

# Nurturing Children's Engagement

## What is child engagement?

Educators build and maintain relationships with children through their daily interactions with them. Child engagement happens when educators join children in play, have conversations with children, provide positive descriptive feedback, and give children positive time and attention. Through these positive interactions, adults are strengthening relationships with the children in their care. Engagement with children can occur anytime throughout the day and is essential for all children.



## Why is engaging with children important?

Building and sustaining responsive and nurturing relationships with children promotes the development of their social and emotional skills and reduces challenging behaviour. These relationships become the foundation that supports all learning – social, emotional, and cognitive development. When educators notice and respond to a child's efforts to express their thoughts and listen to others, it nurtures a sense of belonging for that child.

Positive relationships with families and colleagues are also critical. It is important to share information with families so they can support the social-emotional development of their child at home. When a positive relationship has been built with families, it makes it easier to discuss any challenging behaviour that may occur. Positive

relationships among colleagues provide a model for social interactions and emotional regulation.

## Creating an environment that supports child-adult engagement:

- Greet children by name as they arrive at your room or play area. Be genuinely happy or excited to see them.
- Use a warm, responsive tone, make eye contact, and smile in interactions with children.
- Listen and respond to children's stories, activities, actions, or attempts to communicate (both verbal and non-verbal).

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- Have brief conversations with children throughout the day.
- Join in children's play to expand their interactions and ideas with other children.
- Frequently provide positive feedback to children who are following expectations and engaged in activities.
- Provide individual assistance to help children maintain interactions with their peers.
- Position yourself at eye level and in close proximity with children to guide, nurture, model, and facilitate children's learning.

## Materials to support engagement:

Providing a variety of materials (i.e., natural, purchased, loose parts, and recycled objects) supports creativity and learning. Children use materials to express their feelings, thoughts, and ideas as they explore, imagine, create, and invent with them. When children are engaging with materials, they

have sustained focus and are using them in purposeful ways.

As children engage with these materials, they provide peers and adults with an understanding of family and cultural practices and traditions. As educators observe, document, and participate in play, they gain knowledge of what children are thinking and feeling.

Provided materials could be classified as “mirrors” and “windows” and both should be present. “Mirror” materials are those that reflect a child's life outside of the center – their families, interests, and cultures. By providing mirror materials, children feel a sense of belonging and know they are important to their educators. “Window” materials are those that offer new understandings and experiences. By providing window materials, children learn new skills, develop new interests, and gain a deeper understanding of other families and cultures.

A variety of materials should be provided which both reflect child's own interests,



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families, and cultures while also providing opportunities to learn new skills, develop new interests, and give a deeper understanding of other families and cultures.

## Creating an environment that supports children in engaging with materials:

- Ensure children can access a variety of toys, materials, and books on their own.
- Materials are age-appropriate, a mix of open-ended and closed-ended objects/toys and include cultural items.
- Bins and baskets are labelled with words and pictures so children can easily find items.
- Provide children with multiple opportunities to make choices within activities and routines.
- Provide attention and positive feedback for children engaged in activities and with materials.

- Educators offer general guidance to children to select activities or use materials to promote engagement. Educators assist individual children in choosing activities, if needed.

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## References

- Hemmeter, M.L., Ostrosky, M.M., & Fox L. (2021). *Unpacking the pyramid model: A practical guide for preschool teachers*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co. Retrieved from: <https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/index.html>
- Makovichuk, L., Hewes, J., Lirette, P., & Thomas, N. (2014). *Flight: Alberta's early learning and care framework*. <https://flightframework.ca/downloads/Flight%20Framework%20Document%20F.pdf>

## Helpful Resources for Educators

### Extension Alliance for Better Child Care

Helpful things to consider when choosing toys and materials for childcare: <https://childcare.extension.org/things-to-consider-when-choosing-toys-and-materials-for-child-care/>

### Fairy Dust Teaching

Numerous articles about incorporating loose parts and natural materials as well as photo examples of engaging environments: <https://fairydustteaching.com/reggio-category/>

### Providence Children: Pathways to Success

Connection Before Redirection - a tip sheet to support a child's emotional development. <https://www.providencechildren.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/supporting-a-childs-emotions.pdf>