

# YOU'RE THE BEST TEACHER!

## RESPONSIVE INTERACTIONS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Children learn best from rich, responsive social interactions with other people. These interactions allow children and adults to share attention and build bonds. In those interactions, adults can scaffold children's learning.

1. Young children learn best from trusted and responsive adults.
2. Learning happens in live, back-and-forth interactions.
3. Children learn best when you respond consistently to their needs.



### WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY?

- Responsive caregiving builds on social, back-and-forth interactions with a child. These interactions foster trust and emotional security. They also support a child's engagement, learning, and other positive outcomes that persist into adulthood.
- Building a strong relationship with at least one responsive, consistent caregiver is essential for children's successful emotional and social skills, as well as their cognitive and problem-solving skills.
- Strong early relationships also help children become resilient when they are faced with stress in life.
- Young children learn best from real, live humans. Television and other screens are no substitute! Research highlights the importance of interactions with adults for children's language learning, their imitation skills, and their memory development.
- Responding consistently to children in a back-and-forth manner also helps children learn. When adults respond to an infant's coos and babbles, babies respond back with more advanced language sounds. The power of back-and-forth interactions is not limited to infancy. All young children learn better from back-and-forth interactions.



### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- Children develop relationships with adults through everyday activities. Each time caregivers play with children, talk with them, and pay attention to what they are interested in, the relationship between child and adult is strengthened.
- From a very young age, children look to adults' eyes to see what they are interested in and what is important. When adults and children share attention, they are learning and building the relationship.
- Children often imitate adult behavior. They do this to learn about the world and to behave like the adults they admire.
- Children are excited to interact with people who are familiar and important to them. Notice how children watch as a caregiver moves around a room. Maintain the relationship across a room by telling the child what you are doing.

- Back-and-forth interactions are most powerful when the adult’s response is immediate and is dependent on the child’s behavior. This means consistent responses are important and that responses should advance the conversation.
- An adult does not have to respond immediately to a child every single time. Providing consistent responses over time is important.



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### TRY THIS!

- Respond when children try to get your attention. You can acknowledge that you hear them, even if you can’t fulfill their request right away.
- Help parents be present with their children. Eliminate distractions during home visits that might divide parents’ attention.
- Reflect on how you integrate the culture of the family into discussions of responsive caregiving with them.
- Encourage parents to look for everyday moments that can be used for one-on-one interactions. These may be moments like diaper changes or riding in the car or on the bus.
- If a parent seems hesitant to talk to their baby before their baby is using words, let them know that even responding to a baby’s babbles is important. All of these interactions build the relationship between caregiver and child.
- Reflect on how you already respond contingently to children and how you might improve your responsivity.

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### LEARN MORE:

#### EARLY ESSENTIALS WEBISODE 8: RESPONSIVE INTERACTIONS

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/early-essentials-webisode-8-responsive-interactions>

#### FIRST CONNECTIONS: ATTACHMENT AND ITS LASTING IMPORTANCE

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/first-connections-attachment-its-lasting-importance>

## CONNECTING AT HOME

# YOU'RE THE BEST TEACHER!

### RESPONSIVE INTERACTIONS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Children learn best from rich and responsive social interactions. Spending time together at home provides many opportunities for learning and bonding moments. Here are some tips you can try.

#### REACT AND REFLECT

Children feel supported when you listen and respond. Respond when your child requests your attention. Acknowledge that you hear them, even if you can't fulfill their request right away.

#### BE A COPYCAT

Practice imitation with games like "Simon Says." You can even roll a ball back and forth. Back and forth interactions help create healthy relationships and strong bonds.

#### LOOK AT IT TOGETHER

Use a picture book to make up a new story. What's happening in the pictures? Ask your child to chime in. Use the book to begin a conversation. Talk about themes like feelings or making new friends.

#### MAKE A SNACK TOGETHER

Preparing food together can be a fun, new experience. Talk about what you observe. What colors do you see? What are the smells, textures, and tastes of foods you're using?

