

Let's talk about...Interactions
By Lois Gamble

Research repeatedly shows the importance of **interactions** to positive outcomes for children. Dr. T. Berry Brazelton has described the teacher/child interaction as a 'synchronized dance'...a respectful, responsive, reciprocal relationship. The child is the initiator; the caregiver responds in a way that meets the child's needs at that particular moment.

A system created by Dr. Sydney Schwartz at Queens College in New York and later expanded by Carol Keyes, Professor of Education, Pace University in New York identifies categories of teacher behaviors in interactions with children. They are:

- Stopping – The adult halts or limits a child's action verbally or non-verbally. "Don't throw the ball" or the teacher takes the ball away from child.
- Changing – The adult redirects the child through verbal means, directions or materials to a new activity or behavior. "Roll the ball to me."
- Sustaining – The adult may make a neutral comment, a brief response, or participate without influence. "Jimmy is rolling the ball to Karen."
- Extending – The adult extends or expands a child's activity by giving information, challenging or adding new materials. "Here is a basket; can you roll the ball into the basket?"

There is not a 'right amount' of any of the responses. All may be appropriate at times during a day. However, optimal development is dependent upon sustaining and extending responses.

Stopping and changing may occur more in the early year when teachers and children are adjusting to each other and to the new classroom. As the year progresses, stopping and changing responses should diminish and more time spent in interactions that are sustaining and extending.

A classroom teacher can monitor himself or herself and/or the director can observe and record the number and types of teacher behaviors.

1. List the four categories and description on a notepad
2. Observe teacher-child interactions for 5 minutes
3. Place a mark beside the appropriate category with each teacher behavior

Thoughts for discussion:

Are the behaviors of the teacher consistent with his/her own goals? The center's goals?

- Sustaining behaviors encourage developing social skills, creativity and exploration
- Extending behaviors encourage language, promote thinking and the acquisition of knowledge
- Stopping and Changing do none of the above. Excessive use of these categories can be damaging to a child's emotional health.

Children need consistent relationships with caring adults in protective and safe environments. Children need to be greeted upon arrival, assisted into the group setting, and comforted when upset. They need meaningful conversation with adults who listen attentively and respond to their ideas.

Children need adults who acknowledge and put a name to feelings, adults who demonstrate affection by appropriate touching, smiling and speaking in a calm, caring voice, adults who keep promises and are regular in attendance and on time.

NAC Standards require that

- Teachers demonstrate behaviors that encourage the children's development of trust.
- Teachers have frequent, positive interactions with children.
- Teachers are responsive to children.

Teachers demonstrate their intent to meet children's needs by lowering to the child's eye-level when speaking to individual child, treating all children with equal consideration and providing an emotionally safe and reliable environment.