

Nurturing Children: Module 2

Module 2 - Interacting with Children

In this module, participants focus on communication with children. They will gain an understanding of how talking and listening to children can provide insight to an individual child's interests and needs while helping the child gain a positive self-concept in a supportive environment.

Outcomes

As a result of completing this module, participants will be able to:

- ✘ Listen to children in order to understand their individual needs, perceptions and interests
- ✘ Talk to children in ways that support their positive self-concept and address their individual needs

Key Concepts

- ✘ Language facilitates development.
- ✘ Children model adult behaviors.
- ✘ Children are always learning.

Background Information

Children do not enter programs as blank pages. All children have abundant background knowledge; experience; and personal, familial, and cultural characteristics. It is fundamental that adults understand each child's individual needs, perceptions, and interests if they are going to work successfully with children. Children's development is influenced by many factors, including the experiences they have. Development is much more than a simple *unfolding* along a predictable sequence. It is a dynamic process in which adults play a critical role. *Being in the right place; being tuned in to a child; listening; asking open-ended, thought-provoking questions; or helping to expand their play are all ways that adults can nurture children.* The nature and extent of adult interactions with children are vital factors in supporting and extending development.

Children and Language

To say that language facilitates development actually understates the connection. Children use language to solve problems and to master their own behavior. For example, many toddlers exclaim, *No!* when they approach an electrical outlet. *Sometimes speech is so important that children cannot accomplish a learning task if they are not allowed to use it.*

Praise vs. Encouragement

Because children take words very literally, it is important for you to be positive and encouraging in the messages you send. Although it is true that a positive self-concept is an important ingredient for learning, the practice of lavishing praise on children for all accomplishments is not likely to be successful. Praise judges a child's work, rather than describing it and allowing the child to make a judgment. Praise is usually broad and vague, rather than specific. Praise puts the emphasis on the adult's response to something rather than the child's perception of his or her work. In fact, very little evidence shows that such adult comments give children greater confidence; however, quite a bit of evidence indicates that they can have exactly the reverse effect. *Praise may create anxiety, reduce risk-taking, invite dependency, and reduce adult credibility.*

Of course it is important for adults to respond positively to children, and staff do this through encouragement. *Encouragement is a positive acknowledgement that is specific and focuses on the child's process of doing something rather than the adult's judgment.* Encouragement never compares one child to another.

Here are some examples of both praise and encouragement:

- ✖ What a great drawing! (praise)
- ✖ Tell me about your painting. (encouragement)
- ✖ what a good job cleaning up. (praise)
- ✖ Show me how you did that. (encouragement)

Exercise 1					
Identify each statement in the two columns as praise or encouragement. Place the correct number in the box: 1 - Praise or 2 - Encouragement					
1.	<input type="checkbox"/> Praise <input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement	What a wonderful painting.	2.	<input type="checkbox"/> Praise <input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement	You cleaned up that mess.
3.	<input type="checkbox"/> Praise <input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement	Show me how you did that.	4.	<input type="checkbox"/> Praise <input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement	I like that bow in your hair.
5.	<input type="checkbox"/> Praise <input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement	Tell me about this house that you've built.	6.	<input type="checkbox"/> Praise <input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement	What a good job of cleaning up.

7.	<input type="checkbox"/> Praise <input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement	That's great.	8.	<input type="checkbox"/> Praise <input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement	I like the way Maria is listening.
9.	<input type="checkbox"/> Praise <input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement	You organized all the blocks by color.	10.	<input type="checkbox"/> Praise <input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement	You look excited about what you brought today.

Role of Adults in the Learning Process

Adults play a very important role in extending children's learning by recognizing when a child is absorbed in a learning task and appreciating a child's efforts to organize knowledge. **Adults can nurture** children with their presence, language, and materials. Independence and self-motivation are essential to lifelong learning. Children need to value such built-in rewards as becoming more interested and competent as opposed to less essential rewards such as letter grades or adult praise.

All adults working with children are privileged to observe, appreciate, and assist in their development. Interactions with children are most helpful when they are positive, playful, understanding, and cued by the children. Therefore, it is important for adults to provide a supportive environment for children that encourages them in specific ways without judging or placing a value on what they are doing. Such encouragement is delivered in a sincere, direct way in a natural voice.

Because **adults are models** for children's behavior, it is very important that adults be good participants: be flexible and curious and have a sense of adventure and a love of learning. If adults are bored, so are children. If adults are energetic, positive, and hopeful, so are children. Children watch what the driver does when the bus breaks down, what the cook does when the electricity goes out, what the director does when a conflict arises - and they learn. Hopefully, they see adults who are flexible in unforeseen circumstances, who problem-solve rather than blame, and who are cheerful and realistic. Many intellectual gains are made in everyday living: replacing a light bulb is as valuable a cognitive task as matching dominoes.

Learning: An Ongoing Process

Children are learning all the time. This is why children's programs cannot be accurately described as have *learning activities in the morning and recreation in the afternoon*. Children are learning whenever they are interacting - with each other, with adults, with objects in their environment.

Learning is never confined to a table, a time of day, or a stage. Learning is everywhere

and lifelong. Day-to-day, real-life experiences are necessary hooks on which to hang future learning. The word *farm* is meaningless to the child who has not seen one. *Night* can be described only if a child can recall the sight, sound, and feel of night. Experiences are absolutely essential to successful learning.

Exercise 2					
Identify each statement in the two columns as positive or negative. Place the correct number in the box: 1 - Positive or 2 - Negative					
11.	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Negative	Tell me about it.	12.	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Negative	Tell me some more.
13.	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Negative	You've had your turn.	14.	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Negative	That's interesting.
15.	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Negative	Keep it down.	16.	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Negative	Clean up that mess.
17.	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Negative	It's not good manners to interrupt.	18.	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Negative	Don't interrupt.
19.	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Negative	I'd like to hear about it.	20.	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Negative	You just want attention.

Time to Listen

It seems that adults treat children like adults in terms of listening skills. Observe "listening time" between caregivers and children. All too often adults do not wait for a child's response or the adult will "hurry" a child to give a response by asking the question again, or asking, "Well?", or by answering for the child. Since children have not yet developed the range of perceptions that adults have, it may take them longer to get a perspective on the words said to them to give a response that is meaningful to them.

Key issues that might influence adult "waiting" time in listening skills:

- ✖ What do you feel like if you are involved in a conversation with someone who does not give you time to speak and who does all the talking?
- ✖ What kind of responses do think a child will give if pressured to answer too quickly?

- ✘ Is it possible that adults might equate quickness with smartness?
- ✘ Is waiting for a response difficult because of the adult's uncomfortableness with silence?

Nonjudgmental Responses

Another important task of listening adults is to provide a communication environment that is not threatening to the child. How can a child be encouraged to speak if there is a better chance of risk than reward?

Examine the following response patterns adults may use with children. Would any of these encourage you to continue a conversation or initiate another conversation?

- ✘ **Denying the problem:** A child expresses a feeling or observation about self or situation and the adult minimizes or communicates that it isn't really that way. Example:
 - ↳ Child - *"I don't feel good."*
 - ↳ Adult - *"You'll be OK."*
- ✘ **Blaming the child:** A child expresses a feeling or observation about self or situation and the adult communicates to the child that it's his/her own fault. Example:
 - ↳ Child - *"I hurt my knee."*
 - ↳ Adult - *"It's your own fault. You shouldn't be running."*
- ✘ **Solving the child's problem:** A child expresses a feeling or observation about self or situation and the adult communicates to the child what the child should do. This may not allow the child to talk more about how they feel and it implies that the adult is their real problem-solver and the child is helpless. Example:
 - ↳ Child - *"They won't play with me."*
 - ↳ Adult - *"Just stay here with me and help set the table."*
- ✘ **Interpreting:** A child expresses a feeling or observation about self or situation and the adult gives a diagnosis. This could cause uncomfortableness, feeling misunderstood, and add to the original problem. Example:
 - ↳ Child - *"I don't like to drink milk."*
 - ↳ Adult - *"Your mama is not feeding you right."*
- ✘ **Questioning:** A child expresses a feeling or observation about self or situation and the adult grills the child and as far as the child is concerned makes a bad situation worse. Example:
 - ↳ Child - *"They don't like me."*
 - ↳ Adult - *"Who said they didn't like you? What did you do to them?"*

✘ **Threatening:** A child expresses a feeling or observation about self or situation and the adult communicates to the child that there will be negative consequences. Example:

↳ Child - "He took the book I was reading."

↳ Adult - "If you hit him, I'm going to have to talk to your mom about that."

To develop communication skills with children will require the use of open-ended, other oriented responses. If we want children to talk to us we must provide an avenue of interest for the children and that is often themselves. Examples of responses that encourage children to talk about themselves would be:

✘ "You seem upset."

✘ "You think they don't like you."

✘ "Tell me about it."

✘ "Go on, I'm listening."

✘ "He took your book?"

Exercise 3		
21	<p>If I tell a child what their problem is, for example, "You feel left out since the new baby came home." This would be an example of</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Denying the Problem <input type="checkbox"/> Blaming the Child <input type="checkbox"/> Interpreting <input type="checkbox"/> Threatening
22	<p>If a child complains that another child hit him and I respond, "Go play at the computer table. You like that." This would be an example of</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Questioning <input type="checkbox"/> Solving the Problem <input type="checkbox"/> Interpreting <input type="checkbox"/> Threatening
23	<p>If a child tells me that others do not want to play with her, and I say, "That's because you hit them sometimes." This would be an example of</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Questioning <input type="checkbox"/> Solving the Problem <input type="checkbox"/> Interpreting <input type="checkbox"/> Blaming the Child