

Ideas for Using Dyadic Strategies with Young Children

I. Setting the Stage

- A.** Establish “routines,” either within the interaction itself or over time; infants love repetition, and it helps them to anticipate and to gain control over their environments. Routines also provide a familiar setting in which adults can gradually pull back and let infants take a leadership role.
- ★ Younger ages- routines might consist of nonsense games or familiar games with much repetition of sound, facial expression or tactile or kinesthetic stimulation. “So big” and “peek-a-boo” are good examples.
 - ★ Older ages routines could be continuations of games played at younger ages, or could be established around familiar household routines such as bedtime or bath time.
- B.** Position yourself so that the infant can establish mutual gaze, and so that you can help the infant control any objects that s/he may be playing with.
- ★ Younger ages- much play is without objects, and occurs in a face-to-face position; when using objects, the adult can use facial expression and vocalization as elements of surprise and variation, being careful not to distract the infant’s attention from the object.
 - ★ Older ages- play that occurs without objects will still be in a face-to-face position. When toys are involved the adult should be positioned so as to be easily available to the infant should the infant attempt to establish mutual gaze or if help is needed in controlling objects. In cases where the object is part of a turn-taking game (rolling a ball or building/knocking down), the adult should be positioned so as to easily take his/her role as well as to allow mutual gaze.
- C.** Provide objects and toys that are appropriate to the child’s levels of development.

II. Regulating Attention and Involvement

- A.** Make yourself into an interesting partner- use “theme and variation,” inserting into your interactive routines as elements of surprise: exaggerate your facial expression, your voice; change your pace, slowing down or speeding up.
- B.** Be sensitive to the child’s moods- change your level of intensity or involvement based on what they child’s body language tells you; pace yourself to match the child’s pace.
- ★ Younger ages- infants will use body language such as looking away or yawning when they are getting too much stimulation: slow down, back away and wait— the baby will look back to you when s/he is ready to be engaged again. Infants also get bored with doing the same things; watch for signs of fussiness, and use a new strategy.

- ★ Older ages- again, watch for cues from the child: fussiness, boredom, frustration, all call for a change. A change of toy, demonstration of different way to use a toy, asking a different type of question, using nonsense/surprise—all will capture the child again.

III. Establishing Mutuality or Topic Sharing

A. Watch the child; determine what s/he is attending to, when, and join that focus of attention.

- ★ Younger ages- the focus of attention may be you; a little later, the child also will become very interested in the world around him. Watch where s/he is looking, and comment on that focus of attention. You can join the child's vocal play by waiting and then imitating.
- ★ Older ages- with the slightly older child, you can establish mutuality by taking a role in the child's play; by commenting on what they child is doing (parallel talk); or by demonstrating a new action using the same toys and commenting on your own play (self talk). The latter should be used only for expanding what they child is already doing, or, if the child is not doing anything constructive, to demonstrate an appropriate way to use the toy.

At both ages, the key is to WAIT AND RESPOND; if the child doesn't give you anything to respond to, then PROMPT, WAIT, AND RESPOND.

B. Respond to initiations; treat looks, vocalizations, touches, and movements as initiations.

C. Elaborate or extend the child's language. Engage the child in conversation.

IV. Establish Turn-Taking Sequences

A. Wait and respond, then expand these turns into a longer sequence. Once this gets going, violate the turns by throwing in some element of novelty: use a new sound, use a new rhythm, put a different toy in the container or put the same toy in a different container. Imitation is often a good way to start a turn-taking sequence.

B. Use routines such as ball rolling or build/knock down, in which one of you does something, and then the other does something. Almost any activity can be used for turn taking. The key is to establish the routine. You can then use these routines for expanding and challenging.

V. Match and Challenge

A. Be sure to present yourself or objects in a way that the child is developmentally capable of responding to. Imitating the child is a good way to get a feel for what is appropriate.

B. Challenge the child by waiting for a response or an initiation:

- ★ Younger ages- establish a routine, and then stop and look expectant and excited; this will challenge to child “request” the next step, either by general bodily excitement, by vocalization, or later, by gesture. Even later, the same strategy will elicit a verbal request.

- ★ Older ages- establish a routine, and then change some element of it. Also create situations where the child has to request: e.g., an object, food, being picked up. Ask for slightly higher level behavior, and wait; back up to the next level very shortly if nothing happens.