

# SHOW AND

If you want to encourage certain behaviours, says **Paul Dix**, then it's essential to make a song and dance of exactly what they are...

**H**ow is it that my three-year-old cannot read a word, yet can find his way around my phone without a pause for thought? He can decipher images, send my friends gobbledygook emails, and hide apps in places I have never seen. I suspect that he is not a genius but like all children finds his way through the world by using icons like pins on a map. The digital child is icon intelligent. Surround him, then, with the images that will have the most positive impact on his behaviour. Use the iconography that he reads so easily. Give him pins to place in his behavioural route planner.

Forget trying to teach every behaviour that needs to be taught. Fighting on all fronts leaves your influence thin and diluted. Instead, decide on the behaviours that are most important in the nursery – those that the children need to learn above all others. Teach these directly, calmly, and relentlessly, reinforcing them through what the children see as well as what every adult says.

## Say what you see

Walk to your room from the front door of the nursery. What messages are there for the children? Which ones stand out, and is there anything you would like to be a little more prominent? Do your displays scream 'outstanding conduct' and pride in the children, or are they looking a little tired and unfocused? Are those that relate to behaviour focused on single, observable behaviours or do they leave children guessing? Are there photographs of children behaving impeccably?

Make displays of the precise behaviours that you want the children to demonstrate. Choose just two on which to concentrate for the next few weeks. Use icons to represent the behaviours that work and/or the routines you are trying to embed. These need to be clear symbols or pictures that are agreed with the children and displayed where they will take notice of them. Make a point of talking to children about their behaviour while sitting with the icons in front of you, standing next to the





What games do you use to teach behaviour?  
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poster on the wall, or sharing a 'cube' made with the icons (you can create your own cubes here <http://ictmagic.visibli.com/share/FVRR1>).



Position displays of the behaviour that you want to see prominently. Make them part of the rewards conversation as well as having them represented in the quiet corner to reset the boundaries. The lines of tolerance that reside inside the mind of most adults need to be made clear and obvious for every child. They must be revealed, referred to and recalled daily, hourly and yes, when you feel like you are herding cats, every few minutes. Give the children every chance to make good choices in their behaviour by letting them know exactly what the behaviours are that

work. Spend your energy catching those individuals who are doing the right thing rather than reminding your charges of rules only when they break them.

### The right stuff

With your own group, let the children know the behaviours that make you smile most of all. Explain to them how you like to be treated and encourage them in turn to think about what might make others happy. Display the results of this conversation as a list of three behaviours using icons, headed 'these things make me smile' or 'this is how I like to be treated'. Refer to it frequently; use it as your minimum expectation. Couple this visual cue with an obvious display of pleasure on your face – children soon learn the value of putting those behaviours firmly on their own map.

As you teach the routines using positive reinforcement there are opportunities to highlight the behaviours that work. Use a tally system for group rewards: "If you can earn 30 tallies today we can have an extra biscuit/special story/look inside the secret box." Any child can receive a reward that contributes to the team effort. The strategy is simple, so there is a great opportunity to be really creative with it – instead of tallies on the board think about devising a system that gives you more opportunity to make a show of desired behaviours: adding leaves on the success tree, perhaps, or piling stackable cubes on the tower of achievement. Alternatively, try a vase of water with a line marked on the side; children drop marbles in and watch the liquid level rise until it reaches the marker, at which point the class reward is earned. Good behaviour soon becomes associated with pleasure, excitement and

collaboration. Children will deliberately try to follow agreed routines to earn the right to drop marbles; if you catch them doing something that needs positive advertising then you can produce the sack of 'special marbles' (listen for small gasps at their beauty, size and weight). Remind the children why 'sharing without being asked' – for example – is so special, and clearly link the behaviour with the honour of dropping the marble into the vase. Couple this with a burst of dramatic percussion, a build up of tension and a collective "Ooo!", and behaving well soon becomes irresistibly fun. In turn, of course, for the few who struggle, behaving badly no longer seems to be the way to get attention.

### All for one...

Around the site make a show of the behaviours that you want to see. Remind everyone of the expectations in the places where they are relevant: in the outside spaces and toilets; in the entrance hall and corridors. Agree with all the adults that every conversation about behaviour will be referenced with these displays. Encourage a meaningful consistency around behaviour to develop. Allow the displays, icons, and photographs to be the song sheet from which everyone sings; give everyone the chance to contribute to teaching behaviour.

You won't change the behavioural norms of your nursery by simply 'sorting out the naughtyies'. Improving the behaviour of three per cent is not going to get you to 'outstanding'. If you want to improve behaviour and shift your expectations up a gear start with the 97 per cent. And if you are going to start with the 97 per cent, begin by questioning the messages that you are sending them about behaviour in the first place.



### Play time

Try this game as a way of modelling and encouraging desired behaviours: Place an electric candle in the middle of a circle of children. Ask the children to concentrate on the candle and as a team try and count to 10 in order. Each child can only say one number and if two speak at the same time the group goes back to zero. You can develop this exercise to use key vocabulary or as a silent game with each child trying to put his hands on his head in turn (if two people move at the same time then we start again). As you play, reinforce the behaviours that the children are showing – sharing, turn-taking, listening, waiting etc., and remind them of the behaviours that we love to see all day.

### findoutmore

Pick up further free behaviour tips, resources and advice from Paul's award-winning site, [PivotalEducation.com](http://PivotalEducation.com)