



What You Need to Lead an Early Childhood Program: Emotional Intelligence in Practice by Holly Elissa Bruno

About this book: *What You Need to Lead an Early Childhood Program: Emotional Intelligence in Practice* is an early childhood leadership book anchored in what matters most: emotional intelligence (EQ), the art and science of building relationships. Emotional intelligence is the ability to read people as well as you read books—and to know how to use that information wisely. Each chapter begins with a case study that features richly complex, everyday challenges facing early childhood program directors. Alongside the case studies are EQ theory and principles, pointers and problem-solving steps to help you practice and hone your leadership skills.

What You Need to Lead covers the entire realm of a leader's responsibilities, from financial management to marketing, supervision to assessment, and health and safety to preventing legal troubles. What makes this book unique and engaging is the human focus in each of these areas.

About this excerpt: This excerpt (from Chapter 9, "Supervision and Staff Development: Social EQ in Action") outlines steps and principles to follow in helping a staff member improve her work performance. In the case presented, a teacher who is great when working with the children struggles to arrive to the program on time. As Bruno notes, "Being able to tell employees directly that their behavior needs to change is part of leadership."

Case Study—Francia and Jasmine

Francia, an outstanding toddler teacher, is a dedicated mom to her four young children. Her husband expects a homemade meal on the table every evening, a clean house, and time with the wife he loves. Francia is highly motivated to earn her early childhood degrees. With English as her second language, no money to spare, and fears about feeling inadequate in a college classroom, Francia asks you, her director, for guidance.

Jasmine, Francia's team teacher, is due to arrive by 6:30 a.m. daily. On Monday, Jasmine arrived at 6:45. On Tuesday, she walked through the door at 7:05. Today, Jasmine showed up at 6:50 without apology. The parents of Clarence, a toddler, wanted to speak with Jasmine. At 6:45 they told Francia they couldn't wait any longer and stormed out. Jasmine's behavior stresses Francia.

To maintain required teacher-to-child ratios in the toddler room, the director increasingly reschedules early morning meetings and phone calls to cover for Jasmine. Once Jasmine settles into the classroom, she is a creative and loving teacher.

If you were Francia and Jasmine's director and supervisor, how would you assess the situation? What steps would you take?

... This chapter will help you successfully tailor your supervision to fit the needs of each staff member. You will learn how to discern when a teacher needs to be told what to do (directive supervision) and when she can be invited to innovate (reflective supervision). Much depends on the maturity level of each staff member and each team. You will also study how to establish a system of supervision with useful policies, procedures, and forms. Because supervision practice aligns with legal requirements, you will track the close and necessary relationship between the law and a director's actions. ...

Five principles and steps of directive supervision

Being able to tell employees directly that their behavior needs to change is part of leadership. For the majority of early child care professionals who are conflict avoidant, consciously learning the skills of direct supervision is liberating. At the early stages of development, employees learn best when told directly what is expected of them. This means stating the "1, 2, 3" steps of the task and spelling out in detail what needs to be done. Many supervisors prefer to imagine staff will catch on by imitating model behavior. Avoidance makes the problem grow larger. ...

Directive supervision is based on five principles. It can be challenging for directors to use directive supervision when an employee doesn't want to take responsibility for her own actions. The table **Principles of Directive Supervision** provides tips for how to apply each principle and remain objective and focused on finding a positive solution.

Let's revisit the chapter case study and put these principles to the test. . . . Jasmine's performance will improve only if she learns to take responsibility for her actions through directive supervision.

Imagine calling Jasmine in for a supervision session about her behavior:

Director: Jasmine, when you arrived this Monday at 6:45 a.m., Tuesday at 7:05, and today at 6:50, that was inappropriate. You need to be in your classroom, ready to begin by 6:30 a.m.

Jasmine: Why are you picking on me? Melanie is late half the time.

Director: Jasmine we're talking about your behavior, not anyone else's. The actions I take with staff members are confidential.

Jasmine: I work really hard and give my heart and soul to these children. Why isn't that enough for you?!

Director: The children need you in the classroom on time. What will you do to make sure you arrive on time each day?

Jasmine: Change my start time to 7:30. You let Taylor come at 7:30!

Director: We need you for the early morning slot. Tell me what you can change to make sure you are in the classroom, prepared and ready to start, by 6:30.

Jasmine (crying or yelling): You don't appreciate anything I do! I'm a better teacher than half the staff you have here!

Director: Yes, Jasmine, when you are with the children, you are an excellent and caring teacher. That's not the issue. You need to get here on time. Here's a Kleenex. Take a five-minute break. Come back ready to share what you will do to be here on time each day.

Principles of Directive Supervision	
Principle 1 Focus on the person's behavior, not the person	The employee's behavior is at issue, not her worthiness as a person.
Principle 2 Be factual, concrete, and accurate when identifying the behavior.	Tell the facts about what she or he did, accurately and in sufficient detail, without shaming or blaming the employee or "sugar coating." Res ipse loquitur, a Latin saying, translates: "The facts speak for themselves."
Principle 3 Don't get "hooked" by taking what is said personally; use a "Q-tip."	Because employees can become defensive, focus the conversation on "What will you do to make sure you do what's expected?" Do not get ensnared in a power struggle. Step to the side. Use your OFC (see Chapter 2) if you feel your amygdala may be hijacked. Put a Q-tip in your pocket. Squeeze it to remind yourself: Quit Taking It Personally.
Principle 4 Expect employees to take responsibility for their behavior.	Focus the employee on problem solving by asking: "What will you do to change your behavior?" Do not rob the employee of his chance to take responsibility by stepping in to "fix" it for him. Find a solution that is right for everyone, especially for children and families.
Principle 5 Come to a "meeting of the minds" and enforce it with a follow-up plan.	Tie a bow on this supervision meeting by making sure the employee understands what she will do differently, when you will meet to follow up, and what the consequence of her failure to change would be.

Jasmine: All right, I suppose I could take the earlier bus, the #79 that leaves half an hour earlier. Would that make you happy?!

Director: Sounds like a plan. So, Jasmine, are you agreeing to take the earlier bus?

Jasmine: If I have to, I guess.

Director: We'll meet one week from today at this time. Taylor will cover your class. I'll also stop by each morning to check in with you. The children, their parents, and Francia will all feel better when they can count on you to be on time. If you do not arrive on time, however, the next step is probation. Please sign this Corrective Action form to indicate you agree to this plan.

Jasmine: This is hard for me. I have never been an on-time person.

Director: I understand, and I support your making the effort.

Directive supervision is respectful and not mean-spirited. Holding the line with Jasmine will help her learn how to become a professional. . . . The chart **Putting Directive Supervision into Words** shows what Jasmine's director could say when applying the steps of directive supervision.

Putting Directive Supervision into Words	
State the inappropriate behavior.	"Jasmine, when you arrived Monday at 6:45, Tuesday at 7:05, and this morning at 6:50 a.m., that was inappropriate."
Name the expected behavior.	"You need to be here ready to start by 6:30 a.m. each day."
Ask what changes the employee will make to meet expectations.	"Jasmine, what will you do to get here, ready to start in the classroom by 6:30 a.m. daily?"
Persist until the employee takes responsibility for identifying and taking ownership of a workable solution.	"Changing your start time is not an option, Jasmine. Your idea of taking the earlier bus will work well."
Make a plan for follow-through that includes notification of the legal consequences of failure to make agreed upon changes.	"Please tell me what you agree to do differently. We'll meet one week from today at 1 p.m. nap time in my office. Millicent will cover for you. I'll check in with you daily to see how things are going. This is your written notice, Jasmine. If you do not get to work on time, you will be put on probation. Thank you for coming up with a solution that will help children, families, and your team members."