



Engaging in Meaningful Interactions

One sign of respectful and responsive relationships is that children and caregivers have a variety of meaningful interactions during their time together. When you have meaningful interactions with infants and toddlers you are:

- ◆ attentive;
- ◆ nurturing;
- ◆ warm;
- ◆ responsive;
- ◆ respectful;
- ◆ guiding, and
- ◆ comfortable following children's lead.

The following are some ways to engage in meaningful interactions with the infants and toddlers in your care.

Self-Reflection

Taking a moment each day to think about how your communication and behavior affect the infants, toddlers, and adults you interact with is a powerful way to develop your awareness and responsiveness. Think about how your personal interactions might affect your relationships. For example, how do your tone of voice, facial expressions, and body posture communicate messages to the people around you?

Take the Time to Connect with Children

- ◆ **Slow down.** Life is busy, and you have a lot to do each day. As a caregiver, you provide the extremely valuable service of caring for infants and toddlers. Instead of constantly thinking about what comes next, take a deep breath to help yourself consciously slow down and fully experience what is happening in the moment. For example, rather than rushing through feeding an infant, you might slow down, carefully watch the infant's cues, engage in back-and-forth communication, and feed at the infant's pace.
- ◆ **Be present.** Being present means taking a moment to clear your mind of all distractions so that your focus is only on connecting with children (Dombro, Jablon, & Stetson, 2011). With this focus, you can think carefully about responding to individual children's cues and needs in that moment.
- ◆ **Remember that being with children is the first priority.** Helping to support the growth and development of the children in your care is your greatest and most important role, placing all other responsibilities second. When you are faced with many tasks throughout the day, it might be easy to be distracted by doing laundry, cleaning cots, or completing paperwork. It is not easy to be present when other tasks need to be done. Reminding yourself that being present with children is the first and most important role that you play helps you prioritize time and the other tasks that need to be completed. Understandably, there are a lot of tasks to complete as an infant and toddler teacher in a child care center or family child care home. If it feels challenging to balance these tasks with being present with children, you may want to talk with your director or colleagues and develop approaches that will help you keep your focus on the children.



- ◆ **Take time to understand children's individual needs.** When working with infants and toddlers, it is important to get to know them as individuals who have unique interests, needs, and preferences. Working to understand each child's interests, needs, preferences, and culture builds a foundation for connecting with infants and toddlers in meaningful ways.
- ◆ **Support children's learning.** When you are in tune with children's individual needs, you are able to make responsive and sensitive decisions about the next step in each child's learning (Dombro, Jablon, & Stetson, 2011).

Resources

[Baby Talks, Webinar 1—Babbling Babies: Early Learning Development](#) (2017) is an hour-long webinar that explores how social interactions support infants' and toddlers' language development and the strategies teachers can use in their interactions with children to support this development. This webinar is part of the BabyTalks webinar series that features current research about babies, developed by the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning.

[Early Essentials, Webisode 8—Responsive Interactions](#) is a 20-minute video that discusses the importance of having responsive back-and-forth interactions. This video is part of the Early Essentials series, which offers key messages and helpful resources to get staff started with the youngest children and their families. The video has a [Quick Start Guide](#) that includes teaching practices and resources.

[Early Essentials, Webisode 8—Practice Moment](#) is a 4-minute video that gives you the opportunity to identify instances of responsive interactions between a home visitor, parent, and toddler. This video has a [Quick Start Guide](#) with teaching strategies and resources.

Reference

Dombro, A. L., Jablon, J., & Stetson, C. (2011). *Powerful interactions: How to connect with children to extend their learning*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The State Capacity Building Center (SCBC) works with state and territory leaders and their partners to create innovative early childhood systems and programs that improve results for children and families. The SCBC is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care.

State Capacity Building Center, A Service of the Office of Child Care

9300 Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA 22031

Phone: 877-296-2401

Email: CapacityBuildingCenter@ecetta.info

Subscribe to Updates

http://www.occ-cmc.org/occannouncements_sign-up/



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES