Finding an identity as part of a peer group is a key area of development for children aged 3 – 5, therefore a large part of our program supports social interactions and learning. Children try out roles and different ways of interacting just like they try out other skills. Through experience in a pre-school program, we aim for children to learn skills and dispositions to respect others, include others, take responsibility, negotiate, begin to understand what fairness is, take turns, cooperate, show resilience and begin to show empathy for others. Children’s understanding of language is becoming more sophisticated and so using stories, logical consequences and songs are useful ways of getting messages across – however it is still absolutely vital to use visual strategies and side by side guidance in everyday situations.

In pre-school, educators work in a team, therefore consistent behavioural expectations and strategies are important. For children who have challenging behaviour, specific behaviour plans will be negotiated with parents and caregivers. Families’ input supports educators to understand different children’s lives, interests and dispositions. Educators work with families to support children’s social skill development and bridging the gap between home and school. Sometimes goal charts can be created to work on a home or pre-school behaviour plan to aid communication and the child’s awareness that parents and teachers are communicating to help their behaviour.

Following are some of the strategies that we use as educators to support children’s behaviour.

**Cooperative Behaviour:**
- setting up the environment to support group work, providing sufficient resources and organising resources so that children can become independent in getting the things they need.
- Educators playing and working alongside of children to model taking turns, sharing resources and listening to others.
- teaching will encompass some increasing encouragement and expectation to join in with some structured group time experiences moving from short small groups - to whole group experiences.

**Including and respecting others**
- Role modelling positive ways of entering groups and play situations, making friends, sharing resources, taking turns and solving problems and conflicts
- using puppets, stories and songs to show how people feel good when others include them and respect them and also about how people feel when they are not included, or when they are teased or put down. Using hypothetical situations to support children to think “How would I feel if that happened to me?” “How do I like others to treat me ?

**Developing Responsibility**
- giving children opportunities to take care of their environment, to put things away, help in simple routines eg setting the table, cleaning tables/ chairs; looking after animals and plants.
- Assisting children to take responsibility for their belongings – putting their hats, lunch boxes in their drawer – packing their own bags at the end of the day.
- Showing children about cause and effect, that our actions have consequences. Eg If we push the blocks they might fall on someone..... if we don’t put things in our drawer - we will lose them
- Having high and positive expectations of children – and working together to show children what they can achieve to build their feelings of responsibility and pride.
Hurting others, animals and resources
- developing respect for others also incorporates respect for all living things and also for other people's belongings and resources.
- when a child intentionally hurts another child, our action is to help them to sit out and think about what they have done – to think about the other child and to do something to ‘repair’ the situation. This is not about saying sorry for the sake of politeness – it is about the child voicing, “I’m sorry for hurting you” to accept exactly what it is they have done – and then to think about what they can do to help the person feel better. Sitting out and missing out on play time also signals to the child that what they have done is not OK. If the behaviour is repeated – or if the educator can see that the child is not calm – they will keep the child close to them in their activity to help them to re-enter social play with guidance. A verbal message “You’ll need to stay next to me – because I want you to be safe and I want other children to be safe.”, builds on to important attachment relationships, showing the child that you will support them through the situation.
- Sometimes strategies such as drawing what happened in the situation can be a good way of helping the child process what has happened and also the feelings that are associated with this.

Developing self control and resilience
- Children at pre-school are learning how to accept challenges and disappointments as part of life. This might be accepting when something hasn’t gone their way, or when they haven’t had a turn to be a leader in a song or game, or when they have had an argument with a friend. Again puppets and role modelling are good ways to show children how to begin to control some of their emotions in different situations, as well as showing children that they can have strong emotions – and then they can get over them. Not all children’s strong emotions are about disappointment – sometimes children can struggle to get themselves back ‘together’ after an exciting experience or a ‘silly or boisterous’ activity. Educators also use distraction, or some individual or small group time to help children work with strong emotions.