

# Powerful Interactions

## Begin with You

Amy Dombro, Judy Jablon, and Charlotte Stetson

The things you say and the things you do when you interact with children each day make a big difference in their lives.

When Joey walks through the door with his father, you smile and say, "Good morning, Joey. Come on in. We've been waiting for you!" These simple words and gestures give Joey—and his dad—a warm and personal welcome, individual attention, and a feeling of security. Powerful interactions like this are rich gifts. They create the heart and soul of your classroom community.

### Why are powerful interactions important?

Powerful interactions achieve two important goals. They allow teachers to

**1. Build and deepen relationships with each child.** Meaningful and lasting learning depends on a strong personal relationship between teachers and learners.

**2. Move children's learning forward in small steps.** When you use interesting language, ask questions, and help children make connections, you engage their curiosity and extend their thinking. They discover the pleasure and excitement of being a learner.

Here are some simple strategies to help you have powerful interactions with children!



Copyright © 2010 Amy Dombro, Judy Jablon, and Charlotte Stetson. For reprints or permissions information, contact the authors through [www.thepowerofinteractions.com](http://www.thepowerofinteractions.com).

RICHARD GRAESSLE / © NAEYC

## To build and deepen your relationship with each child,

➡ Use children's names each time you speak with them.

➡ Use "mirror talk" rather than saying "Good job" to show children you appreciate what they do.

- "Wow, Adam, you scooped up a lot of soap bubbles and put them in the funnel!"
- "You have added a lot more blocks to your high tower since the last time I looked at it, Rachel!"



© ELISABETH NICHOLS

Families can have powerful interactions too. Sign and make copies of the Message in a Backpack on page 15 to send home. It's also available online (in English and Spanish) at [naeyc.org/tyc](http://naeyc.org/tyc).

➡ Talk with children one-on-one about topics of interest to them.

- "You know so much about trucks, Jojo. I saw a dump truck yesterday, and I have a question for you. Do you know how the driver makes the back tip up?"
- "Alicia, do you have any new stories to tell me about your cat Fluffy?"

➡ Show caring and respect.

- Join a child's activity, with his or her permission.
- Be polite at all times.
- Listen attentively and actively.
  - Give children privacy (when safe to do so). Foster independence by giving children time to explore books or activities alone before interrupting or directing them.

➡ Set limits in supportive, nonpunitive ways.

- Create a safe, engaging environment that invites children to explore and interact in positive ways. For example, placing three chairs around a table makes cooperation more likely by limiting the number of children working together at one time.
- Involve children in the process of establishing three to five clearly stated rules, then engage them in discussions about how the rules apply to different situations. "When we made our class rules, we decided that everyone

should share toys and materials. What do you think we should do when two children want to use the same bucket in the sand box?"

- Remind children of the rules, as needed, in a calm, direct way: "We walk inside. We can run outside."

➡ Acknowledge and accept a child's emotions.

- "Latoya, are you feeling happy? I see a big smile on your face."
- "Emiko, you seem upset because Simon teased you. Let's go talk to him so you can feel better."

## To help each child's development and learning move forward in small steps

➡ Explain the reasons for doing activities, so children become aware of their own learning.

- "Sammy, doing puzzles helps you learn to solve problems."
- "Stringing beads helps your eyes and your hands work together, Roxy."

### SUPPORTING DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Powerful interactions become critical when teaching children whose home language is not the same as yours. To connect with each child, learn a few words in their home language. Focus on words that capture their interest or words needed to ask some of the key questions in this article. This shows that you too are on a language-learning journey. It also shows that you value languages and are willing to work hard to learn them. When you don't have the words for a full conversation in the child's language, plan ways to use eye contact, facial and voice expressions, gestures, pictures, and props to bridge the communication gap. With individual attention, your warmth and enthusiasm will come through.

► Ask open-ended questions to encourage children's thinking and language, then give children time to think about how to respond.

- "Addie, how do you think Trixie felt when she realized she didn't have Knuffle Bunny?" [Pause and listen.] "Have you ever lost a favorite toy?"
- "How did you figure out how many cups to put out for snack, William?"

► Use interesting and varied vocabulary.

- "Look at the wild animals on this page, Rosa. I think the lion looks very dignified. The tiger looks fierce. How do you think the cougar looks?"
- "When you cook dinner today, Reggie, maybe you'll make a pepperoni pizza or some roasted chicken or a big cauldron of butternut squash soup!"

© ELISABETH NICHOLS



Remember . . .  
What you say and  
do matters!

- Izzy is showing off her new coat. "Yes, Izzy, you have a new coat. I notice that it's thick and has a hood with furry fabric inside. I think it will keep you very warm when we play outside."

► Give children specific information about their actions and creations.

- "You are being so careful, Ciera. You are lining up your worms in a very straight row."
- "Carlos, I heard you use some interesting describing words—*humongous, scary, and amazing!*"

► Offer children manageable challenges that nudge them to take the next step.

- "Betsy, you made a pattern while stringing those beads together—blue, blue, red; blue, blue, red. Here are some purple ones. How can you use them to make a new pattern?"
- "Nathan, it looks like there's a lot going on in your picture! Tell me what's happening, and I'll write down your words on this card. Then we'll attach the card to your drawing."



© ELISABETH NICHOLS