

## **Creating and Maintaining a Respectful Preschool Environment**

At Wild Lilac, we see the challenges that naturally arise in our dynamic preschool setting as opportunities for the group to develop and for each child to practice using his or her “social toolbox”. Teachers do not attempt to prevent problematic situations from happening, rather we observe the shape they take and offer our assistance in negotiating peaceful and respectful solutions. We strongly believe in:

- Fostering Respectful Interactions
- Honoring Natural Consequences
- Creating Agreements and Offering Choices
- Encouraging Solution Based Problem-Solving and Redirection

### **Respectful Interactions**

We believe in modeling respect and treating children as the intelligent and capable people they are. We understand the importance of listening to children's feelings and helping them express themselves. We believe in empowering children to do for themselves what they can, and we are conscious of our involvement in their development.

For example: Rick has Velcro shoes that his teacher suspects he can put on himself. When Rick asks her to put them on, she says *"I think you might be able to put those on yourself because they are Velcro and I have seen you can fasten the Velcro on your bag."* Rick seems concerned and wants help. Instead of just doing it for him, his teacher says, *"I'll come stand right by you and watch you try. I'll talk you through it if you get confused about what to do."* Rick's teacher stands beside him and watches him, describing what she sees and when Rick gets stuck, she talks him through it, as promised.

This scenario probably takes them five minutes, versus the 25 seconds it would have taken had an adult helped, but Rick now knows he can put on his own shoes. Even if he is not yet comfortable doing it without a trusted adult nearby to supervise, he is empowered by the independence and responsibility of knowing he can do this simple act for himself. By respectfully and patiently creating interactions in which children are able to actualize their own capabilities, Wild Lilac teachers aim to foster the confidence that allows each child to become responsible for his or her own body.

### **Natural Consequences**

Wild Lilac Teachers set the tone for a peaceful school environment by creating agreements with the children to ensure each member of our community feels safe and respected. We expect every individual, child and adult alike, to treat others respectfully and to keep each other safe. When a group agreement is broken, the child will experience the natural and logical consequence of his or her action.

For example: If Carlos intentionally dumps his glass of water onto the floor, he helps clean it up. His teacher will tell him how she feels when she pours a glass of water for him and then he dumps it out. She will not shame him or make an example of him,

but she will be honest about her own feelings just as she would encourage him to share his feelings with her. In this scenario, Carlos' teacher has honored the natural consequence of his action (the feelings that arose out of the action) and she has created a logical consequence for him (asking Carlos to help clean up the spill).

### **Agreements and Choices**

As mentioned, at Wild Lilac, teachers and children create agreements together that are fair and reasonable. Teachers commit to fully honoring and supporting the children in upholding each agreement made.

For example: Leon is using a truck when Zelda takes it away from him. Leon hits Zelda on the head and Zelda begins to cry. Leon begins to cry also. The children are not able to resolve their situation themselves, so a teacher intervenes. *"You both seem very upset. Can you tell me what happened?"* the teacher asks. After hearing an account of the traumatic incident from each child (or whoever is able to talk about it), the teacher will reiterate what she heard from them and add any of her own observations about what happened. She will ask Leon how it made him feel to have his toy taken from his hands. She will ask Zelda how it felt to be hit.

The teacher will ask the children how the situation could have been resolved differently. She will prompt them to think about how they would feel if there had been a conversation rather than a struggle. She will lead them in making an agreement about how they will treat each other: *"Zelda, how do you think you could handle the situation differently? Next time you really want a toy that someone else has, what can you do?"* She will then lead Leon through the same questions. The teacher will remind Zelda of ways she can ask for things she wants and brainstorm next steps if Leon ignores her or says no. The teacher will brainstorm with Leon as to how he can express his anger and frustration without scaring or hurting his friend. Now that they have talked about what happened, they will make a plan for the truck. They will make an agreement about what is a fair amount of time for each person's turn with a toy, and then the teacher will support them in upholding the agreement. If a child is not able or willing to choose from the proffered choices, the teacher must choose for him or her. This is not a punishment, but another choice: *"You can choose or I can."*

### **Problem-Solving, Respectful Communication and Redirection**

At Wild Lilac, we do not believe in using punishments and rewards. We believe that this model of teaching and parenting responds only to specific behaviors rather than the child as a complete being. Punishment/reward systems do not take a child's feelings into account or help the child process and find a productive use for his or her emotions. When a problematic situation arises, teachers first observe to assess the children's ability to work it out together. If the children are communicating respectfully and trying to use the tools they have to reach an agreement, our role is only to point out how we noticed them problem-solve and work together. If they continue to struggle, we will remind them of the tools they have. We encourage them to talk about their feelings and to tell each other how they want to be treated. If children become violent or unwilling to negotiate an agreement, we ask them to step out of the play space with a teacher. We give children the option of helping the teacher with a little project or task, and they are always welcome to rejoin the group when they feel they are ready to be safe and to discuss the incident.

Wild Lilac does not use or condone the use of time-outs as punishment. We believe time-outs send the message that children are only welcome in the group when their behavior is desirable and will be isolated if their behavior is undesirable. This can be damaging to a child's confidence and emotional health. In fact, the National Association for the Education of Young Children includes the use of time-outs in a list of harmful disciplinary measures, along with physical punishment, criticizing, blaming, and shaming. Our approach empowers the child to work with us in exploring their feelings, solving problems, and creating agreements. We aim to send the child the message, no matter the situation, that the love and commitment of trusted adults is unconditional.

### **Honoring Each Other, Honoring Ourselves**

It is important for parents and caregivers to honor and respect their own needs as well as the needs of the child. Adults who sacrifice their own needs to an uncomfortable degree may become resentful, sad, and angry. Children may feel their pain and act out. An adult who sets reasonable limits rooted in respect for self and child instill security and confidence in the child. At Wild Lilac, teachers honor the children's feelings and needs while also honoring their own. Teachers work hard to maintain an environment where every person, adult and child alike, has the space and support to be his or her kindest, most patient and respectful member of the community.

### **Recommended Reading:**

*Your Self Confident Baby* by Magda Gerber

*How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk* by Adele Farber and Elaine Mazlish

*Helping Young Children Flourish* by Aletha Solter, PhD

*Unconditional Parenting* by Alfie Kohn