors?

It is the teacher's role to teach prosocial behaviors, provide activities that foster appropriate skills, provide necessary assistance, and develop a social network that supports children in their efforts. This role is unique to a teacher and what Redding terms "relational suasion" (Redding, 2013). Relational suasion refers to the teacher's unique position to be able to create a caring and supportive relationship with a student as well as to teach by example and instruction the social/emotional competencies which students need in order to succeed. Teachers must provide activities that help children identify various social skills and help them understand why the skill is needed (Johnson, Ironsmith, Snow, & Poteat, 2000).

According to Kostelnik (1988), the development of prosocial skills is a three-part process. In the first step, the recognition step, a child must be able to determine if someone needs help. Second, the child must decide whether to help or not to act, taking into consideration the consequences of acting. Third, a child must act by selecting and performing an appropriate behavior for that situation.

Copple & Bredekamp (2009), on behalf of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), recommend that in developing prosocial skills and behaviors for younger children teachers should ensure that children have numerous opportunities to:

1. Play and work with others.

Several teacher strategies encourage positive play interactions for children including, a) emphasizing cooperation rather than competition through activities and games, b) setting up classroom spaces to facilitate cooperative play, c) using literature to enhance empathy and caring, and d) encouraging social interactions between children of different abilities whether it is social, emotional, or physical (Honig & Wittmer, 1996). Research has shown children benefit greatly from effective, positive play situations (Klein, Wirth, & Linas, 2003).

2. Make choices and encounter the consequences of those choices.

The teacher's role in helping children consider the consequences and make choices is to plan activities that help children think through a problem. Kostelnik et al. (1988) recommend repeating the learning activity or similar activity several times. Through this repeated step-by-step process children can learn how to identify the different path choices, apply reasoning to the process, and formulate a decision.

3. Figure out how to enter play situations with others.

Young children tend to need encouragement to enter playgroups, and some do so more successfully than others. Teachers can facilitate participation by insuring the equal participation of all children, helping the group work toward a desired goal, and enriching the activity so that all the children can have a meaningful role (Ramsey, 1991).

4. Negotiate social conflicts with language.

Children must use social problem solving skills to resolve conflict and teachers must help them develop those negotiating skills (Berk, 2002). Marion (2003) recommends the following six steps for teaching conflict resolution: a) Identify and define the conflict; b) Invite children to participate in solving the problem; c) Work together to generate possible solutions; d) Examine each idea for how well it might work; 3) Help children with plans to implement the solution; f) Follow up to evaluate how well the solution worked.

For any aged student, teachers can intentionally build into their lesson plans materials and instruction that teach and reinforce prosocial behaviors. Twyman and Redding (2015) give these guidelines for a well-constructed lesson plan that would include the intentional teaching of prosocial behaviors. These lesson plans should include:

- A clearly defined learning goal,
- Reference or acknowledgement of a standard or framework for the goal,
- The resources need to implement the lesson,
- The background knowledge or prior experiences needed by students to be successful in the lesson,
- An understanding of how the lesson ties into larger learning or a learning framework,
- What is done to guide or direct learning,
- A method for assessing what has been learned, and
- A plan for individualization, differentiation, or personalization across learners. (p. 4; for lesson plan examples on personal competencies, see Twyman & Redding, 2015)

As a Leadership Team, plan what the school can make available for the staff to assist them in developing and establishing a set of norms that will enhance students' social and emotional personal competency. The school may plan professional development for all the teachers on how to establish a set of norms as well as on good principles and practices of classroom management. Teachers who are more skilled in these areas can mentor newer teachers or teachers who are less skilled. The school may provide resources and tool that support classroom management and the establishment and reinforcement of norms (Redding, 2014a).

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