

# Tips for Constructive Responses to Youth

- **Create relationships**
  - Take the time to get to know children/youth who come to the library.
  - Use names. They will feel that you know them and care about them.
  - Be **WARM** and **INVITING** but set firm **BOUNDARIES**.
  - Ask youth for their **OPINIONS** and **IDEAS**.
  - Invite youth to explain their **WORK** and **INTERESTS**.
  - Ask **OPEN-ENDED** questions.
  - Strive to be **NON-JUDGEMENTAL**.
- **Model the behavior you want.**
  - Keep in mind the example you set through your own behavior; not only just toward children and youths, but toward adults as well.
  - Take responsibility for your reactions; be willing to admit you are wrong.
  - Practice not: arguing, screaming, nagging, pleading, anger, stress, criticism, complaining to control others. When you feel like doing these things, count to ten, or do whatever helps you maintain your composure and your perspective; consider the options.
- **Have a few simple, but important rules with set consequences**
  - Communicate rules and their consequences in words that are clear and understood by all.
  - Consider the student's age and "normal" behavior for this age range. Learn about developmental stages of young people and their accompanying physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs.
- **Be consistent**
  - When a child breaks a rule, follow through with a fair, appropriate, and meaningful consequence right away.
  - Fair and consistent responses to misbehavior will reinforce children's sense of security and knowledge of right from wrong.
  - Accept that they will make mistakes! Balance firmness with flexibility.
- **Promote positive behavior**
  - Show appreciation for positive actions.
  - Give at least as much attention for positive behavior as for misbehavior.

- **Be proactive rather than reactive**
  - Create an environment and programs that support youths' needs
  - Allow children/youth to provide input regarding activities, events and disciplinary policies.
  - Instead of waiting and watching mildly inappropriate behavior become something that warrants consequences, intervene early and redirect the young person towards another behavior or activity.
  - Think & plan for the future. Visualize what you want. What you consistently visualize and expect is what you empower.
  
- **Choose your battles**
  - If no one is being physically, emotionally or morally hurt by a behavior, it may not be worth disciplining.
  - Try to keep in mind what would be best for the young person, as well as for others. If you are making exceptions for one person, it may be best for them, but hurt others, or vice-versa.
  
- **Give choices**
  - Instead of giving the young person directions, give choices whenever possible. This gives a sense of freedom and responsibility and allows the young person to "save face."
  - Use choices as warnings. For example: "You can share the computer, or keep doing what you are doing and you will receive a consequence. I am going to give you 30 seconds to make your decision--It's up to you."
  
- **Allow the expression of feelings**
  - Children may need to diffuse strong feelings of anger or frustration and to relax and calm down. Provide appropriate space for young people to release these very strong, yet natural emotions (e.g. a break outside).
  - Allowing a child to express his or her feelings does not mean allowing inappropriate expressions such as hurting others.

Adapted from: Goodwin, E. (1994), "Five Tips for Guiding Children's Behavior," National Network for Child Care - NNCC. In Todd, C.M. (Ed.), *\*Day care center connections\**, 3(6), pp. 1-2. Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service.

"Positive Discipline Tips," Public Health, Grey Bruce Health Unit  
<http://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/Family/PositiveDisciplineTips.htm>