

Caregiver Responsive Strategies to Promote Social Engagement

Invite • Engage • Teach

GUIDE TO RESPONSIVE CAREGIVING STRATEGIES

While all children learn best when they are engaged in daily routines with people they know, some children learn best when they are allowed to lead during those interactions. When caregivers keep demands low, include the child's interests, focus on the child's sensory preferences, and follow the steps below, children have more chances to stay socially engaged in daily activities and learn.

STEPS TO HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN

1

Watch the cues your child uses to tell you what they like and don't like.

2

Use your child's cues to connect with your child in an activity they are already doing (without making demands, asking questions, or redirecting).

3

Invite your child into an activity or routine your child finds interesting in a way your child is going to find fun and exciting.

4

Use your child's cues to help you choose ways to **engage**, keep your child engaged, or re-engage your child in an activity.

5

Once your child is engaged, **teach** your child something new or help your child practice something they are learning.

Child Cues

Child cues are the ways your child shows you what they like and want to do. When your child uses a cue, your child is communicating with you and it's important to respond back immediately in a positive way. Which of the cues below does your child use to communicate and what does it mean?

Moving toward you

Making a sound, saying words, or using gestures

Looking at an object

Reaching for an object

Pointing at an object

Grabbing hold of your hand

Giving you something

Tapping or hitting you

Moving away from you

Closing eyes or looking away

Covering ears

Tensing body, or becoming rigid

Connect

Connect strategies are all the ways you can get your child to let you be near them. **Connect** strategies focus on teaching your child that you are fun and enjoyable to be around. Use your child's cues to determine if your strategies are drawing you and your child together or making child move away from you.

Do the following to **Connect** with your child in an activity they are doing:

- Observe your child's cues to see what they find interesting (see page 2).
- Notice your child preferred level of sounds, sights, textures, movements, or smells.
- Share the same space without making demands.
- Make fun sounds or imitate your child's sounds.
- Join in without redirecting your child's activity.
- Imitate your child's action.
- Acknowledge what your child is showing you.
- Let your child control the activity.
- Smile at your child and avoid demanding eye contact.
- Match your tone of voice to your child's tone.
- Notice when and how your child is attempting to communicate.
- Minimize your use of language and keep it simple.
- Respond to your child's behavioral cues.
- _____
- _____

Invite

When your child is comfortable with you joining in their activities, use **Invite** strategies to encourage social engagement in other activities your child enjoys.

Try the following to *Invite* your child into an activity or routine that interests them:

- Identify the parts of the activity that your child might find interesting and enjoyable.
- Move to be near your child.
- Use the sounds, sights, textures, movements, or smells your child likes to draw your child into the activity.
- Position yourself so you and your child can be face-to-face as much as possible.
- Respond immediately and positively to your child's attempts to interact.
- Follow your child's lead in the activity and do the same thing they are doing.
- Make comments to your child that acknowledge their interests.
- Show your child something they are interested in.
- Keep your language simple and match your child's pace.
- Avoid redirecting your child's interest in the activity.
- Avoid asking your child questions so that you don't redirect your child.
- Be aware of your child's motivation for engaging in the activity.
- Match your child's energy levels.
- Limit competing interests and distractions.
- _____
- _____

Engage

Engage strategies are all the ways you can keep your child socially involved in an activity.

Try these *Engage* strategies:

- Stay face-to-face to be available to make eye-contact with your child.
- Follow your child's lead – let your child choose what they enjoy.
- Be animated with your voice and gestures (make them fun, do something unexpected).
- Use pointing and other nonverbal gestures with vocal communication.
- Respond to all your child's vocalizations, facial expressions, and gestures as if your child is trying to communicate with you.
- Match your interaction style to match your child's interaction (excited/quiet).
- Use wait time and watch for how your child is engaging with you.
- Plan when to offer your child a turn and wait.
- Balance turn-taking and interactions.
- Use simple words to identify your child's actions, feelings, and intentions that match your child's language.
- Use the sounds, sights, textures, movements, or smells your child likes to keep your child interested in the activity.
- Listen until your child is finished telling you things.
- Help your child with the most frustrating parts of the activity.
- Let your child know when they have been successful.
- Repeat activities your child enjoys and include **their interests**.
- Imitate or mirror your child's actions and vocalizations to keep the interaction going. Keep repeated activities predictable (same steps, order, gestures).
- Remember what sounds, sights, textures, movements, or smells your child likes or doesn't like.
- Let your child use the materials any way they want.
- Observe all the ways your child is communicating with you and communicate back.
- _____
- _____

Teach

Teach strategies are the ways you can help your child practice what he or she knows and learn new social skills.

Some *Teach* strategies you can try are:

- Add new activities that let your child practice making eye contact with you.
- Create opportunities for your child to get your attention.
- Start and wait for your child to respond to practice making eye contact and taking turns.
- Continue your child's successful social interactions to make them last longer.
- Use effective prompts that can be faded over time (hand over or hand under support/tapping your child's shoulder/rubbing your child's back)
- Use your child's **interests** to help them increase their gestures and words in interactions with you.
- Keep the activity fun for your child by being playful.
- Pause and make eye contact with your child before showing your child new ways to do things.
- Consider using objects that you can control, that your child finds **interesting**, and that bring your child close to you (bubbles, pillows, pots and wooden spoons, etc.).
- Increase how often your child is a part of group social activities they like to do.
- Exaggerate your gestures and actions to encourage your child to watch you.
- Help your child as much as needed in social activities to learn making eye contact and decrease your help as your child becomes more successful.
- Slowly increase the social activities your child participates in help them feel comfortable interacting with others.
- Have your child make a request during the activity.
- Playfully get in your child's way to encourage interaction and communication.
- Take turns in the activity and keep it going.
- Prompt or model to teach your child a new skill within the activity.
- Put words to your child's interests and emotions.
- Other _____
- Other _____