

Educator Resource Sheet

Based on: *the ever helpful Sandie Shark* – part of the *On the Reef* series of books
By **Melanie Atkinson** – published by **PerthLight.com.au**, November 2025

Disclaimer

These educator notes are not official EYLF or EYFS guidelines. They are an informal discussion resource designed to support reflection and conversation when using the *On the Reef* books with children. Educators should always refer to the current EYLF and EYFS documents for accurate and authoritative guidance and use these notes only as a supplementary tool.

About the author

Melanie Atkinson is an early years educator based in Perth, Western Australia. She earned degrees in teaching and developmental psychology in the 1990s and has worked exclusively in the early learning sector ever since. Her work is based on the latest Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF Version 2.0) and grounded in a deep understanding of how young children grow, learn, and make sense of their emotions.

Overview

This gentle read-along picture book for children aged 2–5 explores themes of helping, empathy, and consent. Sandie Shark loves to help her friends, but she learns that even good intentions can go wrong if we don't ask first. The story encourages children to consider others' feelings, listen to their responses, and respect different comfort levels.

Through familiar social situations, *the ever helpful Sandie Shark* helps children learn that asking before acting builds trust and friendship. It promotes early emotional literacy, social awareness, and responsible behaviour while supporting foundational communication and empathy skills.

The book aligns with the **Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF Version 2.0)** and the **UK Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)**, and reflects current Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks used internationally. Sandie's story helps children practise CASEL's five core SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Theoretical Context

Sandie Shark at your service is grounded in key developmental theories that guide early childhood practice.

Piaget described children aged 2–7 as being in the preoperational stage, when they experiment with independence and perspective-taking through play. Sandie’s eagerness to help mirrors this stage, as she explores social roles and begins to understand that others think and feel differently from herself.

Vygotsky highlighted the role of social interaction and adult guidance. In this story, Miss Coral’s calm scaffolding and peer feedback show how gentle correction within the child’s zone of proximal development supports empathy and self-regulation.

Erikson’s stages of autonomy and initiative are central here: children thrive when they are supported to act kindly, reflect on their choices, and make amends.

Bandura’s social learning theory reminds us that children model the behaviour they observe. Sandie’s peers provide positive examples of self-advocacy and boundary-setting.

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems model further situates these lessons in community contexts where children learn respect and empathy through relationships at home, in care, and in the wider social environment.

By combining these insights, *Sandie Shark at your service* provides a playful but developmentally rich framework for teaching consent, empathy, and emotional understanding through familiar peer experiences.

About the EYLF (Australia)

Sandie Shark at your service connects especially well with:

- **Outcome 1.1** – Children feel safe, secure, and supported.
- **Outcome 1.2** – Children develop their emerging autonomy, interdependence, resilience, and agency.
- **Outcome 3.1** – Children become strong in their social, emotional and mental wellbeing.
- **Outcome 3.3** – Children are aware of and develop strategies to support their own mental and physical health and personal safety.
- **Outcome 5.1** – Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes.

These outcomes are reflected in Sandie’s experiences of learning to listen, ask permission, and respect her friends’ needs while still expressing her natural kindness and enthusiasm.

About the EYFS (UK)

This story supports development in two of the prime areas:

- **Children’s personal, social and emotional development (PSED):** is crucial for children to lead healthy and happy lives, and is fundamental to their cognitive development.
 - **Communication and Language:** The story encourages children to use polite, respectful language when offering help and to listen carefully to peers’ responses. The development of children’s spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development.
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Suggested Discussion Prompts

- How was Sandie trying to help her friends?
 - How did Larry feel when Sandie helped too quickly?
 - What did Miss Coral remind Sandie to do before helping?
 - How can we show kindness and still ask first?
 - What can we say if someone says “no, thank you”?
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Extension Activities

Activity 1: Helping Hands (or Fins)

Theme: Thoughtful helping

Children trace and cut out paper hands or fins, then write or draw ways to help that include asking first.

Activity 2: Ask First Cards

Theme: Consent and communication

Create small picture cards showing actions like hugging, sharing toys, or joining a game. Children practice saying, “May I...?” and responding “Yes, please” or “No, thank you.”

Activity 3: Calm Waves Breathing

Theme: Self-regulation

Guide children to breathe in while tracing one wave with a finger, and breathe out tracing the next. Link to Larry’s “Breathe and be calm” moment.

Activity 4: Friendship Reef

Theme: Empathy and respect

Children build a coral reef collage where each coral piece shows an act of kindness that respected someone’s choice.

Parent and Carer Summary: Supporting Your Child Through Kind and Respectful Helping

This story explores empathy, communication, and consent in early childhood. Young children often want to help but may not yet understand that others have different needs or feelings. Learning to ask first helps them develop kindness, patience, and respect for others' boundaries.

Support strategies:

- Use everyday examples to model asking first: "Would you like help with that?" or "Can I give you a hug?"
- Praise respectful choices: "You remembered to ask first, that was kind."
- Encourage empathy by asking, "How do you think they feel?"
- Reinforce positive phrases: "Yes, please," "No, thank you," and "Maybe later."

Helping children learn to ask and listen builds empathy, confidence, and trust, the heart of caring relationships at every age.

Emotional Learning Activities for the Early Years Classroom

Activity 1: Ask, Listen, Help

Theme: Consent and empathy

Children role-play offering help, practising "May I help you?" and responding appropriately.

Activity 2: Bubble Breathing

Theme: Self-regulation

Children pretend to blow bubbles slowly, breathing in and out like Larry does when calming down.

Activity 3: Yes or No Pebbles

Theme: Choice and autonomy

Use coloured stones for "yes" and "no." Practise asking permission and respecting responses.

Activity 4: Kind Words Reef

Theme: Respectful communication

Add paper "coral" pieces with kind or polite phrases, "Can I help?" "Would you like a hug?" "Thank you for telling me."

Educator Tips

- Model consent-based helping in everyday routines.
- Reinforce that asking shows kindness and respect.
- Highlight how friends can say “no” and still be kind.
- Encourage reflection: “What could Sandie do next time?”
- Celebrate moments when children listen to others’ answers.

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