

GUIDE TO GETTING ALONG

Goddard schools' tool against bullying: confident students

By Rich Ott • February 18, 2011



LAVENDER, 2, of Avondale plays a game with her mother, Urielle, right, and school staff members Nicole, left, and Lorraine in conjunction with a program that promotes anti-bullying initiatives through play. Photo by Ray Thomas

When most people hear about children being bullied at school, they might tend to picture youths older than toddlers.

That's not stopping The Goddard School® of Goodyear - which educates children from 6 weeks old to 6 years - from doing its part to fight bullying.

The method used at Goddard Systems schools is building the children's confidence while teaching them to express their feelings and make their own choices.

"When we talk about building confidence, it spills over into every aspect of their lives," said Kimberly Hoody, co-owner of the 19-month-old Goodyear school at

12325 W. Thomas Road, which has 120 students enrolled. "With confident children, you don't see them doing the bullying.

"And if they have that confidence, they'll be better equipped to stand up to bullies if they should have that encounter in the future."

The main method used by Goddard Systems - which is based in Prussia, Pa., and has 370 schools across the country - is incorporating its Goddard Guide to Getting Along in its curriculum.

Can't We All Just Get Along?

"We've been teaching children about friendship, compassion and cooperation for a number of years," said Sue Adair, Goddard's director of education.

Adair has been at the 22-year-old corporation since 1995, first as an educational director on campus before making the transition in 1998 to Goddard's corporate offices.

The company has been using the Goddard Guide to Getting Along for the past seven years.

"We are addressing these issues because we see pre-school children engaging in minor social spats that we look at as learning opportunities," Adair said from her Pennsylvania office via a telephone interview Feb. 1. "Our goal is to help children learn to play with one another, get along and respect differences."

Adair, who has worked in early education for the past 24 years, believes a confident child avoids being bullied, she said, noting that parents can help their children build confidence at an early age.

“Be examples. Adults, teachers - we are role models to children,” she said. “If you speak positively about yourself, your child will follow.

“Always praise them and encourage them,” Adair continued. “And listen to children. What the child has to say is just as important as what an adult has to say.”

An important factor in building a child’s confidence is building trust, she said.

“Allow them to take on their own responsibilities to foster independence,” Adair said. Independence leads the children “to feel more confidently about making their own choices and decisions.”

Since the Goddard Systems has incorporated its Guide to Getting Along into its curriculum, the schools are seeing “positive outcomes,” Adair said.

“We still see some negative behavior because it is typical, especially when they don’t have the language skills to express how they are feeling,” she said.

Playful learning

At Goddard of Goodyear, when negative behavior appears, learning follows.

“If a child takes a toy from another child and they weren’t done playing with it, we look at that as a real learning opportunity,” said JoEllen Johnson, co-owner of the Goodyear school.

The teachers will get the two children involved together, talking about how the event made them feel, Johnson said.

Then in future playful learning times, “sometimes they self correct or their friend will say, ‘Hey remember how it made me feel last time?’” Johnson said.

“We believe in playful learning and we give them a lot of choices so they can be successful and build confidence,” Hoody said.

It’s apparent which children have been through a Goddard program before, the co-owners said.

“They are very good about resolving situations and talking things through with each other,” Johnson said. “We witness that on a daily basis in the classes.”

Each Goddard classroom has two teachers: the lead, who writes his or her own curriculum and has a degree in early childhood education, and an assistant. Students advance in classes every six months until they reach preschool age, and are then enrolled in preschool 1 and 2. Goddard Systems also has pre-kindergarten classes.

On Feb. 5, most Goddard locations in the country - including the Buckeye school at 4320 N. School Hill Road - hosted the Goddard Community Games. The purpose of the event was to teach children about playing well with others and accepting differences while having fun with their families.

“Learning is going on all day,” Hoody said.