

Everyday Interactions Matter: Family Engagement Activities



CONNECTION

Name and Notice Moments

GOAL

Build connection through presence and attunement.

WHAT TO DO

Encourage families to **gently narrate what their child is doing**, using their name often: “Jayden, you’re kicking your feet! I see you stretching so big!” This kind of interaction helps babies feel seen, safe, and connected.

Face-to-Face Talk Time

GOAL

Strengthen emotional bonding and early communication.

WHAT TO DO

Invite caregivers to **spend a few minutes each day at eye level**, making faces, smiling, and having a back-and-forth “conversation” with coos, giggles, or words. Babies learn turn-taking and emotional cues from this kind of warm, responsive play.

Gentle Movement

GOAL

Deepen physical and emotional closeness.

WHAT TO DO

Suggest that caregivers **slow down during routines** like diapering, feeding, or dressing, using **gentle touch and soothing voices**: “I’m holding your foot now. I’m putting on your cozy sock. You’re warm and safe.” These moments become powerful chances to connect.

Sing While You Do

GOAL

Connect through rhythm and repetition.

WHAT TO DO

Encourage families to **sing or hum during daily routines**, even if it’s made-up songs like: “Washing your hands, washing your hands, splash splash splash!” Singing adds predictability, comfort, and shared joy—especially for non-verbal children.

“I See You” Time

GOAL

Focus on being with rather than doing for.

WHAT TO DO

Recommend families take 3–5 minutes a day to just sit quietly with their child, observing and noticing them without distractions. “You’re watching the light on the wall... I see you’re so curious.” This helps caregivers slow down and be fully present, which nurtures attachment.

RECIPROCITY

“Serve and Return” Conversations

GOAL

This builds turn-taking and strengthens communication skills. It helps children understand that their actions and words are important and that communication is a shared experience.

WHAT TO DO

During daily routines or playtime, encourage families to respond to their child’s cues (cooing, babbling, gestures, or eye contact). For example, if the child reaches for a toy or makes a sound, the parent can respond with a word or smile, and then wait for the child to react or respond again.

Back-and-Forth Play

GOAL

The goal is to help the child learn the flow of interaction and develop a sense of being understood and responded to, which fosters secure attachment.

WHAT TO DO

Encourage families to engage in simple, interactive play that invites back-and-forth exchanges, like peek-a-boo, clapping games, or gently rolling a ball to each other. These activities allow for the child to actively participate and “respond” to their caregiver.

Reflecting Feelings

GOAL

This builds emotional literacy and validates the child's feelings, showing them that their emotions matter and can be shared in a safe, responsive environment.

WHAT TO DO

Encourage families to reflect back their child's emotions by responding with understanding. For example, if the child shows excitement (smiling or clapping), the parent can say, "You're so happy! I see you're excited!" Or if the child is upset, the parent can say, "You're feeling sad. I'm here with you."

Responsive Reading

GOAL

This reinforces the idea of reciprocal communication in an enjoyable way and helps children associate books with interaction and learning.

WHAT TO DO

Encourage families to read interactive books or simple stories with their child. As they read, the parent should pause to let the child engage. This might be pointing to pictures, making a sound, or babbling. The parent can then respond to the child's interaction by asking questions like, "What's that?" or simply naming the picture.



Model Inclusive Language

GOAL

Encourage acceptance and understanding of differences through daily interactions.

WHAT TO DO

Encourage families to use inclusive language when talking about others, especially when referring to children with different abilities, cultures, or backgrounds. For example, instead of saying "normal," use terms like "different" or "unique." "Everyone is special in their own way. Look at how this person uses a wheelchair to move!"

Introduce Diverse Books and Stories

GOAL

Promote empathy and respect for others.

WHAT TO DO

Suggest that families choose books or stories with **characters of different backgrounds, abilities, and cultures**. Ask families to read these books together and **talk about the characters' experiences** and feelings. "This book shows a child using sign language to talk with their friends. How do you think they feel when they can communicate like that?"

Inclusive Play Activities

GOAL

Support the understanding that everyone belongs, regardless of differences.

WHAT TO DO

Encourage families to create opportunities for **inclusive play** by involving children in group activities that emphasize working together. For example, playing with toys that can be shared, like blocks or dolls of different races and abilities. "Let's all build a house with blocks! You can help by stacking the red ones while I put the blue ones together."

Celebrate Family Traditions and Cultures

GOAL

Foster a sense of belonging for every child.

WHAT TO DO

Suggest that families share their own cultural traditions, family celebrations, or everyday practices with their child. Invite families to talk about these traditions, and if comfortable, share with the group. "In my family, we celebrate Diwali, where we light candles and share sweets with our neighbors."

Respectful Interactions with Others

GOAL

Encourage respect for others' needs and perspectives.

WHAT TO DO

Encourage families to **model respectful behavior** when interacting with others, especially those with disabilities or different needs. Parents can demonstrate how to **ask for help**, use adaptive tools, or communicate in different ways. "It's okay to ask for help when we need it! If someone has a wheelchair, we can make sure to give them extra space to move."



Foster Curiosity Through Exploration

GOAL

Support your child's natural curiosity and encourage active learning.

WHAT TO DO

Encourage families to create opportunities for exploration by letting their child safely explore their environment. This can include crawling, touching different textures, or even exploring nature during walks. Parents can say things like, "Look at the leaf! It's green and crunchy!" "Let's see what happens when you roll the ball down the hill. It's going so fast!"

Encourage Problem-Solving Through Play

GOAL

Support early cognitive development and problem-solving skills.

WHAT TO DO

Suggest that families engage in simple problem-solving play with their child, like stacking blocks, fitting shapes into a puzzle, or opening containers. Parents can encourage trial and error, saying, "Can you figure out how to put the square in the square hole?" "Let's see if we can fit this block inside the box. What happens if we try it this way?"

Promote Social-Emotional Development

GOAL

Encourage the development of empathy, sharing, and self-regulation.

WHAT TO DO

Encourage families to model emotion-sharing by expressing their own emotions and encouraging the child to do the same. For example, a parent can say, "I'm feeling happy because we're playing together. How are you feeling?" "I can see you're upset. Let's take a deep breath together to feel better."

Support Language Development

GOAL

Encourage language skills through everyday interactions.

WHAT TO DO

Suggest families narrate their actions throughout the day and engage in conversations, even if the child is not yet talking. For example, while getting dressed, a parent can say, "Now we're putting on your shoes! One shoe, two shoes!" "We're going to the store. Can you see the apples? I'm putting them in the basket. Apples are red and green!"

Encourage Physical Development

GOAL

Promote motor skills development through movement.

WHAT TO DO

Suggest simple, safe activities that help build gross and fine motor skills like tummy time, crawling, or playing with textured objects to help develop hand-eye coordination. Caregivers can gently support the child's movement and say things like, "You're moving so fast! Let's see if you can crawl over to the toy!" "Can you stand up and reach for the toy? You're doing great!"

