

# Icons of the AGE



Take the illustrated approach to teaching good behaviour and your setting and children will benefit, says **Paul Dix...**

**C**hildren read signs more quickly than they read your intent or remember your voice. The digital child is icon intelligent: signs and symbols guide them through new media and technology; they use icons to plot their map of new worlds and new routines. Using them in the nursery means you can teach complex routines to very young children.

As you negotiate or impose routines, agree a set of icons to represent the steps. Leave the icons on display near the activity. The signs you agree with the group help to focus the children on the behaviours that you need to see. They must be positive, affirming and engaging. Before embarking on a new activity establish the routine, draw it, display it and refer to it continually.

Teach the new rituals immediately before the task, giving examples and modelling your responses carefully. When the task is revisited it's vital that you run over the routine with the children. When the activity begins, focus on those children who are following the rules. Use praise and positive reinforcement to support their good choices.

As you build up a series of routines, every adult who intervenes with the child's behaviour has the same framework for the conversation. The consistency ripples through the group. Without this level of agreement a single behaviour can be addressed in many different ways – and mixed messages mean

behaviour takes longer to learn. The consistency is further embedded as you use the icons in your non-verbal language. They can be used to indicate subtly to children, as a backdrop for a conversation about behaviour or as a focus for the child's attention. Without the icons the non-verbal cues are not pinned on a memory of a forgotten instruction.

Use the icons to recognise and reinforce positive behaviour. Mark the moment with the child. Don't let them think your praise is just conversation. When things get wobbly later on you can bring them back to that moment and remind them how well they've done today. Through the ritual of reinforcement the routine is kept at the forefront of the fast-paced mind of the toddler.

Finally, teach routines from the start – don't wait until poor habits become second nature before you try to intervene. Teach the behaviours that you want to see. Simply telling the children the rules is leaving a lot to chance. Directly teaching appropriate behaviour with a framework of agreed icons is less of a gamble.

## findoutmore

Paul Dix's award-winning behaviour training is now available as a fantastic self-study online course. Just email [ellie@pivotaleducation.com](mailto:ellie@pivotaleducation.com) for a free sample. Paul's company, Pivotal Education, has a national reputation for designing and delivering training that promotes real change. You can sign up for free behaviour tips service at [pivotaleducation.com](http://pivotaleducation.com)

## watch out for

**1** Displaying the rules on just one wall or in one place. Think about where your rituals are best displayed. A checklist of rules for entering and leaving the room should be on the door. Similarly, the routines for individual table activities need to be visible to everyone as they work.

**2** Enthusiastically introducing rituals and then not referring to them again until sanctions need to be applied. Use the routines to support your discussions with children. Refer to them tirelessly until the children realise that you are not going to be diverted from them.

**3** Establishing too many new rituals too soon. Introduce new routines gradually over time. Allow one or two to become embedded before developing more advanced rituals. Too many new routines too soon are confusing for adults and children.