ecta Early Childhood
Technical Assistance Center

Accentuating Positive Child Interactions

Social emotional behavior begins with a child responding to adult interactions. These behaviors include an infant smiling in response to a familiar adult's face or cooing in response to hearing a caregiver's voice. Infants and toddlers learn to recognize social cues through interactions with adults. Adults support this by responding to child social cues and gestures and providing lots of opportunities for the child to engage in social play. Older toddlers use behavior such as holding a hand out to request "more" of something, or by saying "my turn" during a social play activity.

Watch a video of this guide

Promoting Children's Social Emotional Development

- Engaging children in everyday social play activities provide adults opportunities to watch the children and understand social emotional behavior the children are using. It also helps the adult identify the behavior she needs to teach the child to use.
- Social play activities include your-turn-my-turn interactions such as rolling a ball back and forth; joint attention activities with a child; following his lead during shared story book reading; and social games such as singing songs, finger plays, and pretend play.
- Be sure to identify how each child plays and responds to you and other adults during everyday interactions. Notice what makes the child smile and laugh. What does the child do to let you know she likes to engage in social interactions? Does she smile or clap her hands to let you know she likes playing pat-a-cake? Does he lead you by the hand to his favorite toy or activity?
- Respond in a positive manner when a child uses or tries to use a social behavior during any play activity. Be sure to smile and talk to the child to show her you are pleased with her behavior.

- Encourage children to participate in different types of social play activities so they have many opportunities to use their social behaviors.
- Facilitate children's use of different types of social behavior to begin and continue interactions during adult-child play activities. For example, you might begin a game of bouncing a toddler on your knee when she says "bounce" and by continuing the game when she laughs and squeals or says, "do it again".
- What behaviors do the children use to let you know they are happy, sad, or angry? Think about how you respond to the child. What are some ways you could encourage the child to participate in the social play? What behaviors will you teach the child to successfully participate in the social game?
- Remember that a caregiver's positive response is enjoyable and motivating for a child. This can be as simple as encouraging the child to wave hello and the teacher waving back, or giving a toddler a pat on the back when he turns the page during shared story book reading.

A Quick Peek

Ms. Tasha is a classroom teacher of older toddlers. She has observed an increase in children hitting and screaming over the past two weeks during play time. She notices the behavior most often when children want to play with the same toy. She decides to provide more opportunities during the day to teach the children turn-taking skills. For example, she shows two of the children in the class how to take turns feeding a baby doll rather than fighting over it. She begins inviting the children to participate in brief turn-taking activities throughout the day, such as passing a wand back and forth to blow bubbles. Eventually she notices children using more of the positive social behaviors she has been teaching them to use.

You'll know the practice is working if...

- Children are asking you to engage in social play activities
- Children are participating in different types of social play
- Children are excited about participating in social play

This practice guide is based upon the following *DEC Recommended Practices*: Interaction 1, 2, 4, 5
The DEC Recommended Practices are available at http://dec-sped.org/recommendedpractices

Access this practice guide and other products at http://ectacenter.org/decrp
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