

The Learning Tree Montessori Education Centre



BEHAVIOUR POLICY

Applies to:

- The whole tuition centre

Statement of intent

At The Learning Tree we believe that children flourish best when their personal, social and emotional needs are met.

Such needs are best met when there are clear and appropriate expectations and standards. This applies to all aspects of life at The Learning Tree, particularly behaviour.

These standards apply to all children and adults involved with The Learning Tree, in any capacity or location.

We believe that everyone has the right to be happy and secure at any place of education and to be supported when he/she feels vulnerable.

We aim to teach children about the rights and needs of others and to understand how these manifest themselves. In so doing we believe we are helping them to behave in socially acceptable ways that uphold these rights and go to creating a learning environment that supports all.

In a Montessori environment we aim to develop a child's inner discipline and self-motivation.

At the outset we wish to state clearly that, without exception, bullying is always unacceptable at the Learning Tree. We have a separate, specific anti-bullying policy that addresses this particular behaviour.

Methods

The maintenance of good standards of behaviour is primarily the responsibility of the Learning Tree staff, although children and parents also have varying degrees of responsibility.

As well as understand and use our Behaviour Policy we expect staff to:

- treat each other with respect and follow the guidance given in their contract.
- present a good role model for the children in their care.
- provide stimulating and appropriate activities to prevent boredom which may cause some forms of difficult behaviour.
- to convey to the children that it is negative behaviour that is unacceptable and not the children themselves.
- to work with parents and/or carers in partnership to aid the child's behaviour and development.

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Responsibility for Behaviour

Louise Self and Sarah Baker, the Proprietors, have overall responsibility for the behaviour within The Learning Tree which includes supporting personal, social / emotional development, and issues concerning behaviour.

As the named persons responsible, they are required to:

- keep up to date with legislation, research and thinking on promoting positive behaviour and on handling children's behaviour where it may require additional support;
- access relevant sources of expertise on promoting positive behaviour within the programme for supporting personal, social and emotional development
- to check that any staff have relevant in-service training on promoting positive behaviour.

General Principles

- We recognise that codes for interacting with other people vary between cultures and require staff to be aware of – and respect – the cultural norms of all those involved with The Learning Tree.
- We require all staff, volunteers and students to provide a positive model of behaviour by treating children, parents and one another with courtesy and care.
- We familiarise new staff with our behaviour policy and its guidelines for practice.
- We expect all members of our community – children, parents, staff, volunteers and students – to keep to the guidelines, requiring these to be applied consistently.
- We constantly work in partnership with and provide support to children's parents. Parents are regularly informed about their children's behaviour. We work with parents to address recurring inconsiderate behaviour, using our observation records to help us to understand the cause and to decide jointly how to respond appropriately.

Maintaining Good Behaviour

Good behaviour must always be acknowledged. This will usually be at a personal level by staff or through peer recognition.

"That is exactly how we walk around the Learning Tree..."

"Well done for walking..."

"That was lovely walking..."

This will vary according to the age and needs of the individuals involved. Some positive behaviour may be an unspoken expectation and not need commenting on, although a positive comment will always help maintain standards.

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Standards of behaviour must be made explicit and described in behavioural terms that are relevant to the children concerned. For example:

Respecting each other on the playing field means:

- Asking if you can join in with games or take a turn with a piece of equipment
- Keeping your game within the defined boundaries so that it does not interfere with the games of others
- Making sure smaller children can play safely by not walking in or through areas where they are playing.

When behaviour falls short of expectation

Where there is an expectation that staff feel may not need to be made explicit – e.g. common courtesy – Staff should first:

- Ask – “Are you aware, what happens when..” “How did you just do X...”
- Remind – “Just to remind you... when we are doing X we do Y”
- Explain - what happened / what we expect at The Learning Tree – especially when behaviour may differ at home.

Any behaviour which falls below the standards set will be discussed with the individual or group. It must be made clear what constitutes unacceptable behaviour, in a way that the children can understand, what does it ‘look like’? Expected behaviour must also be made clear and a review time set.

“I would just like to show you what I have just seen... children were running around. When we move around The Learning Tree we walk calmly. This (hurried / speed walking) is not walking calmly. Walking calmly means walking like this.....(demonstrate) This is what I would like to see you all do from now on, especially as we walk to get our coats to go outside to play.”

Dealing with unacceptable behaviour

In dealing with any unacceptable behaviour it is essential for staff to ensure that children understand why their behaviour is unacceptable and their own responsibility in the matter.

This means asking the child, describing what happened, explaining the impact and why this is inappropriate.

This discussion may happen immediately or later.

In extreme or repeated situations, other staff and parents will become involved, and / or be brought into discussions.

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Where there is repeated or serious concern about a child's behaviour, parents must be informed and their support sought.

It is recognised that the reasons for bad behaviour is often complex and that high emotions can make immediate resolutions difficult. It may be appropriate in some circumstances to remove a child from the immediate situation. This must be done if it is in the child's own interest or for the safety of the child or others. This should not be seen as a sanction.

Consequences

Rewards and sanctions are appropriate in motivating people towards desirable behaviour and away from undesirable behaviours. The reasons for giving either must be understood by the child. We have used a variety of rewards and sanctions, as described below, and their use / effectiveness is constantly reviewed.

Day to Day Strategies

To manage and maintain positive behaviour on a day by day basis we have adopted the following strategies:

Weekly Objectives

In their learning plans children have a page each week where their objectives are recorded. This may include objectives in respect of their behaviours or attitudes. These can be carried over to the following week.

Behaviour and Learning Improvement Programme (BLIP)

This is for use when we feel the need to closely monitor a child's behaviour during all parts of the day, including all aspects of the work cycle.

A meeting should be held with the child's parents to explain the need, intention and practical method of the programme.

Specific agreed objectives and targets are written in the child's work plan. The observation page is used to remark on how the child is achieving their targets. There is a review at the end of each week, with objectives for the following week.

Separation within the Classroom

When a child is behaving in a way that is disruptive to other learners, and normal reminders are not helping, the child may be removed to work in a separate area of the classroom. This is a temporary measure to allow some relief for both children and staff.

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Immediate Action

Staff have the option of using immediate sanctions with children who display inappropriate behaviour. These are always relevant to the particular child and involve the short-term removal of normal privileges.

Examples of such action might include;

- Working on their own rather than with peers
- Working during the afternoon activities and/or restricted to take their break in specified areas.
- Restricted to a particular area in the classroom

In extreme cases parents will be informed via phone call, email or face to face meetings.

Disagreements between Children

We believe that part of an all-round education is helping children learn how to resolve their own differences and disputes rather than relying on adult intervention.

All children have the opportunity to resolve conflicts at any point during the day. The Learning Tree might, on occasion, use a 'Peace Table'. If a child feels they need to resolve a conflict with another child, they will invite them to the Peace Table. The child who has requested the visit places one hand on the table, holds the Peace Lily in the other hand and explains why they have requested the visit. The other child listens, without commenting. When the first child has finished, they pass the Peace Lily to the other child and place their hand in their lap. The invited child then has a chance to speak. They stay at the Peace Table until the conflict is resolved. The idea is that the emotion generated by the action is acknowledged and addressed, rather than an argument about who did what.

General Principles

As well as the above specifics, the day-to-day smooth running of the Learning Tree, the atmosphere and the behaviour of the children is influenced by the demeanour, language, and actions of the staff. The following general principles apply within The Learning Tree to all staff in whatever capacity:

- We use positive language to reinforce expected behaviours.
- We require all staff, volunteers and students to use positive strategies for handling any inconsiderate behaviour, by helping children find solutions in ways which are appropriate for the children's ages and stages of development. The Peace Table is one forum to do this. Discussions with children at the time should acknowledge the feelings of those involved, explain what was not acceptable, and support children gaining control of their emotions so that they can learn a more appropriate response.
- We ensure that there are enough resources and sufficient activities available so that children are meaningfully occupied without the need for unnecessary conflict over sharing and waiting for turns.

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We DO;

- Acknowledge considerate behaviour such as kindness and willingness to share
- Support each child in developing self-esteem, confidence and feelings of competence.
- Support each child in developing a sense of belonging in our group, so that they feel valued and welcome.
- Avoid creating situations in which children receive adult attention only in return for inconsiderate behaviour.
- Help children to understand the outcomes of their action and support them in learning how to cope more appropriately.

We:

- Never send children out of the room by themselves to “stand in the corridor.”
- Never use physical punishment, such as smacking or shaking. Children are never threatened with these.
- Never deprive children of food or drink.
- Do not use techniques intended to single out and humiliate individual children.
- Do not shout or raise our voices in a threatening way to respond to children’s inconsiderate behaviour.

Physical restraint

- In special circumstances we may use physical restraints, such as holding or picking a child up. This is only ever used to prevent physical injury to children or adults and /or serious damage to property. Whenever practically possible we tell the child what we are going to do beforehand.
- Any serious events of this nature (what happened, what action was taken and by whom, and the names of witnesses) are brought to the attention of the Proprietors and are recorded in the child’s personal file. The child’s parent is informed on the same day.

Abuse – Racial or otherwise

Abusive behaviour, particularly those based on negative stereotyping – racist behaviour for example, is never appropriate at The Learning Tree. We make clear immediately the unacceptability of any of this behaviour or attitudes. We do this by explaining what is being done, the harm caused and why it is not appropriate. We do not personally blame or create further stereotypes by labelling individuals as bullies or racists.

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A note on rough and tumble, fantasy play that involves aggression

Young children often engage in play that has aggressive themes – such as superhero and weapon play; some children appear pre-occupied with these themes, but their behaviour is not necessarily a precursor to hurtful behaviour or bullying. It may be inconsiderate at times and may need addressing using strategies as above.

- We recognise that rough and tumble play is normal for young children and acceptable within limits. We also know that this may involve some use of name calling or teasing, as an integral part of the play. Until they become hurtful to the child/children on the receiving end we regard these kinds of play as pro-social and not inherently problematic or 'aggressive'.
- We do work to contain such play within certain boundaries, physical, behavioural or emotional, to ensure children are not hurt. We agree these with the children, making sure they understand them.
- We recognise that fantasy play also contains many violently dramatic strategies – blowing up, shooting etc., and that themes often refer to 'goodies and baddies' and as such offer opportunities for us to explore concepts of right and wrong.
- Observing and understanding this play we are able to suggest alternative strategies for heroes and heroines, making the most of 'teachable moments' to encourage empathy and lateral thinking to explore alternative scenarios and strategies for conflict resolution.

Younger/ Immature Children and hurtful behaviour

We take hurtful behaviour very seriously. We also put this in the context of what we know about the development of younger children. Most children, particularly under the age of five will at some stage hurt or say something hurtful to another child, especially if their emotions are high at the point in time. It is not helpful to label this behaviour as 'bullying'. For children under five, hurtful behaviour is momentary, spontaneous and often without an awareness of the feelings of the person whom they have hurt.

- We recognise that young children behave in hurtful ways towards others because they have not yet developed the means to manage intense feelings that sometimes overwhelm them.
- We will help them manage these feelings as they have neither the biological nor the cognitive means to do this for themselves.
- We understand that the self-management of emotions, especially of anger, can only happen only when a child has developed neurological systems to manage the physiological processes that take place when they experience anger or fear.
- We understand that the person on the receiving end does not understand any of this either and their hurt feelings are perfectly legitimate and they need calming, consoling and a sense of reconciliation.

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- Therefore we help this process by offering support, tending to the hurt child and calming the child who is angry. By helping the children return to a normal state, we are helping them to learn how to manage their own feelings and develop the physiological response system they use to do so.
- We do not engage in punitive responses to a young child's rage as that will have the opposite effect.
- Our way of responding to pre-verbal children is to calm them through holding and cuddling. Verbal children will also respond to cuddling to calm them down, and we offer them an explanation and discuss the incident with them at their level of understanding.
- We recognise that young children require help in understanding the range of feelings experienced. We help children recognise their feelings by naming them and helping children to express them, making a connection verbally between the event and the feeling. 'Adam took your car, didn't he, and you were enjoying playing with it. You didn't like it when he took it, did you? It made you feel angry'.
- We help young children learn to empathise with others, understanding that they have feelings too and that their actions impact on others' feelings –e.g. 'When you hit Adam, it hurt him and he didn't like that and it made him cry'.
- We help young children develop pro-social behaviour, such as resolving conflict over who has the toy e.g. 'I can see you are feeling better now and Adam isn't crying any more. Let's see if we can be friends and find another car, so you can both play with one.'
- We are aware that the same problem may happen over and over before skills such as sharing and turn-taking develop. In order for both the biological maturation and cognitive development to take place, children will need repeated experiences with problem solving, supported by patient adults and clear boundaries.
- We support social skills through modelling behaviour, through activities, drama and stories. We build self esteem and confidence in children, recognising their emotional needs through close and committed relationships with them.
- We help a child to understand the effect that their hurtful behaviour has had on another child; we do not force children to say sorry, but encourage this where it is clear that they are genuinely sorry and wish to show this to the person they have hurt.
- When hurtful behaviour becomes problematic, we work with parents to identify the cause and find a solution together. The main reasons for very young children to engage in excessive hurtful behaviour are that:
 1. they do not feel securely attached to someone who can interpret and meet their needs - this may be in the home and it may also be in the setting;

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2. their parent, or carer in the setting, does not have skills in responding appropriately, and consequently negative patterns are developing where hurtful behaviour is the only response the child has to express feelings of anger;
3. the child is exposed to levels of aggressive behaviour at home and may be at risk emotionally, or may be experiencing child abuse; and
4. the child has a developmental condition that affects how they behave.

Staff are required to follow the guidelines of Essex Local Educational Authority when dealing with cases of suspected child abuse. Please refer to the Child Protection Policy.