



Possibilities

Early Childhood Inclusion

Institute for Disability Studies - Project PREPARE
Mississippi's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities

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PREPARE Essentials

Project PREPARE staff members hope that each person who reads this newsletter will have a better understanding of the importance of providing high quality early experiences for young children. Early experiences, whether positive or negative, have the potential to affect a young child's brain development and thus impact developmental outcomes. Early experiences affect the quality and the rate of development of skills a child will need for life such as walking, eating, getting along with others, problem-solving and self-regulation.

Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers spend many of their waking hours in child care while their parents are working or attending school. It is extremely important that the care children receive encourages healthy growth and development. Children need to have stimulating experiences with adults, other children and the environment. Healthy brain development is dependent on a child's experiences within a warm, caring environment where there is a trusted adult. For example, we know that babies need to be talked to and played with throughout the day to form a secure attachment with their caregiver. A warm and caring provider sets the stage for reciprocal interactions between the baby and the caregiver. These interactions are essential for communication, language and social development. Babies and toddlers feel secure when in the presence of a responsive caregiver. Feelings of security provide young children the confidence they need

to fully explore their environment. This exploration is fundamental to intellectual and motor development. Thus, healthy brain development is dependent on the quality of care a young child receives.

Child care professionals provide for the health, safety and nutritional needs of children they serve. High quality child care, however, provides much more than basic child care needs. In a high quality program, children are exposed to many rich experiences. Children are talked to, read to, and sang with; adults read the cues of the children in their care and respond appropriately to the needs of the child; exploration of the environment and play with adults and peers is encouraged; and the environment is structured and consistent routines are established to teach children appropriate behavior. All of these experiences attribute to better outcomes for young children in child care.

Training Opportunities

Project PREPARE staff members will lead a session for Voices for Mississippi's Children in Choctaw on July 20th. The session title is "Reaching and Teaching ALL Children: Inclusion." For more information about attending the conference, please contact Jamila Taylor or Tawanna Austin at 662.320.4171.

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Web Site Spotlight

Better Brains for Babies (BBB) Initiative

<http://www.fcs.uga.edu/ext/bbb/>

Better Brains for Babies (BBB) is dedicated to promoting awareness and education about the importance of early brain development in the healthy growth and development of infants and young children. BBB shares research on brain development and information on fact sheets, resources and additional Web sites through the “What You Need to Know” and the “What Information is Available” links on their Web site.

A Perspective of Interaction

Contributed by Alicia Westbrook, Early Intervention Specialist, The University of Southern Mississippi Institute for Disability Studies

As an early interventionist, I work with young children with developmental delays who are enrolled in childcare. I strive to provide quality care and education for each child that I serve. Early education begins with the development of positive and interactive relationships with children. When relationships are strong, teacher/child interactions will be meaningful and engagement with the child will last longer. My goal is to encourage all teachers to be interactive and engaged play partners so learning can take place! Here are some things to think about:



- Before I can think about “teaching” I must first build a relationship. Relationships are the foundation for all learning. One way I build relationships with all children, including those with developmental delays, is to follow their lead. This is a principle that really does take practice. When adults follow a child’s lead they are showing the child that his/her actions are important and that he/she is respected. By following a child’s lead, you are opening the door to a relationship. When playing with children, teachers have a goal in mind for the child to meet. To achieve that goal, however, we have to have a relationship and to build a relationship, we follow the child’s lead. Following a child’s lead and joining in their play requires flexibility in the classroom. When you follow a child’s lead, you become able to read the child’s cues which allows for better interaction.
- Next, I always use “affect” when interacting with children. This means my facial expressions and voice reflect what I’m saying and feeling. During play, children are more likely to engage with you when your affect matches your language. For example, while playing in dramatic play, I use high affect (big eyes, bright smile,

silly voice) when asking questions such as: “You make the BEST breakfast, can I have some more?” Affect can also be used to calm a child who becomes upset in a noisy room. Using affect (inviting look on face, quietly, and secretly), I might say: “I wonder if it’s too loud and we should go some place quiet.” These are two examples of how a teacher can use affect to engage children in interactions. Many times, you don’t even have to use language, just a facial expression can be engaging. My rule of thumb is that the more enticing I can make myself, the more the child will want to engage with me.

- Another strategy I use is to establish a continuous back and forth interaction with the child. By doing this, I can expand on the child’s language and ask questions that encourage more thought or clarification. I go beyond asking children to recall information and I engage them in higher level thinking. For children who are non-verbal, I will expand their actions and keep them engaged through shared attention.
- Other ways to encourage a continuous flow is through playful obstruction. If you playfully block the child’s way or pretend like you don’t know what the child wants you to do. To get a response from you, the child will have to engage with you. There are a lot of ways to keep children engaged, so just use your imagination! I encourage teachers to truly embrace their ability to encourage children to open and close circles of communication.

For more information about including children with disabilities in your program, please contact Ann Henson at 601.331.7369 or visit www.usm.edu/ids/prepare. You may also call us toll free at 1.888.671.0051.

Getting Started

Child care providers should try to find creative ways to share helpful information with parents. One way to communicate with parents is through sending information home in the form of a letter. Parents need to know why it is important for children to play and how play contributes to the development of skills that will help their child succeed later in school. Often, parents may be looking for “educational” activities such as worksheets and structured group lessons with



children seated at desks. These childcare center activities are not age-appropriate for preschool children. Following is a sample letter that child care centers could send home to educate parents on best practices in early childhood education.

For more information about why we discourage worksheet usage, visit <http://www.acei.org/worksheets.pdf>

Dear Parents,

We are so excited that your child has enrolled at our child care center. Our goal is to help your child develop to his full potential. We strive to provide activities that are developmentally appropriate for young children.

At our center you will not see us using worksheets because research has proven that young children learn best through concrete experiences that occur during play. Therefore, you will see your child actively engaging in play activities throughout the day. While playing, your child is learning how to get along with peers, how to problem-solve, new language skills and large and small muscle development.

Young children are not ready to sit still for an extended period of time. Therefore, you will not see us sitting at tables for long periods of time or sitting in groups for more than 15 to 20 minutes at a time. We provide both large and small group activities for short periods of time so that children will become and remain engaged. During group times, children will be introduced to new concepts and will be actively engaged with books, nursery rhymes, finger plays and music movement.

We look forward to helping your child with his development. We will communicate with you about how your child is learning in the following ways:

- send home samples of your child's work weekly
- send home weekly information related to our theme and what our goals are for the activities we will be doing
- send home extension activities for you and your child to do at home with information about what they will learn from the activity

If you have any questions about our philosophy, please let us know.
Sincerely,

Child Care Director

Resource Room

Listed below are some practical ideas that are easy to do. Each bullet provides a suggestion for facilitating interactions that lead to healthy relationships with young children. When doing each of these activities, you are stimulating little brains. That is something to get excited about!

Infant Room Ideas

- Pause and wait for an infant to respond to you when talking to them. If they do not respond initially, talk back to them and wait for them to take a turn.
- Hold an infant while giving them their bottle even after they are able to hold their bottle independently. These warm experiences foster relationships and security.

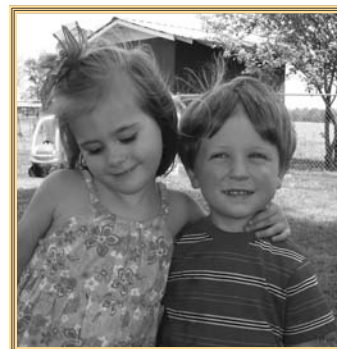
- Provide safe toys that children can explore and manipulate. Cause effect toys (the toy responds to a child's action such as pushing a button) should be accessible as well as a variety of sturdy books.

Toddler Room Ideas

- Use words to describe children's emotions. "I see that you are sad that Daddy had to leave."
- When reading with toddlers, place the child in your lap or have them sit next to you. It works best to read to a toddler individually or to only two or three toddlers at one time. A toddler's attention span is limited and they are easily distracted in larger groups.

Preschool Ideas

- Within your learning centers, provide toys that encourage children to use their imagination. Sometimes flashy toys require the toy maker to be creative but do not allow for creative play for the children. Simple toys that can be used in a variety of ways are often a better option.
- All children need to play in well equipped learning centers. Observe and make note of a child's interests. Follow the child's lead and join in their play by becoming a character or partner. After playing at the same level as the child, introduce a slightly more complex level of play.
- During circle time, play memory games with the children. Encourage them to remember events and experiences from yesterday or even from the last week. Discussing the weather and/or discussing activities from the previous day are suggestions.
- Ask open-ended questions that allow children to think about problems and offer solutions. "If we do _____ what do you think would happen?"
- Exercise is a good stress reliever and helps to build active, healthy bodies and minds. Encourage children to run, jump, climb and swing.



Problem Solving

Do you have a child that you have difficulty understanding?

Do you have a child that does not follow instructions?

Do you have a child who is having attention or behavioral problems?

Please contact Ann Henson at 601.331.7369 or visit us at www.usm.edu/ids/prepare to request free assistance. You may also call us toll free at 1.888.671.0051.

Please share this and future editions of *Possibilities* with all child care professionals at your center.

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To subscribe or to submit materials (pictures, articles, etc.) for consideration, contact Kristie Bowlin at 662.397.1902 or Kristie.Bowlin@usm.edu.

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