Staff in OSHC can help children learn to respect and take care of themselves, other people and the world around them. They do this by giving encouragement and support, not expecting learning to occur after one experience, breaking down complex tasks into simpler ones, making the situation easier, demonstrating ways of doing things, acknowledging desirable behaviour and giving explanations. These are all common teaching strategies that are effective in helping children learn many things, including appropriate behaviour.

The following guidelines may help:

1. **Have appropriate expectations for children’s abilities and understanding; be sure rules, limits and guidelines are reasonable.**
   
The wide age range in OSHC creates challenges in deciding what is fair and reasonable. More should be expected of 9 to 12 year-olds than of 5 to 8 year-olds. Staff need to give careful consideration to the extent to which rules, guidelines and expectations can be different and still seem fair.

2. **Try to match your responses to any undesirable behaviour, so that children learn the difference between a minor annoyance and serious ‘misdeemeanour’.**
   
   For example, hitting another child is much more serious than leaving the remains of your afternoon tea on the table.

3. **When a child behaves inappropriately, look at the environment or situation as well as the child as a cause of or contributor to the undesirable behaviour.**
   
   For example, a group of very energetic children in a tightly packed space is a recipe for misbehaviour. Not enough materials and equipment, not enough food, too long sitting still in a group, never getting a turn, nothing interesting to do, or always being excluded from the group are causes of misbehaviour over which the adult has at least some control.

4. **When possible, try to prevent undesirable behaviour rather than reacting after it occurs.**
   
   For example, if you know that there is a child who has particular difficulty making the transition from school to OSHC and who acts that out by annoying other children, plan something special for the child. Perhaps give them a job they enjoy, to try to prevent the behaviour from occurring. As another example, if the new computer game causes tension and disagreements about who can have it first and how long a turn anyone can have, work that out through discussion with the children ahead of time.

5. **Build in choices and variety, giving children the opportunity to exercise some autonomy and decision making about their own experience.**
   
   Children’s needs and interests vary, and the best services offer a range of opportunities and experiences to choose from. Many behaviour problems stem from children feeling constrained and overly controlled by the adults around them, especially as they get older.

6. **Always give brief explanations when you set limits or stop a child from doing something.**
   
   If the aim is that children will eventually internalise rules and limits, then they have to understand why they are there and enforced in the first place. What may be obvious to adults may not be so obvious to children. Don’t lecture them, but do remind them about why what they did is unsafe, hurtful, disrespectful, wasteful or inconsiderate.

   Involve children in negotiating and deciding about rules, limits and guidelines. However, adults have the final say, and children need to be clear about this. Consult with children and pay close attention to their views about what is appropriate behaviour and what should happen when children do not follow guidelines.
7. Acknowledge desirable behaviour and give attention when a child is doing the right thing. Avoid letting undesirable behaviour be the best or only way to get attention.

Often in group situations, it is the child who misbehaves who gets the most attention. Desirable behaviour is often taken for granted and not commented on. Children want and need adults’ attention, and sometimes they appear to decide that negative attention, that is, being spoken to sternly and redirected, is better than being ignored. The implication of this guideline is not that undesirable behaviour should be ignored, because often it can’t be – it has to be stopped. Rather the point is that whenever possible you should acknowledge and express appreciation for desirable behaviour. An aim in OSHC services should be to make desirable behaviour by children an attention getter.

8. Model in your own behaviour those attributes that you want the children to ‘catch’.

Modelling is a powerful teaching and learning tool. If you consistently model respectful interactions then the children will ‘catch’ that behaviour and model it back to adults and each other.

9. Acknowledge children’s feelings, whether they are expressed by the child or sensed by you, when you respond to them.

Feelings are acknowledged when responses such as the following are used: “Yes, I know you feel angry;” “I feel sad too when …;” “You feel annoyed when …;” “I can see that you are frustrated about ….”

10. Keep in mind that children believe messages they receive about themselves from adults.

A child needs successful experiences that build a positive self-image. Effective discipline teaches without making the child feel frightened, ashamed, embarrassed and insecure, and without lowering self-esteem. The challenge is to support self-esteem and respect for others in a positive way, and that uses situations that occur to help children learn about their own rights and responsibilities and their obligations to others. This approach goes far beyond simple managing behaviour and does not involve the use of management.

Learning most of the important things in life comes through a number of varied experiences. It is helpful if you approach your interactions with children with the ideas that these have potential for assisting children to learn skills and attitudes that will serve them well for the rest of their lives.