Transcript for the Video:

Guiding Young Children's Behavior

Segment 4: Establishing Classroom Rules

Objective 2: Creating rules with children during a class meeting

Part 1

Host: Children’s fascination with rules means that they can and should be involved in creating them.

Kathryn Castle, Expert: Thinking and talking about rules helps children think about why rules are necessary and what would be good rules for all. It helps them to think about regulating their own behavior in relationship to the behavior of other children or what others call self-regulation.

Kathryn Castle, Expert: When children are engaged in thinking and talking about rules, they are actively involved in the democratic process. The emphasis is not on blind obedience, but on understanding why rules are important for all concerned. Children are more likely to understand the value of rules if they are involved in creating them. They’re more likely to follow rules they’ve had a part in creating because they understand their importance. They’re even more likely to remind other children of the rules and to help enforce the rules.

Kathryn Castle, Expert: For the beginning of the program or year, teachers can conduct group discussions of why rules are important and brainstorm with children on what would be good classroom rules. Teachers can use good children’s literature, puppets, and other props to read and dramatize helpful and hurtful behaviors. Teachers can then focus on helpful and hurtful behaviors, how they make you feel, and what you should do when they happen.

Kathryn Castle, Expert: It’s important to write children’s ideas for rules as they state them and then review the list with the group, discuss each rule and why each might be important. Now once some classroom rules have been established, and are written down, and posted, then the rules can be referred to when problems occur.

Kathryn Castle, Expert: When rules get broken, teachers can ask the child who has broken a rule to think about what they have done, and what rule they’ve broken. Teachers can take the child by the hand to the posted rules and help the child find the rule in question and then review why that rule is important. Teachers can ask the child about what they might do next time.
Kathryn Castle, Expert: It’s a long term process that can’t be accomplished in just one group meeting. Rule discussions are ongoing throughout the duration of the early childhood program. But in the long term, children who are engaged in such discussions will advance in their thinking about what it means to be a good citizen, and what it means to be respectful towards others.

Host: We visited a classroom to see how one teacher creates rules with her pre-school children. The teacher had recently brought a dollhouse to school and she wanted to engage the children in creating rules for using it.

Kate McHugh, Teacher: I thought we need to decide some rules on how to play with the doll house, so, so we respect the doll house.
Child: Larson was playing wrongly with it.
Kate: How was he playing wrongly with it?
Child: Uh, he was banging paper up and down.
Kate: He was banging on it. I heard some of the problems we had were people were banging on it. I heard that people were pushing around it. Is that a safe way to play and respect the doll house?
Child: I didn’t do all that.
Kate: Well it doesn’t matter who did it.
Child: Me either.
Kate: It doesn’t matter who did it. But if we have some rules, we’ll know how to play over there, won’t we?
Kate: We really work a lot in our classroom on respecting materials. They’re not my materials, by any means, even though I’m the teacher, they’re our materials, it’s our classroom. We talk about that a lot.
Kate: My friend Grace said she thinks a good idea would be to say that only two friends at a time can play in the doll house.
Child: But all the other people don’t understand.
Kate: Some friends are learning, you’re right. Some friends are learning how many two people are.
Child: Alex is.
Kate: Yeah, he’s learning how many is two friends.
Child: I’m learning. I’m learning how to respect stuff.
Kate: You’re learning how to respect things, you’re right and that’s what preschool’s for. So, Grace said a great idea for one of our rules would be to have two friends, and why do you think that’s a good idea Grace?
Child: Cause.
Kate: How come? Does anyone else have an idea, why is it a good idea to have only two friends play with the doll house at a time? Cole.
Child: So people won’t bang on it and, and fight.
Kate: So people won’t fight. Do you feel like when there are too many friends over there people were fighting around the doll house?
Child: And I couldn’t hear Grace.
Kate: Ohhh, and when everyone was there you couldn’t hear each other?
Child: No.
Child: Yeah, I was trying to talk to Alyssa but everybody was too loud.
Kate: And it was too loud.
Child: And we have to let somebody talk, two friends talk and then we can hear each other.
Kate: I think that is a great reason to say there are two friends playing by the doll house. So, we’ll say “two” F-F-F.
Children: Friends.
Kate: What does that start with?
Children: F
Kate: “F”, good job, two friends.
Child: That’s twelve.
Kate: Oh, you know, I’ll put this dot here so we know its rule number one. That was good looking though, Langston. “2 friends”. Does anyone else have any ideas on what kind of rules we should have?
Child: OOOO, I know I know! I know!
Kate: Kirsten?
Child: Well, it can be the, no jumping on the, no...don’t make, don’t, hey I was talking,
Kate: Let Kirsten.
Child: We can make the rule no doing, putting, bouncing the toys on the doll house.
Kate: Okay, no bouncing the toys on the dollhouse. Anyone have another idea?

Kate McHugh, Teacher: I think making their own rules is so huge because it gives them so much ownership, just like, like I said, I emphasize this is our classroom. Having ownership of the classroom, as well as part of that, is having ownership of the rules in our classroom and how we treat and respect materials.

Teacher (Kate McHugh): What kind of hands should we use with the doll house?
Children: Gentle!
Kate: Gentle hands.
Child: I’ll show you, I’ll show you, I’ll show you how easy it is.
Child: You should close it for like two days.
Teacher Kate McHugh: Why do you think we should close it?
Child: Because it’s almost going to break.
Kate: You think it’s almost going to break? Well, it’s fine.
Child: Miss Kate, look how easy.
Kate: Oh, Alyssa is showing us gentle hands.
Child: I can do it too.

Kate McHugh, Teacher: They right away, even someone used the terminology, this is fragile, and they understood they need to be careful with it, it was delicate, so they understood the gentle part.

Teacher (Kate McHugh): These sound like really good rules for our doll house I think.

Host: There are several steps to creating classroom rules. We are going to take a look at all of them and then we will go over them one by one. The first step is to ask the children to think of rules.
Next you combine and edit the rules, with the children’s input. As children suggest rules, you ask them to tell you why a rule is important and to give an example. If inappropriate rules are suggested, you should explain why they should not be added. You should also suggest adding important rules that children don’t mention. Then, after the class meeting, you can rewrite the rules and discuss them with children at the next class meeting. Finally, you should review the rules on the chart throughout the year.

Host: When creating class rules, you first ask children for their ideas for rules. Then you write down the children’s rules, restating them in a clear way. The rules work best when they cover things that really matter.

Host: Too many rules or rules that don’t matter too much can be overwhelming. So in step two, you can help children stick to a few really important rules by combining and editing with the children’s permission.

Host: Let’s think about what this might look like. One child might say “don’t tear up the books.” Another child might say “don’t throw the blocks.” And another child might say ”put the caps on the markers.” After writing those rules down, you might say “it sounds like what you are saying is we need to take good care of our classroom materials.”

Host: Now, why would you write down rules for pre-school children who can’t read yet? Research suggests that children can make meaning from print even in the early pre-school years. Even though the children are not able to read the rules word for word, they will look at them for clues about what each rules says. This kind of early exposure to print is important for later reading and writing.

Host: Now we want you to practice combining rules children might suggest. We are going to give you a few sets of rules children might suggest. We want you to think about how you might combine them into one.

Part 2

Host: During the next step of creating rules, you ask children to explain why each proposed rule is important and to give an example.

Host: Research shows that children are more likely to follow rules they understand. So taking time to discuss a rule helps children to understand it and follow it more easily.

Host: There might be times when a child can’t tell you why a rule is important. That’s okay. You can offer ideas or help the child understand why we might not need it as a rule.

Host: That brings us to the next step. You need to help children make decisions about what rules are important and what rules are missing. If children do not add a rule about treating peers with kindness, you should suggest that, that be added. If a child shares an inappropriate rule, you can just explain why it doesn’t work for the class. A child might say, “No talking in school.” You could respond, “If we can’t talk in school, how could we play?”
Host: In the next step, you rewrite the rules and edit and consolidate. Then the rules are put on a chart for posting in the classroom. At the next class meeting, the rules are discussed and if everyone is in agreement, they are posted in a special spot in the classroom.

Host: Teachers use different strategies for presenting the final chart. Some teachers have a conversation about where to post the new chart.

Host: Other teachers have children sign their name on the chart using scribble writing or letters in their name, to show a sign of agreement. Other teachers have children vote on the new rules and have further conversation if everyone isn’t in agreement.