Department of Early Education and Care
THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

School-Age Child Guidance Technical Assistance Paper

#3
General Information

Table of Contents

Who are School-agers?

These children are working on developing their self-sufficiency and independence skills. The EEC regulations define them as children enrolled in kindergarten and of sufficient age to enter first grade the following year; or an older child enrolled in a higher grade who is not more than 14 years of age. Special needs children shall qualify if under 16 years of age.[1] The following summaries are compiled from various books, handouts, workshops, and research studies. The summaries give a general overview of four domain areas of development for children between the ages of 5 and 14 years.

Cognitive Development

School-agers learn very quickly and need to be challenged mentally. They have "tons of energy" for learning, even though many of them will say they do not like school. Given the right environment, many children can concentrate for long periods of time on projects that interest them. They need time and space to discover and explore their interests. They can memorize easily. They love to categorize and classify things. They enjoy games, especially those that tap their capacity to memorize and strategize. They are bound by rules and the concept of fairness. They may spend more time considering, deciding, and debating the rules of a game than time playing it.

They understand the concept of justice. They can identify actions that are unfair, unjust, or in some other way biased. They can identify stereotypes.

School-agers are tied to physical reality in many ways. They may fantasize from the concrete and create stories about adventures or alien creatures. But they are not usually interested in abstract symbols or ideas. They like to invent things that work, plays that can be enacted, songs that get sung, adventures and mysteries that turn into games or books.

[1] EEC: Standards For the Licensure or Approval of Group Day Care And School Age Child Care programs. 7.02 Definitions School Age Child. Pg. 80.

They understand the concepts of time and money. They live in the “now” time period although they have the capacity to remember the past and see value in planning for the future. They can evaluate themselves, others, and events.
They also need to build intellectual independence by testing out their own thinking. Because of their zest for learning and challenging their own and others' thoughts, they get bored easily.

Social Development

School-ager’s need to interact with others. Acceptance by friends, often to the exclusion of others, is almost everything to them. They often have one or two best friends. School-age children also form groups to distinguish themselves from others. In their attempts to secure a place in a group, children can get boastful, loud, aggressive, argumentative, or take risks. Children who cannot or choose not to behave in these typical ways may become withdrawn.

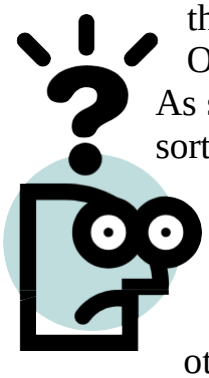
School-age children enjoy sharing secrets among their peers. They need privacy for their friendships. They also need time and space to be alone. The pressure of having to act in a way that is acceptable to their peers can get tiring. Sometimes they need to retreat and engage in younger children's activities such as; fantasy play, talking to thelmselves, or snuggling with a stuffed toy.

School-agers love the reactions of adults when they use vulgar terms or do other things to “shock” adults. However, relationships with adults other than their parents/guardians become important during the school-age years. School-agers test adult's authority as they work on being independent thinkers. At the same time, they want adults to respect them. School-agers want to be able to confide in adults and discuss problems in an adult way. They desire increased responsibility, desire opportunities to try out adult roles, and look to adults for validation.

School-age children are also becoming sensitive to others' needs. They're able to empathize at times. They're sometimes able to look beyond their own needs to please or comfort others. They're moving out of the “little” child's worldview, in which they and their parents are the center. Now school-agers live in a world that is full of other people, and search for their niche in that new world.

Emotional Development

School-age children's emotional needs are dramatic and may cause much confusion for the adults who work or live with them. (They are also confusing to the school-age children, themselves.)



Often school age children are still learning to recognize and label feelings. As school-agers develop they need adult assistance to become more adept at sorting out complex feelings.

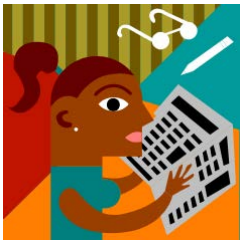
As they continue to develop and learn, school-age children may have difficulty explaining their emotions. As a result, they will sometimes work out their anxieties, fears, and feelings through their actions. They may withdraw or act out. They may punish themselves or others. They may honestly answer, "I do not know" when asked how they feel. School-age children often have strong feelings that can overwhelm them. This is especially true in the areas of fairness, justice, honesty, and right and wrong. Powerful feelings emerge in situations that they feel affect their peers' view of them.

School-age children are developing a sense of their personal strength. However, when feeling incompetent they often don't have the tools to analyze or cope with those feelings. Therefore, they are often self-conscious and self-critical. They are particularly vulnerable to criticism from others, which may reinforce their own critical view of themselves.

Building skills, and being able to accomplish concrete tasks that peers and adults recognize as successful, adds to their self-esteem. School-agers need accurate recognition, not artificial praise. They sense insincerity immediately and take it as a sign that they're not competent, so the adults had to make something up.

They can get upset quickly and appear to get over it quickly. They need to know that they can count on adults to be in control of situations when they are not. They need limit setting that also respects their need to develop independent thinking. While struggling for independence, children need reassurance that they can retreat into the protection of caring adults who will encourage them to take risks again when they feel safe.

Physical Development



School-age children's physical developmental needs are closely tied to their social and emotional needs. The physical needs at this stage can vary greatly from one year to the next. Physical development can also differ significantly from child to child. Children are growing taller, heavier, and stronger. They are challenged to learn coordination and other physical skills.

School-agers are refining small muscle skills that they use for crafts, computers, art and writing. The development of school age children's physical abilities increases self-esteem and a sense of greater independence. It is important to remember that they are still developing large muscle skills and are often awkward and clumsy. School-age children have a high energy level that can be sustained for long periods of time. They need to be able to expend their energy and learn how to channel it in positive ways.

School age children need physical exercise routinely every day. Lack of physical exercise inhibits proper growth and leaves children feeling pent-up on the one hand and sluggish on the other. When the children tire, they become very tired. They need to get the proper amount of nutrition and sleep to renew their energy. They need to eat nutritious food, not foods with empty calories that don't give them sustained energy. This growing phase requires the nutrients that promote the growth of healthy muscles and bones. This is a time in their lives where they have access to more foods outside the home (soda and other high calorie drinks, chips and other high fat and high sodium foods). Therefore, it is important to stress healthy eating.

School-age children are becoming aware of their physical appearance. Self-care skills need to be developed so that children are healthy and feel good about their appearance. Children's acceptance by peers is often based on appearance. There may be times when children are a bit over or underweight during these years. They need to learn that their appearance is not the only source of self-worth.

Physically, children in this age range are dealing with many changes. School-age children begin to mature, which causes changes both outwardly and inwardly that can be confusing and embarrassing. They need to understand these physical changes so that they can learn to deal with them in positive ways. They generally believe the judgments and information that they receive from peers about their

physical abilities, appearance, and changes. However, trusted adults to whom the children speak honestly can have an influence in the child's assessment of their friends, positive or negative. Generally those adults are not the parents.

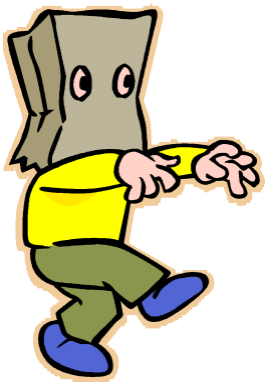
School-agers often believe that parents treat them younger than they are, don't understand them, and don't have an objective point of view.

The Importance of Play

School-age children come to the school age program after a full day of "work" at school where most of their activities are planned and controlled by adults. By the time children arrive at the school-age program they need to burn off some steam.

Therefore, it is important for children to spend a good deal of the time at the school-age program playing. Program staff should set-up activities with choices for children to pick from and staff to guide and direct children to these activities.

Play helps them grow in all areas. It gives children opportunities to develop physically, to think and solve problems, learn to express themselves in acceptable ways, and build self-esteem. Play is also one of the most important ways in which children develop social skills. They learn to take turns, negotiate, share materials, understand how friends feel, and express their emotions. In addition, play helps children tryout grown-up roles and overcome their fears.



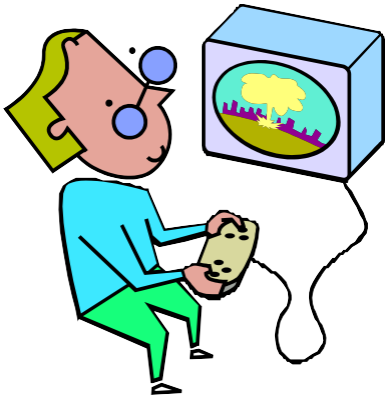
Children's play may include using their imaginations, organizing and leading others, researching special interests, making collections, playing board games, doing puzzles, working on crafts, using physical skills, or listening to music. The school-age program can offer children a change of pace. A place to relax, have fun, use their creativity, make their own decisions, practice and master skills, do things with other children, and do things by themselves.

School-age staff play an important role in supporting children's play by providing time, space, materials, and encouragement. The youngest children in the group may invite you to participate in their games and dramatic play.

Depending on a child's temperament, he or she may enjoy playing games with one or more peers. Some children just enjoy the game; others are driven to win. Playing games with rules provides opportunities for children to deal with

competition and the strong feelings generated by winning or losing. Games with rules include board games, computer games, sports, or any type of play governed by a set of rules that everyone understands and follows. School-agers may argue over the rules and they may have difficulty accepting when they lose. Games are an opportunity to help children work through their disagreements and handle feelings of anger and aggression. Staff can model how to be a graceful loser (or winner), review the rules at key moments in the game, introduce non-competitive versions of popular games, and ask open-ended questions to help children recreate experiences.
Also introduce some games that do not result in winners or losers. Some children enjoy competing with themselves to better their previous scores or records. Interested children can make charts to keep track of their own progress.

Many school-age children enjoy planning and putting on their own plays and shows. School-age staff can provide writing materials for budding playwrights and books about creative drama activities and short plays. Children will make good use of props and dress-up clothes.
Older school-age children may involve younger ones in their productions, or they may put together a show, and then perform it for the whole group. Writing a script, providing background music and creating elaborate costumes can all be part of their play. Such projects may last from an afternoon to several weeks.



Older children prefer to make and carry out their own plans without a lot of adult involvement. Allowing children to be semi-independent tells children that you feel confident they can do many things on their own. However, never ignore them; instead, observe to see how things are going, encourage them to ask for what they need, and offer suggestions in a way that allows children to accept or reject them.

Basic Child Guidance Techniques

Child guidance principles should be implemented in a consistent, reasonable and appropriate way based on an understanding of the child's individual needs as well as the safety of the entire group.

Traditional approaches to child discipline rely on external control – often fear of punishment – to induce children to act appropriately. The most important goal of child guidance is, however, that children learn how to control their own feelings and actions. Children who learn self-control enjoy better relationships with peers and adults and tend to be more successful in school.

Involve Children in Creating Rules and Limits

The children in the school-age program should be included in setting program rules and specific expectations for themselves. Children are more likely to respect rules when they understand the reasons behind them. There are also more likely to follow rules they helped create.

A clear, simple set of program rules is desirable. When there are too many rules, children may have difficulty remembering what they are expected to do. Too few rules may compromise children's safety and their respect for the program environment.

During the course of the year, problems may arise that suggest that the program rules should be revisited and modified.

Conflict Resolution

Conflicts are a part of life in school-age programs. They arise between children and between children and staff. When handled effectively, they can become a productive method for teaching children how to effectively communicate and resolve conflicts.

Conflicts between children and staff are reduced when school-age programs have the following:

- The program provides opportunities for children learn to work cooperatively. Cooperative behavior is encouraged and rewarded. Children can focus their energies on enjoying games and sports and not be overly concerned with winning or losing.
- Diversity is valued. Children learn to respect and appreciate individual and group differences.
- Staff model good communication skills. They encourage children to express their needs and feelings effectively. Children are encouraged to express their anger and frustration in appropriate ways.

Mediation

Fairness is very important to school-age children. To be effective, mediation can take time. It is productive time, however, if it helps children develop skills they can use to solve future problems by themselves.

Mediation includes the following steps:

- Each child tells his/her side of the story without interruption.
- Each child describes the problem as he/she sees it and then what happened in the conflict.
- Children are encouraged to consider alternatives to the course of action they chose.
- Children agree upon a solution.

Routine child guidance practices should include but are not limited to the following:

- Preparing a stimulating and activity-focused environment with a varied curriculum and plenty of play materials that are age appropriate;
- Creating consistent routines and planning ways to have smooth transitions, enabling children's waiting times to be productive;
- Modeling appropriate behaviors and positive attitude;
- Learning about the child and family history;
- Using a prearranged individual signal to remind a child to use self-control.
- Understanding how individual children respond to different cues, and that no single technique will work for all situations;
- Giving children a major role in helping to develop the programs rules;
- Being clear about rules and being consistent in applying them;
- Assuming the role of the authority only when necessary, but doing so firmly;
- Resolving problems as they occur and reminding children of the rules when a problem erupts;
- Talking to children privately away from the rest of the group, to allow children to "save face" with peers when appropriate;
- Helping children use problem-solving skills to develop their own solutions;
- Recognizing children's feelings while helping them to understand that their behavior is not acceptable;
- Being able to gain control of your own angry feelings before you intervene with a child. Asking for help from a colleague when needed;
- Separating one's disapproval of the behavior from care and respect for the child;
- Immediately intervening when a child becomes physically aggressive in order to prevent injuries and encourage appropriate, non-violent behavior;
- Helping children understand the likely consequences of their own actions and the actions of others, because consequences appeal to their sense of logic, *when I do this, this is what happens.*
- Teaching children coping mechanisms such as "taking a break," selecting another activity, or ignoring the circumstances causing discomfort;
- Helping children to "brainstorm" to solve problems and make choices because this helps promote self-esteem and teaches children problem-solving skills;
- Knowing when to respond to inappropriate behavior and noticing appropriate behavior; giving appropriate praise and encouragement for it;
- Creating behavioral action plans for children, in partnership with their parents, to reduce challenging behaviors and encourage appropriate behavior; and
- Creating written safety plans for all children in your program who are identified with challenging behaviors that all staff is familiar with.

Ways in which program staff can respond to a child's inappropriate behaviors include:

- Separate the child from the activity until the child is able to regain self-control and rejoin the group;
- Redirect the child to another activity;
- Place oneself in close proximity to the child until the child is able to regain self-control when the child refuses to be removed from the environment. In this, situation it may be necessary to remove items within the child's immediate reach that are a potential danger to the child or others.
- If necessary, request the assistance of another staff member to help calm the child; and
- Talk calmly to the child.

HELPFUL HINTS

- Set limits,
- Give children regular positive feedback;
- Use natural, logical, and needs-meeting consequences,
- Encourage independence and give children decision-making power,
- Allow children to express their feelings,
- Reframe children's behaviors,
- Learn conflict resolution skills to resolve issues between children and use them often.

Take a look at your Program

A Provider's Perspective

Provide Children with Choices

Sometimes behavior problems arise for reasons you wouldn't expect. After taking a look at my program environment, I realized that some of the problems were due to the children not having enough choices. I then began to make them more responsible for helping to develop our activities and making sure plenty of supplies were available. Once they had more ownership, they were more cooperative both with staff and one another. For more disruptive or harmful behavior, a staff member would sit down with the child to discuss the issue and talk about how it happened, how he handled the situation, and how he could handle it the next time. If the problem involved more than one child, we would sit down with the children and act as a mediator and allow them to discuss the problem with each other and come up with their own solution. This worked extremely well with our children and, after a while, they were able to solve many problems in an appropriate manner on their own. We were then able to avoid "punishment." —Kim Askew, School-Age Project Specialist.

Note: Often behavior problems disappear when children are kept involved and active.

OTHER ISSUES IN SCHOOL-AGE PROGRAMS CAN TRIGGER A PATTERN OF BEHAVIORAL ISSUES. THESE INCLUDE:

- Schedules that don't allow enough time for transitions; or too much waiting time, with a lack of creativity in handling the transition,
- Failure to give adequate notice at transition when children are enthusiastically engaged in an activity;
- Unclear program expectations;
- Children or staff experiencing fatigue or hunger, and
- Cultural, class, racial, or religious differences that are not understood or respected.

Things to Think About

- What is your program's guiding philosophy or principles regarding discipline and behavior management?
- Is there frequent disruptive behavior at your program? **What** types of behaviors are most frequent? **When** do problems most often occur? Are there any patterns? **How is it handled by staff?**
- In what ways might you reinforce children's positive behaviors, such as when they cooperate, share, care for materials, or join in activities?
- What types of limits need to be set to create an environment where your values are able to flourish?
- In what ways could behavior be remedied by a revision of your program's schedule?
- How much choice and input do children have regarding programming?
- How else might you reduce behavior management problems? Are you aware of issues or changes at home that may have affected the child's behavior? What types of discipline methods are supported at your program? What types of discipline methods need to be avoided? Why?
- In what ways can you encourage children to solve problems for themselves? What are some of the pitfalls that could occur if this isn't done correctly? What would this look like in its ideal form? How can you create an environment that helps to facilitate children solving problems for themselves?
- How are rules created? When is it appropriate to involve children? Staff?
- When are consequences appropriate? Inappropriate? What consequences?
- How will you train staff to skillfully deal with the child guidance needs of children and youth at your program?

A Case Example

Alex and Diego have their share of conflicts. Alex has a history of violent temper tantrums. Today Diego has brought his Gameboy to after-school. Now Alex and Diego are fighting over whether it's Alex's turn to play with it.

Alex is grabbing the Gameboy. You can tell he's quickly going into tantrum mode. What do you do?

a. Walk right up to the boys and grab the Gameboy out of Alex's hand. Take Alex by the hand and lead him to the site director's office. Return the Gameboy to Diego.
b. Approach the boys. When you're about five feet away, say in a calm voice, "Diego, give Alex some space. You'll get your Gameboy back in a minute." Ask Alex, "Can I help you? What do you need?" Give him time to respond and a lot of space.
c. Give Alex a hug. This will stop him from having a tantrum for sure. When you are hugging him, you can explain that he needs to return the Gameboy to Diego.
d. Start yelling at the boys twice as loud as they're yelling at each other. This is sure to get their attention. Order them to follow you into the site director's office.

A Case Example Feedback

Feedback for A.
Never use any form of touching or physical violence—including grabbing. You need to set a good example for children, so don't do anything that you ask them not to do. By physically touching a child who is having a tantrum you could easily make him become violent or potentially hurt himself.

Feedback for B.
This is a good approach to take. You are giving Alex the space he needs. By speaking to him in a calm voice, you are a soothing presence. Asking Alex if he needs help gives him a chance to explain how he feels. You are right to focus on calming Alex down rather than on returning the Gameboy to Diego. You can do that later.

Feedback for C.
A child having a tantrum needs space, not a hug. Staff touching an angry child—whether in affection or in anger—may cause the child to act violently. Make sure the child has room. Remove dangerous objects that are in his reach. Speak to the child in a calm, soothing voice. Ask, "Can I help you? What do you need?"

Feedback for D. Staff need to model positive behavior. Never copy the child's misbehavior. Never "out yell" a child. If a child is upset, speak in a calm, steady voice. You will probably find the child starts lowering his or her volume to match yours. Whether or not that happens, you need to be the voice of reason and provide a safe space for the angry child. Above all, you need to prevent the child from causing injury to self or others.

The SMART Way to Set Goals

Use these goal-setting guidelines to set goals with staff. Remember, you don't need to know everything to give your staff what they need.

Goal setting is SMART when it is...:
***S**pecific*—one goal at a time ***M**easurable*—
in time and quantity ***A**chievable*—
reasonable, but also a stretch ***R**elevant*—
makes a positive difference ***T**rackable*—
allows monitoring of progress

Effective goals are:
Conceivable – You must be able to conceptualize the goal so that it is understandable and then be able to identify clearly what the first step or two would be.

Believable – In addition to being consistent with your personal and the program's value system, you must believe you can reach the goal. Bear in mind that few people can believe a goal that they have never seen achieved by someone else.

Achievable – The goals you set must be accomplishable with your given strengths and abilities. If a goal is a high priority but does not seem achievable, be creative and brainstorm alternative methods for achieving the goal.

Controllable – If your goal includes the involvement of others, you should first obtain their permission or state the goal as an invitation. For example, your goal is to set up two field trips in the month of June, one to the fire department and one to the airport. There are aspects of this goal that are out of your control such as the schedule of the fire department or airport. The restated goal could be to set up two field trips in the month of June from a list of possible field trip locations. The staff person now has more control over the success of the goal.

Measurable – Your goal must be stated so that it is measurable in time and quantity. For example, suppose your goal was to greet as many children as possible by name each day and to improve the number as the week progresses. You would specify your goal by saying, "My goal is to keep track of the number of children I greet by name each day. I will work each consecutive day to greet more children by name." That way, the goal can be measured and when Friday comes you know whether or not you have achieved the goal and areas for further growth.

Desirable – Your goal should be something you really want to do. Whatever your ambition, it should be one that you want to fulfill, rather than something you feel you should do. Successful people commit to and achieve goals that are desirable and undesirable. (Mopping once a week is NOT desirable, but having a clean house is desirable.) Having goals that are desirable or that contribute to a larger desirable goal is necessary to sustain and create positive change in our life.
You should never be destructive to yourself, to others, or to society. One way we often set ourselves up is by making work goals we can only achieve at personal expense. For example, you might set a goal to raise funds for a new outdoor play structure. Not built into the strategy around the goal is relief from other responsibilities. The goal may be achieved, but at what cost to your personal life?

When Setting Goals. . .
Do not give yourself an "either/or" choice because you will seldom get beyond the “or.” Typically, you end up doing neither. This does not imply inflexibility. Flexibility means you are able to make a judgment that some action you are involved in is either inappropriate, unnecessary, or the result of a bad decision. Even though you may set a goal based on a certain outcome, you can stop at any time and opt for a new outcome. Remember, when you change a goal to again state your goal without an alternative option.

The National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA)

The mission of the National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA) is to build a profession that develops, supports, and promotes quality after-school programs for children and youth. NSACA represents a network of more than 8,000 members nationwide and thirty-six state affiliate organizations. Members come from an array of public, private, school-, and community-based providers and advocates of before- and after-school programs. The core program areas within NSACA include program improvement and accreditation, public policy, a national conference, and the journal *School-Age Review.* NSACA’s nationally-recognized system of program improvement and accreditation promotes quality and addresses the needs of the whole child. Through its public policy committee and annual public policy forum, NSACA members develop position statements on key legislative issues. The public policy network disseminates action alerts and updates to advocates and affiliate members nationwide, who, in turn, generate advocacy responses from their members and the families they serve. NSACA’s annual conference is *the* training and networking event for after-school, school-age, and youth development professionals and advocates. *School-Age Review* is published three times a year and focuses on up-to-date research, theory, resources, effective school-age practices, and public policy. For more information about NSACA and its programs call 1-800-617-8242 or visit www.nsaca.org.

MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL-AGE COALITION

MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL-AGE COALITION INDIVIDUALLY,
LEADERS. TOGETHER, A POWERFUL VOICE FOR CHANGE.

The Massachusetts School-Age Coalition (MSAC), as a statewide coalition of providers and stakeholders, is a voice for change in the out-of-school time field. MSAC empowers professionals in the field through advocacy, leadership development, and support for the field. By enhancing the workforce and professional development of school-age staff, we seek to ensure a comprehensive system of out of school time opportunities for children, youth, and families that are diverse, accessible, balanced, and of the highest quality. Additionally, we advocate for positive public policies to expand, improve and sustain quality services through grassroots organizing and public education.

MSAC is dedicated to improving after-school and out-of-school time programming for the children and families of Massachusetts by:

Systematically linking program quality and a professionally trained, well-compensated workforce with positive outcomes for children, youth and communities through advocacy, public policy efforts, and engagement of stakeholders at all levels; and

Supporting the professionalism of the school-age workforce by offering sharing of best practices, networking, training, conferences, access to needed services such as health and dental insurance and discounted supplies, and by advocating for a statewide professional development system.

MSAC is a true coalition - we will reach our goals together with providers, families, public agencies, community organizations, and intermediaries working to improve out-of-school time in Massachusetts.

For more information about MSAC visit our website at www.mass-sac.org or call (617) 326-1400

1137 WASHINGTON STREET - DORCHESTER, MA 02124 I TELEPHONE- 617.326.1400 - FAX 617.298.5371 - WWW.MASS-SAC.ORG