Caregiver Practices to Support Infant-Toddler Social Emotional Development

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The purpose of family-centered coaching in early intervention is to support caregivers in implementing strategies and practices that enhance their child's social emotional development. This handout outlines the caregiving practices that lead to healthy social emotional outcomes for infants and toddlers. Early interventionists also might use this handout as a resource when engaged in joint planning with caregivers.

Responsive Communication

- Frequently talks with their child
- Responds to child initiations
- Comments on child's interests, activities, or action
- Imitates child's vocalizations and actions
- Pauses during back and forth interactions to allow child to take a turn
- Expands on child's vocalizations and actions by adding words or information
- Waits, watches, and joins child's play by following child's lead and matching their focus of attention or interest
- Listens and responds to child's communication (including nonverbal communication) by matching their focus of attention or interest
- Comments positively and descriptively to reinforce child's communicative attempts
- Uses multiple pathways (e.g., ASL, visual supports, or use of family's preferred language) to communicate with child who may be non-verbal, have language delays or dual-language learner

Responsive Interactions

- Uses a positive and supportive tone with child during a variety of child's emotional responses (e.g., calm, happy, excited, sad, scared, frustrated)
- Finds ways to position self at child's level during interactions
- Makes eye contact, or smiles to connect with child
- Shows physical affection toward their child
- Demonstrates genuine interest, and positive attention when matching and joining child's focus of attention during play and other activities
- Responds in a timely manner when child experiences distress

Supporting Positive Social Interactions with Others

- Remains available or in close proximity during interactions with peers, siblings, or new adults
- Encourages child to initiate or respond during interactions with others
- Models social skills (e.g., greetings, sharing, gentle touches, using words or gestures)
- Comments to help child understand others' intentions (e.g., "Charlie took a block because he wants to play blocks too.")
- Offers comfort when negative interactions occur with peers or siblings
- Comments positively and descriptively when child engages in positive interactions with others
- Helps toddlers begin to work cooperatively with others (e.g., help clean up, build a tower of blocks together)

Encouraging Child's Active Engagement during Activities, Routines and Transitions

Note: Caregivers may use multiple strategies such as modeling language or interaction with materials, physical support to interact with objects as needed, novelty, facial expressions, tone of voice, etc.

**Level of engagement/independence may vary based on families' cultural values and beliefs*

- Establishes predictable routines and activities
- Makes positive and varied attempts to initiate child's engagement in an activity or interaction
- Engages child with materials and activities that are appropriate for the child's development and understanding
- Uses a variety of strategies to help child engage with materials or in routines or activities
- Uses a variety of strategies to help child engage in multiple back and forth interactions

- Comments positively and descriptively when child is engaged in activities or with materials

- Provides toddlers with opportunities to make choices during activities, routines, or transitions

- Responsive to child's individual needs within routines and activities (e.g., stops play to change a diaper or responds to cues child is tired and needs rest)

- Provides language and support in response to child's cue they are ready to transition to a new idea or activity

- Uses additional supports (e.g., timers, verbal, or visual cues, physical prompts) as needed to support transitions. (Visual cues may also include holding up objects such as a bottle or diaper to indicate what is happening next.)

- Balances providing support to toddlers with opportunities for independence during activities and routines

- Verbally and/or visually communicates what is happening prior to and during a routine or activity (e.g., "I am going to lay you down so I can change your diaper.")

Teaching Emotions

- Uses emotion words during activities and routines

- Labels child's feelings and expresses empathy and understanding of those feelings

- Matches affect to child's affect during interactions

- Labels their own feelings and models self-regulation actions (e.g., breathing or counting, this includes taking deep breaths when comforting an infant)

- Poses "dilemmas" and ways to solve them for toddlers during activities and routines

- Uses challenging situations as an opportunity to help toddlers recognize emotions and self- or co-regulate

- Uses skills and strategies to regulate their own emotions

Communicating Developmentally Appropriate Expectations

- Expectations are appropriate and based on child's individual development

- Uses positive language to let toddlers know what to do during specific routines and activities

- Uses modeling to demonstrate expectations during specific routines/activities

- Comments positively and descriptively to toddlers about their appropriate behavior related to expectations

- Uses simple words and phrases with toddlers to explain natural consequences of behavior or to provide feedback when behavior does not meet expectations (e.g., "hitting hurts me")

Responding to Child's Distress and Challenging Behavior

- Remains calm and supportive when child is experiencing distress or engaging in challenging behavior

- Provides frequent positive attention and comments during moments when toddler is behaving appropriately

- Provides positive attention when toddler has calmed down and is behaving appropriately after engaging in challenging behavior

- Helps toddlers who are angry or upset identify the problem and respond with a solution when appropriate

- Uses redirection or planned ignoring in response to toddler's challenging behavior

- Anticipates when problems may occur and has strategies in place to support child (e.g., organized play space, removal of item that typically links to the behavior, provides extra snacks during outings)

- Links natural consequences to challenging behavior (e.g., child throws a toy, caregiver removes toy)

- Provides opportunities for child to practice new and age appropriate skills in place of challenging behavior (e.g., communication skills, safe space to calm down, gentle hands)

Sources

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