

Interaction

Sensitive and responsive interactional practices are the foundation for promoting the development of a child’s language and cognitive and emotional competence. These interactional practices are the basis for fostering all children’s learning. For children who have or are at risk for developmental delays/disabilities, they represent a critical set of strategies for fostering children’s social-emotional competence, communication, cognitive development, problem-solving, autonomy, and persistence.

We selected interactional practices to promote specific child outcomes, and these will vary depending on the child’s developmental levels and cultural and linguistic background. Practitioners will plan specific ways to engage in these practices across environments, routines, and activities. In addition, practitioners will assist others in the child’s life (family members, other caregivers, siblings, and peers) in learning sensitive and responsive ways to interact with the child and promote the child’s development.

We recommend the following practices to support interaction:

INT1 Practitioners promote the child’s social-emotional development by observing, interpreting, and responding contingently to the range of the child’s emotional expressions.

- Examples**
- A home visitor models positive interactions for the parents by commenting on what a great helper the child is when he joins her in gathering up the toys they have been using.
 - An early interventionist is responsive to the child’s initiations by “reading” and interpreting her nonverbal cues, anticipating her desires and waiting for her to give a clear signal of that desire, and then following her lead in play.
 - An early childhood teacher smiles frequently at children, shows genuine pleasure to be in the company of children, and shows authentic approval of each child’s accomplishments.

INT2 Practitioners promote the child’s social development by encouraging the child to initiate or sustain positive interactions with other children and adults during routines and activities through modeling, teaching, feedback, or other types of guided support.

- Examples**
- An early childhood teacher in a Head Start classroom helps peers respond to a child who uses gestures to communicate.
 - An early interventionist works with the parents in the home to encourage and reinforce a child for initiations and engagement with materials by providing choices; making suggestions; giving the child time to make choices; and providing positive, descriptive feedback.

INT3

Practitioners promote the child's communication development by observing, interpreting, responding contingently, and providing natural consequences for the child's verbal and non-verbal communication and by using language to label and expand on the child's requests, needs, preferences, or interests.

Examples

- An assistant teacher uses children's preferences to increase engagement and to promote interaction with peers on the playground.
- A speech language pathologist who is trying to teach the child to request using the sign for "apple" in the classroom places the desired apple within sight but deliberately out of reach, in order to prompt the child to request it.
- A Head Start teacher teaches developmentally sophisticated peers to recognize, interpret and respond to nonverbal children's communicative attempts.

INT4

Practitioners promote the child's cognitive development by observing, interpreting, and responding intentionally to the child's exploration, play, and social activity by joining in and expanding on the child's focus, actions, and intent.

Examples

- An early childhood teacher extends and expands on children's play behavior by imitating the children's behavior and then adds steps by showing how things work, other actions they can perform with objects, or ways that they can pretend with toys.
- A Head Start teacher encourages children to verbally describe what they are doing when they are playing in order to share their ideas with adults and peers.
- An early interventionist joins in on the child's exploration in the sand box following the child's lead and showing how the truck disappears under the sand and then reappears.

INT5

Practitioners promote the child's problem-solving behavior by observing, interpreting, and scaffolding in response to the child's growing level of autonomy and self-regulation.

Examples

- An early childhood teacher observes a group of children beginning to interact with pretend play materials and helps them plan their activity and identify what their roles will be as they interact with one another.
- When children engage in aggressive behavior, an assistant teacher models strategies using words to work out problems.