Social & Emotional Practices

Examples of relationship-based practices for working with families

Social and emotional development is the foundation for all learning and development. Research tells us that social and emotional development in the early years can impact many aspects of a child's life, including school, interpersonal relationships, and even his/her physical health as an adult. Remember, social and emotional development is about the child and parent* together. The National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) developed this tool to help practitioners, because practices that support the parent-child relationship support the child's social and emotional development.

Build a relationship with the parent

- Ask how the parent is doing, too.
- Listen – use empathic responses so the parent knows she is being heard.
- Ask about the family's typical routines, including what is working well and what is difficult.
- Try to understand the parent's goals/dreams and periodically inquire about them. Show that you care.

Support the parent's understanding of typical development

- Share examples of what is typical and what is not.
- Identify and celebrate the child's strengths – For example, "Wow! Look at how smoothly he picked up that Cheerio with his fingers!"
- Babies cry… discuss when crying is okay and that crying is how babies communicate.

Support the parent to better understand their child

- Observe and discuss the child's cues.
- Comment when the baby looks calmer when held by the parent: "She is so much happier in your arms…"
- Speak for the baby: "Thank you for picking me up! I needed some snuggles with you."
- Point out the child's actions and wonder together about why she might have taken those actions: "I wonder why she threw that cup down? I wonder what she is feeling?"
- Identify times when the child may need a break from interacting.
- Identify when the child does something well – such as when he is able to calm himself.
- Encourage the parent to make observations about their child.

Support the parent to respond to their child

- Point out and praise when the parent responds to their child's cues.
- "Wonder" with the parent: "I wonder how he would react if you held him facing you instead of facing out."
- Help the parent think of activities that will lead to interactions the parent and child will enjoy together.
- Encourage the parent to use routines to create predictability in the child's day.
- Discuss options for limit-setting for negative behaviors.
- Model the patience and compassion with the parent that you would like to see the parent provide to the child.
- Encourage the parent to comfort their child when the child needs comforting.

*"Parent" is used to represent all primary caregivers.

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