

To: All Staff, Lab Students and Volunteers

From: Sara Sanders, Assistant Director

Re: Working with Preschoolers

Welcome to the SDSU Children's Center, a quality service provided by Associated Students. We are pleased to have you working with our program, and are committed to making your time with us valuable. This letter is to help point out important things to know when working with our Preschool children.

Preschool children range in age from 3-5 years, or whenever they begin Kindergarten. This is a time of rapid changes in development. Working with Preschool children is quite different from working with younger or older children. Preschoolers are developing language and comprehension at an amazing rate. They can usually tell the adults in their lives what they need, but if they are tired, hungry, or overwhelmed, they can "melt down" and regress back to a younger stage. Preschoolers are still very attached to their parents, but can begin to understand that other adults can meet their needs as well. During your time with us, if you are ever faced with wondering what is the best thing to do for Preschoolers, please ask a Master or Supervising Teacher. Your extra pair of hands will be needed during the busy times of the day.

3 Year Olds are interested in pleasing the important adults in their lives. They are usually over the temper tantrums more typical to younger children, but become frustrated easily when attempting something that is hard for them. They are developing so many new skills that often what they think they should be able to do and what they actually can do is different. Threes can usually use the potty with just a little help, and need regular reminders to avoid accidents. They can dress and undress themselves if their clothing is uncomplicated (elastic bands on pants, pull over shirts, etc.). They can become ill tempered when trying a new skill, so it helps to give them a hand and let them do the very last step.

Threes enjoy rhymes and songs. Their vocabulary is expanding, and they are beginning to know how to string more complex sentences together. They want to practice all of the words they have learned, and it helps them when adults "talk them through" the processes of new tasks, explaining the steps as they go along. Talking like this helps them think about how to do things more clearly. Reading stories and talking about what is happening in pictures is a huge help in developing language and thinking skills. Open ended questions, such as "Tell me more", or "What do you think might happen next?" also stimulate their thinking, and encourages them to use their own words. Whenever possible, try to ask questions that require more than a simple yes or no answer.

Threes are just beginning to learn how to get along with others. They cannot share without adults helping them take turns and wait. They are becoming better listeners, so use a kind tone and a gentle touch. Whenever possible, get down on their level and use their names when speaking to them. Threes still cannot work out problems with other

children without adults helping. They need to be supervised closely, and reminded often of what is expected of them.

If a child hurts another, stop them and make it clear that it is not acceptable. Do not shame them—they are still very much in the learning process. Tell them what you expect them to do next time, and then let it go. Sentences should be short, “Talk-no hurting”, and children cannot remember what happened even a short time ago.

Threes love to help. Take time with daily routines to give them the opportunity to try helping in many ways. This does make the process longer, but it is the most effective way for children to learn new skills. Give choices only when there is an option. *Asking* them if they want to put on their sweater when you *know they have to* only paints you into a corner.

Give advance notice when transitioning from one activity to another. Let them choose an activity if they can, but be ready to guide the child who roams from one activity to the next without engaging. Group times should be limited to 5-10 minutes, and increase in time as the children get older. Threes are very curious and not yet clear about every dangerous situation. Never leave them alone, or send them in and out of the classrooms unaccompanied.

4 Year Olds can be best described as energetic and imaginative. They can be both impatient and silly. They have recently discovered humor, and love to tell jokes, even if they don’t make much sense. Fours easily confuse reality with make believe. Cartoons, TV, and movies can seem more real than real life to them. They often are capable of wild stories and exaggeration. They need to feel important and “big”. Fours are willing to try new and more difficult tasks and are becoming more confident in their abilities. Even though they may seem extremely competent, they still need to be supervised very closely, as they are often driven to try more and more risky and dangerous tricks. They love to be outdoors, where the risk of injury is heightened.

Fours are starting to recognize letters, especially the ones in their own names. They know smallest, tallest, more, less, and other concept ideas. They are using complex sentences and ask “why” all of the time. They may also begin to ask questions about sex, death, and birth. They can follow up to three clearly given instructions.

Read, read, read to 4 year olds. Encourage them to dictate their own stories and help them write them down. Fours enjoy creative art and using mixed media, like paint and collage materials.

While four year olds like the idea of having and being “best friends”, they don’t really understand how it is done. They can take turns but are bossy at times, and expect to get their way. They may try to play games with simple rules, but also change the rules to meet their need at the time. They may tattle and call each other names, and use shocking language for attention. They are better at expressing anger through words rather than physically, but they can hold on to angry feelings for a long time.

Fours can have specific fears such as monsters or the dark. Never tease them about the things they worry about. Dramatic play and role playing can be effective ways to help children work through the things that concern them.

Three and Four year olds mimic everything they see and hear from adults, so be sure you are modeling what you want to see. Reinforce the behaviors you want to continue. Redirect inappropriate behavior. Set clear limits and stick to them. Be consistent so the children can clearly learn what is expected of them.

Put yourself in the classroom or outdoor spaces in such a way that you can see the children and the activities you have been assigned. Be aware of the whole group as well so that if a new child moves into your area, you are able to see and assist that child as needed. Take cues from the language used by the teaching staff. When in doubt about how to handle a situation or have a concern or question, do not hesitate to ask the Master or Supervising Teacher, or any other co-teacher in the classroom. We want this to be a valuable experience for you, and we can help navigate the world of working with Preschoolers.