



BEHAVIOUR GUIDANCE POLICY DEVELOPMENT

A guide for licensed child care centres
and family home child care agencies

Behaviour Guidance Policy Development

A Policy and Practice Guide for Licensed Child Care Centres and Family Home Child Care Agencies

This guide is intended to help you develop a Behaviour Guidance Policy that is compliant with Nova Scotia's Early Learning and Child Care Regulations and grounded in the principles of *Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework (NSELCF)*.

An Implementation Support Tool is included in the Appendix to help you review, reflect on, and strengthen your policy.

1. Intent of a Behaviour Guidance Policy

Your behaviour guidance policy must comply with regulatory requirements, including prohibited practices, and should:

- Reflect the principles and practices of the NSELCF, including responsiveness to children, inclusive learning environments, play-based learning and intentionality, and EDIAA (equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility and anti-racism)
- Clearly describe how you support children's social-emotional development
- Explain how your team responds to behaviour in respectful, developmentally appropriate ways

2. NS Early Learning and Child Care Regulations and Standards

2.1. Nova Scotia Early Learning and Child Care Regulations

Your policy must clearly state the requirements outlined in [Section 19\(1\)](#) of the Nova Scotia Early Learning and Child Care Regulations and must include verbatim the following regulatory expectations:

All staff, volunteers, and care providers **must not**:

- Use corporal punishment, including:
 - Striking a child directly or with any physical object
 - Shaking, shoving, spanking, or other aggressive physical conduct
- Require or force a child to repeat physical movements
- Use harsh, humiliating, belittling, or degrading responses (verbal, emotional, or physical)
- Confine or isolate a child

- Deprive a child of basic needs, including food, shelter, clothing, and bedding

2.2. Standards for Food and Nutrition in Regulated Child Care Programs

In accordance with [Section 25\(1\)](#) of the Nova Scotia Early Learning and Child Care Regulations, programs must adhere to the food and nutrition standards established by the Minister. Accordingly, your policy must reflect the expectations outlined in Standard 10 of the [Food and Nutrition in Early Learning and Child Care Programs](#), including the following required statements from Standard 10.1:

- Food is not offered to children as a reinforcement for positive behaviours.
- Food is not withheld from children as a consequence for undesired behaviours.
- Food is not used as a reward for completing a task or finishing a meal.

Note: Standard 10.2 states that when a child’s team has determined that food is the most appropriate and natural way to reinforce desired behaviours and support the child’s development, a routine-based plan (RBP) must be developed for the child, clearly indicating the use of food as a motivator. The RBP must include a plan for replacing and/or phasing out the use of food as a motivator.

3. Philosophy and Beliefs (Policy Foundation)

Your policy should begin with a clear, strengths-based, NSELCF-informed philosophy. This sets the tone for your expectations.

Questions to guide your wording:

- How does your early learning and child care program view children’s behaviour?
- How do you balance guidance with support for social and emotional development?
- How do you honour children’s capabilities and agency as described in the NSELCF?

Sample wording (modify to reflect your practices):

“We believe behaviour is a form of communication. Guided by the principles of *Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia’s Early Learning Curriculum Framework*, we support children’s social-emotional learning through positive relationships, responsive interactions, and environments that promote choice, self-regulation, belonging, and well-being.”

4. Proactive Behaviour Guidance Strategies

Include proactive, strength-based strategies.

What to include:

- Clear, positively stated expectations for behaviour. These expectations are explicitly taught, reinforced, and consistently modelled across all areas of the learning environment. Examples include:
 - ✓ We treat others with kindness and respect.
 - ✓ We take care of our learning environment and materials.
 - ✓ We move safely inside and outside.
 - ✓ We use safe and gentle hands and feet.
- Universal strategies to support social and emotional development, including:
 - ✓ Frequent positive attention (aiming for a high ratio of positive reinforcement compared to corrections)
 - ✓ Predictable daily routines
 - ✓ Routines within routines (Snack time: Wash hands → get a plate → sit at the table → self-serve → clean up)
 - ✓ Direct teaching of expectations and routines
 - ✓ Teaching peer social skills (sharing, turn-taking, cooperation)
 - ✓ Redirection toward acceptable alternatives
 - ✓ Visual supports and cues
 - ✓ Attention to transitions, waiting times, and flow of the learning environment

Reflective prompts for wording:

- How do you teach behaviour expectations explicitly?
- How are social-emotional learning strategies integrated into daily routines and play?

5. Supporting Social Emotional Learning

Include a section explaining how your guidance practices reflect key NSELCF principles.

What to include:

- Social-emotional strategies you use consistently:
 - ✓ Warm, responsive interactions built on trusting relationships
 - ✓ Naming emotions, modelling, and guiding children through them
 - ✓ Opportunities for choice, problem solving, and self-regulation

- ✓ Supportive transitions with visual and verbal cues

Reflective prompts:

- How does your team help children label and regulate their emotions?
- How does the learning environment intentionally reflect and embed the languages, cultural identities, knowledge, and experiences of the children, and how does this support broader language development, cultural awareness, and respect for differences?

6. Responding to Severe Incidents

Define a clear, respectful, evidence-informed process for severe one-time events or persistent challenging behaviours that are unresponsive to positive behaviour interventions.

Severe incidents:

- have a significant impact on the learning of the whole group (e.g., when the group is consistently relocated to another part of the environment due to safety concerns) or interfere with optimal learning and engagement in pro-social interactions with peers
- may be unintentional, or stem from children’s limited understanding of the behaviour’s potential for harm
- are considered to be a “notable situation” under the regulations if they pose a significant risk to the health or safety of children, educators, and/or the learning environment
- are considered to be a “serious incident” under the regulations if they result in any of the following:
 - a) the death of a child while the child is attending a child-care program;
 - b) any injury to a child that occurs while the child is attending a child-care program and that requires emergency medical attention;
 - c) a fire or other disaster on the premises of a facility, agency, play group space or family child-care home;
 - d) a concern or an occurrence relating to an element of the physical environment or an operational or safety practice in a facility or a family child-care home that poses a risk to the children’s health, safety or well-being;
 - e) a child is not accounted for during any period of time, as required by Section 33A.

Suggested process elements:

1. Observe and record objective data about the behaviour
2. Reflect with staff, educators and relevant leadership
3. Communicate and collaborate with families

4. Develop, document, and implement support plans as appropriate (e.g., Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) plans, Routine Based Plans (RBPs))
5. Plan and implement targeted strategies
6. Monitor outcomes and adjust as needed
7. Seek additional supports or referrals to community partners, with permission from the parents (Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Intervention Services (NSECDIS), Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech, Provincial Preschool Autism Services (PPAS)).

Note: Emphasize that responses will remain respectful, non-harmful, and oriented toward teaching social and emotional skills, not punishment.

Regulatory Requirement for Notable Situations and Serious Incidents

If a severe incident also meets the definition of a Notable situation ([Section 30A](#)) or Serious incident ([Section 30B](#)) under the Nova Scotia Early Learning and Child Care Regulations, you must also follow all required regulatory reporting and documentation processes.

7. Families as Partners

Reflect a strong commitment to family collaboration.

What to include:

- Policy is reviewed with families at enrollment
- Families are informed of expectations, strategies, and how concerns will be addressed
- Families are invited to share insights from home
- Communication with families is two-way, respectful, and consistent
- Practical suggestions are shared to support consistency between the home and the early learning and child care program

Reflective prompts:

- How does your Family Communications Plan ([Section 32A](#)) support ongoing, two-way communication with families about behaviour guidance?
- How can families share practical strategies they have found helpful at home, so these can be reflected in your approach to behaviour guidance?

8. Environment Supports Positive Behaviour

Connect your early learning environment to behaviour guidance, as emphasized in the NSELCF.

Key elements:

- Clearly defined learning areas
- Materials and equipment that match children’s developmental needs
- Quiet spaces, active spaces, and opportunities for movement
- Consideration of sensory needs (noise, visual clutter)
- Visual schedules and cues at children’s eye level

Reflective prompts:

- How does your learning environment communicate expectations?
- How does the layout support social engagement and self-regulation?

9. Staff Support, Training & Well-being

In accordance with [Section 19\(2\)](#) of the Nova Scotia Early Learning and Child Care Regulations, programs must:

- a) provide training in the policy for the licensee’s directors, staff, care providers and volunteers before they begin their employment or volunteering;
- b) ensure that the policy is reviewed with the parents of a child at the time of the child’s enrolment in a program operated by the licensee;
- c) ensure that the policy is reviewed with all of the licensee’s directors, staff, care providers and volunteers on an annual basis, or more often if needed;
- d) have a written record of the licensee’s compliance with clauses (a), (b) and (c);
- e) ensure that each of the licensee’s directors, staff, care providers and volunteers comply with the policy.

In your policy, describe how your program fulfills these requirements and how you support staff and educators in implementing positive behaviour guidance.

What to include:

- Orientation and training on the policy before employment
- Annual reviews and refresher training (staff meetings, coaching)
- Ongoing professional learning on positive behaviour guidance
- Support for staff and educator self-regulation and well-being
- Performance management aligned with behaviour guidance expectations

Reflective prompts:

- How do you help staff reflect on their practice?
- How do you build capacity for social-emotional learning and behaviour guidance?

10. Monitoring, Evaluation & Reflection

Describe how you will monitor implementation and outcomes.

What to include:

- Regular observation and documentation of practices
- Data-informed review of behaviour trends
- Reflection and planning using the NSELCF [Reflective Planning Cycle](#)
- Adjustments based on evidence and feedback from educators and families
- Documentation of changes to your policy

For More Information

If you have questions about how these guidelines or compliance expectations apply to your program's behaviour guidance policy, please contact your Quality Assurance Specialist (QAS).

For general inquiries, email: ECDServices@novascotia.ca

Early Learning and Child Care Branch
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
2021 Brunswick Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3K 2Y5

Appendix: Implementation Support Tool

Behaviour Guidance Policy Development

This Implementation Support Tool supports the *Behaviour Guidance Policy Development* guide. It is included as an Appendix to help early learning and child care programs review, reflect on, and strengthen their behaviour guidance policy.

How to Use This Tool

Use this checklist to quickly assess your behaviour guidance policy. The first section outlines [Ministerial Requirements](#) to ensure compliance. The remaining sections reflect best practices as described in the *Behaviour Guidance Policy Development* guide. These elements strengthen your policy, align it with the NSELCF, and support high-quality practice.

If you identify areas needing more detail or clarification, return to the corresponding section in the main guide for examples and prompts.

Self-Evaluation Checklist

Ministerial Requirements

- Licensee has a behaviour guidance policy (“the policy”).
- The policy is reviewed on a regular basis.
 - The policy is reviewed by each employee annually.
- A copy of the policy is posted in a visible place.
- Protocols for breach of the policy are included in the employee/care provider handbook.
- The policy includes details on acceptable behaviour guidance techniques and identifies prohibited methods.
- The required statements from [Section 19](#) of the NS ELCC Regulations are included.
 - All prohibited practices are clearly listed.
- The required statements from [Standard 10.1](#) of the Standards for Food and Nutrition in Regulated Child Care Programs are included.
 - The policy clearly indicates that food is not used as a punishment or reward.
- Handbooks for families, employees and care providers include a copy of the policy or indicate how to obtain a copy.
- The policy is reviewed with all new families, staff, volunteers, care providers, and others (e.g., practicum students, outside professionals) who are involved in the program as part of the orientation process before they interact with children.

Philosophy & Beliefs ([Section 3](#))

- The policy includes a clear, strengths-based philosophy.
- Behaviour is framed as communication.
- The policy reflects inclusive, culturally responsive, and EDIAA-informed practice.

Proactive Behaviour Guidance Strategies ([Section 4](#))

- Positively-stated behavioural expectations are included.
- Strategies for teaching and modelling expectations are described.
- Universal strategies to support social-emotional learning are outlined.
- The role of routines, transitions, and environment design is addressed.

Supporting Social-Emotional Learning ([Section 5](#))

- The policy describes how educators support emotional development.
- Strategies for self-regulation and problem-solving are included.
- The policy reflects warm, responsive, relationship-based practices.
- Cultural and identity-affirming practices are applied.

Responding to Severe Incidents ([Section 6](#))

- The policy defines a clear, respectful response process to severe incidents.
 - Documentation expectations are described.
 - Family communication steps are included.
 - Guidance on accessing external supports (with family consent) is included.

Families as Partners ([Section 7](#))

- The policy describes how families are informed about behaviour guidance.
- The policy promotes consistent approaches between home and centre.

Environment Supports Positive Behaviour ([Section 8](#))

- The policy describes how environment design supports positive behaviour.

Staff Support, Training & Well-Being ([Section 9](#))

- The policy describes staff orientation, training, and professional learning expectations.

Monitoring, Evaluation & Reflection ([Section 10](#))

- The policy outlines how behaviour guidance practices are monitored.
- A process for reviewing and updating the policy is included.
- Reflection tools such as the NSELFC Reflective Planning Cycle are referenced.