

# Resource 5.

## Talking and Interacting With Children

How do you talk and interact with children every day?





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## Welcome

### What will you find in this document?

This resource will **help you reflect on your communication with the children in your program** and provide clear examples and ideas for enhancing that communication.

### Why is this information important?

One of the most important things you can do as an educator is to **build warm, trusting relationships with children in your program**, and communication is as a fundamental tool for nurturing such relationships.

### Guided Reflection Templates and Example

This templates will help you think about **how you communicate with children** in your program. You also will find an example of how an educator might plan communication with children in their program.



## Guided Reflection Template

Talking and interacting with children is one of the most powerful things you can do to help them learn and grow. Use the conversation and interaction ideas below to start thinking about how to talk more with children in your program to help them develop language and thinking skills.

### Conversation and Interaction Ideas

Tip: Consider exploring how to communicate with children of different ages. For example:

- **Have back-and-forth conversations with young children of all ages.** With infants, you can talk while they look at you or “babble” at you. With toddlers and preschoolers, you should try to have conversations where the child responds to you several times (with five or more exchanges between you and the child). To extend the conversation with the child, you can ask follow up questions or repeat what they say with extra details (for example, if the child asks for a ball, you can ask if they want blue ball or a red ball).
- **Use a mix of “big” words and simple words** to help teach children new vocabulary. For example, you could tell a toddler that the mud pie she made “looks delicious! I’d love to eat it!” as you pretend to eat it.
- **Ask open-ended questions** (such as questions starting with “Why...” or “How...”) to encourage children to explain their thinking or feelings, which can help them develop their language abilities and confidence over time. For example, if a dog is barking loudly outside, you could ask the child why they think the dog is barking. With older children, you can ask more open-ended follow-up questions to encourage them to share more details or think more deeply themselves. For example, you could ask a child how they feel about a recent move.
- **Share observations throughout the day** to model language for children. You can also ask children if they notice the same things you do and if they agree or disagree. For example, “That bird has blue wings – I think she’s flying to her babies. What do you think?”
- **Narrate what you think young children are doing, asking or sharing non-verbally.** For example, if you see an infant reaching towards a ball, you could say “It looks like you want that ball. I see you reaching for it. Do you want to play with it? Here, I can help you get it. It’s such a soft and squishy ball, I bet it will be fun to play with.” Or, you can help build children’s social-emotional skills by describing their emotions (such as “You look like you are sad – I see a big frown on your face. Are you upset because your dad had to leave? I understand, it’s ok to feel sad sometimes, even if you know that everything is going to be ok. I miss my family when I’m away from them too, but we can still have fun together today. Why don’t you come sit with me on the couch until you’re ready to play.”).




- **Use simple directions** to help make sure children understand. While hearing and practicing longer sentences and back-and-forth conversations can help children develop language skills, it can take a while for them to learn how to understand everything. When you are giving children directions, using simple and short language will help make sure they understand. Consider giving simple directions in a child’s home language to help improve their understanding.

One of the strategies that great teachers often use with young children is to have a “script” of talking points and questions ready to use with young children. Having a “script” to start from makes it easy to talk throughout the day and respond to children quickly even while you are busy and distracted doing other things. For example, if you know you will respond to a child sharing something about their home life with an affirmation and follow-up question (such as “Wow, that’s cool. Does your family have big parties every weekend or just some weekends.” or “That sounds like such a special event! Did it feel special to you? What did you like the most?”).




Check out this short video from the Head Start Center showing the simple ways you can talk with children to help them think and grow: <https://headstart.gov/video/engaging-children-conversations?redirect=eclkc>

**Complete the following table to add your ideas for how to start communication with children.** You can use the example on page 5 for ideas. Consider adding ways you might respond to children’s nonverbal communications (such as smiling or waving) and what kinds of back-and-forth conversation you might have.

 Type of talk or interaction	What would you say?
Have back-and-forth conversations with children.	
Use clear and positive language to remind children of rules and routines.	
Use language to acknowledge a child’s emotions (whether the emotions are positive or negative).	
Give children praise and encouragement for their efforts.	
Use language to help children resolve conflicts.	
Use clear language to give children consequences they can understand.	



 Type of talk or interaction	What would you say?
Ask children open-ended questions (and follow up questions, to extend their thinking)	
Provide opportunities for children to talk with you and with peers (including children who talk less than others).	
Ask children to tell you about their families, interests, feelings, and preferences (and respond with encouragement).	
Describe your everyday activities as you do them (such as talking about how you are putting snacks in a basket so that you can easily carry them outside).	
Share observations of the world around you (and children’s actions) throughout the day.	
Show affection through language and nonverbally through smiles, high fives, and other gestures.	



For an example of how to add your ideas for better communication with children, see the Example section.

Consider using the following opportunities to have one-on-one conversations with children:

- Use diapering and feeding times to encourage young children to use language (including babbles).
- Talk with children about what they are doing during independent or small group activities.
- Sit with children and have informal conversations about their families, likes, dislikes, and experiences during snack or mealtimes
- Use free choice time or outdoor play time as a chance to connect with individual children who speak less than others.



## Additional Resources




For more information on talking with children, check out these resources:

- **NAEYC's Big Questions:** <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/ideas-spark-rich-conversations-with-children>
- **Basic Tips Child Care Providers Can Use to Guide Children's Behavior:** <https://childcare.extension.org/basic-tips-child-care-providers-can-use-to-guide-childrens-behavior/>
- **20 Pre-K Conversation Starters:** <https://theearlychildhoodacademy.com/20-pre-k-conversation-starters/>
- **Tips for Using Words in Powerful Ways:** <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/using-words-powerful-ways>
- **How to Support Communication Skills:** <https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/how-to-support-your-childs-communication-skills/>
- **Videos** <https://eceresourcehub.org/ece-resource-hub/core-skills/communicate/>




## Example


### Conversation and Interaction Ideas

 Type of talk or interaction	What would you say?—Examples
<p>Have back-and-forth conversations with children.</p>	<p><i>Infants and toddlers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The child looks at you and smiles and babbles.</i></li> <li>• <i>You turn towards him and look at him and smile back. “Wow, you have a lot to say!”</i></li> <li>• <i>The child giggles and babbles back.</i></li> <li>• <i>You lift the child into the air as they giggle and babble and you bring him back and look at him and smile and say, “You were up high and now you’re here!” ...</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Preschoolers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Child: “I dropped my ball.”</i></li> <li>• <i>Adult: “Oh, you dropped your ball onto the ground. Did it bounce?”</i></li> <li>• <i>Child: “Yes, I bounced it high!”</i></li> <li>• <i>Adult: “Wow, you bounced it higher than you! How high can you bounce it?”</i></li> <li>• <i>Child: “I can bounce it to the sky!”...</i></li> </ul> <p><i>School-age:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Child: “I went to my grandfather’s on Sunday.”</i></li> <li>• <i>Adult: “Wow, that sounds like fun. What did you do together?”</i></li> <li>• <i>Child: “He’s sick so we watched YouTube.”</i></li> <li>• <i>Adult: “Really? I bet he liked watching videos with you. What did he like to watch?”</i></li> <li>• <i>Child: “He liked to watch the videos with the zoo animals splashing around.”</i></li> <li>• <i>Adult: “Oh, what kinds of animals?” ....</i></li> </ul>




 Type of talk or interaction	What would you say?—Examples
Use clear and positive language to remind children of rules and routines.	<p><i>Infants and toddlers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Remember, we use gentle hands when touching other people. Show me how you use gentle hands.”</li></ul> <p><i>Preschoolers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Remember, how do we get ready to go outside? We line up and walk slowly and carefully until we are off the stairs.”</li></ul> <p><i>School-age children:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Remember, if you are feeling upset, it is okay to go to the quiet area to calm down.</li><li>• “It is not okay to hide without telling me where you want to go because that is not safe.”</li></ul>
Use language to acknowledge a child’s emotions (whether the emotions are positive or negative).	<p><i>Infants and toddlers:</i></p> <p>“I see a big smile on your face! You look very happy. Are you happy today?”</p> <p><i>Preschoolers and school-age children:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “It can feel frustrating when you drop your snack on the floor. I feel frustrated when I drop my snack, too.”</li><li>• “How did you feel when your dad came to pick you up early yesterday? Were you excited?”</li></ul>
Give children praise and encouragement for their efforts.	<p><i>All ages:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Wow, you used so many different colors in your picture! I bet you worked hard on it.”</li></ul>
Use language to help children resolve conflicts.	<p><i>Infants and toddlers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Do you want to play with the ball, too? Sarah can play with this ball, and we can get another ball for you from the bin.”</li><li>• “Let’s pick out another ball together.”</li></ul> <p><i>Preschoolers and school-age children:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “If you want to play ball, wait until they are not throwing it and then ask one person if you can play. Perhaps ask Billy if you can play ball with him?”</li></ul>



 Type of talk or interaction	What would you say?—Examples
Use clear language to give children consequences they can understand.	<p><i>Infants and toddlers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “We do not throw our food or drinks because it makes a mess. Please help me clean up the mess you made.”</li><li>• “I see that all the markers are on the floor. Let’s put them on the table and then you can choose two or three markers to use to finish your picture.”</li></ul> <p><i>Preschoolers and school-age children:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “You can have the ball back when you are ready to use it safely. I need to know that you have had enough time to calm down. I will hold the ball for 3 minutes; then I will ask if you want it back.”</li><li>• “Great job using the scissors safely. Could you please remind Jen why we do not run with the scissors in our hands?”</li></ul>
Ask children open-ended questions (and follow up questions, to extend their thinking)	<p><i>Infants and toddlers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “You have on very warm clothes today! How does it feel to be so bundled up?”</li></ul> <p><i>Preschoolers and school-age children:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Who do you think will finish the race first? Why?”</li><li>• “How did you figure out how to fit all of those things in that tiny container?”</li></ul>
Provide opportunities for children to talk with you and with peers (including children who talk less than others).	<p><i>Infants and toddlers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “How do you think they feel?”</li><li>• “How big do you think it is?”</li></ul> <p><i>Preschoolers and school-age children:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “What do you think happened to . . .?”</li><li>• “Why do you think . . .?”</li></ul>
Ask children to tell you about their families, interests, feelings, and preferences (and respond with encouragement).	<p><i>Infants and toddlers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “We have markers, pencils, crayons, and chalk on the table. Do you want to start with the marker or the crayon?”</li><li>• “Which of these markers is your favorite color?”</li></ul> <p><i>Preschoolers and school-age children:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “You have apples and carrots in your lunch again today! Do you like apples and carrots?”</li><li>• “What fruits and vegetables do you like to eat for lunch? What fruits and vegetables does your family usually eat at home?”</li></ul>



 Type of talk or interaction	What would you say?—Examples
Describe your everyday activities as you do them (such as talking about how you are putting snacks in a basket so that you can easily carry them outside).	<p><i>All ages:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “It is clean-up time. Let’s put away the art supplies. I will put all the blue pens in the cups. I need help with the red and green pens. Thank you [NAME].”</li><li>• “Thank you all for helping me throw the paper pieces into the trash. There is a lot! If I use my whole arm I can sweep it straight into the basket.”</li></ul>
Share observations of the world around you (and children’s actions) throughout the day.	<p><i>Infants and toddlers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “It is very sunny and hot today! We do not need coats to keep us warm because it is already warm outside.”</li></ul> <p><i>Preschoolers and school-age children:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “The clouds in the sky are really white and bright today! I do not think there will be any rain because rain clouds are usually dark.”</li></ul>
Show affection through language and nonverbally through smiles, high fives, and other gestures.	<p><i>Infants and toddlers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Do you want to sit next to me today? I will help you get comfortable.”</li></ul> <p><i>Preschoolers and school-age children:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “You can sit next to me until you feel like playing again.”</li></ul>
Have back-and-forth conversations with children.	<p><i>All ages:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “You did a great job helping Mary with her shoes! Can I have a high five for being such a good helper and a nice friend?”</li></ul>