



Coaching Guidelines For Parent-Child Interaction: A Tool For Parent Educators

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The following guidelines are designed to help parent educators coach parents* on their interaction with their children – improving communication, bonding and skill development. Parent educators play a critical role in helping parents gain perspective on the daily interaction they have with their children. Yet many parent educators lack basic language and tools to communicate specific feedback to parents.

The coaching guidelines begin with various settings and strategies for communicating with parents. The chart on page two includes key parent competencies that will improve interaction. The parent competencies represent messages delivered in parent education classes that resonated with parents in the Family Resource Center Program at the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Santa Cruz County. Next to the descriptions of the competencies, parent educators will find direct feedback that they can use to coach parents.

Choosing a Setting for Parent-Child Interactions

There are many settings for parent educators to coach clients on their interaction with their children. Parent educators may use the coaching guidelines to accentuate points in their classes, create opportunities for parent-child interaction, or add as homework assignments.

Parent and Child Classes. Opportunities to observe parents and children together during classes or playtime are ideal. They allow for direct observation and immediate feedback.

Parent Only Classes. If children are not present during classes, the discussion of parent-child interaction will be based on at-home activities. Parents will be instructed to practice parent competencies with their children as class homework and report back on their experience when they return.

Videotaped Interactions. Whether in the classroom or at home, videotaping parent-child interaction allows the parent to watch their own interaction with their child and to review it with the educator.

Steps for providing feedback to parents:

Coaching parents on their interaction with their children is a delicate process. It is imperative to create an atmosphere of trust and support. Parent educators must withhold judgement and focus on the parents' strengths. Feedback should be constructive, allowing parents to build upon what they are already doing right.

- 1 **Select a competency from the chart.** Focus on a competency to discuss with parents such as 'encouragement.'
 - Explain what it is and why it is important.
 - Show them what the skill looks like, such as using descriptive praise on the child's effort – rather than the finished product.
 - Give the parent language and ideas to practice this skill during playtime with their children.
- 2 **Observe play.** Allow uninterrupted parent-child play for ten minutes. Depending upon the setting, parents may be reporting on the interaction or sharing video.
 - Keep the focus on the parents. Do they offer specific encouragement to their children regarding their effort?
- 3 **Allow for self-reflection.** Talking with parents individually is ideal but a group conversation would work if necessary.
 - Ask open-ended questions such as – What do you think you did well? What did you notice about your child's reaction? What could you have done to improve?
- 4 **Provide constructive feedback.** Use the 'sandwich technique' for feedback:
 - Start and end with what parents did well.
 - Give only one suggestion for improvement.
- 5 **Recap.** Review the competency to ensure the parent understands its meaning and how to practice it.

*Although these guidelines apply to all adult caregivers, the term 'parents' is used for simplicity.

Guidelines to Improve Parent-Child Interaction

KEY PARENT COMPETENCIES	DIRECT COACHING FEEDBACK
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Consistency</i></p> <p>Children build trust when their parents provide consistent and loving care.¹⁰ Parents can be consistent by setting clear limits and following through on consequences for bad behavior.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model clear limits and follow through on consequences.^{4,7} ‘You told him not to knock that over and he did it again. Now you can take it away from him.’ • Share positive emotions with your child.⁸ • Show child affection and match their excitement.⁴
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Down Time</i></p> <p>Parents who take time for themselves feel more emotionally stable and are better able to take on the challenges of parenting.⁸ Yet many parents feel they do not deserve it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take time out to breathe or get space. • Nurture your own mental health. • Seek out a support system or respite care. • Identify physical and emotional outlets.
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Empowerment</i></p> <p>Including children in the decision-making process for daily planning as well as discipline can give them a sense of responsibility and a motivation to achieve.⁷</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include rationale when setting limits. ‘I had to take this stick away because you might hurt someone with it.’ • Lead your child to reflect on the reasons for their actions ‘Why do you think your friend is crying? Is there anything you can do to make him feel better?’ • Offer choices to your children.²
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Encouragement</i></p> <p>Encouragement offers specific feedback on a child’s effort as opposed to praise, which is more broad recognition of a finished product. Encouragement builds confidence. Also, children who receive encouragement are more likely to value hard work.⁵</p> <p>In contrast, children who receive praise are more likely to seek approval.⁷</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide specific and sincere feedback to your children when they do something good. ‘I like the way you chose such bright colors for your painting.’ • Praise the effort rather than the finished product. ‘You worked really hard on this.’
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Language Development</i></p> <p>Language development is a key milestone that is best achieved through one-on-one interaction using whichever language is spoken at home.¹⁰</p>	<p>Model the following strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labeling, • Turn taking, • Creating activities around books, • Telling stories with picture books, and • Narrating your day.^{4,6,8,10}
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Fostering Initiative</i></p> <p>Children who choose their activities are more likely to tap into their creativity. They are also more focused and compliant when they are playing with something that interests them.⁸</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize your child’s cues – when they like or dislike an activity – and to respond by letting them stop if they do not. • Let the child choose what they want to do. • Let them explore and expand their play.^{3,4,8}
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Promoting Self-Regulation</i></p> <p>Self-regulation is a complex set of abilities that improve behavior and enable learning.⁹ These behaviors require children to think before they act.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play games such as “Simon Says” that require children to wait to respond.² • Initiate imaginative play such as dress up that require children to create and remember rules.² • Plan for arts and crafts with multiple steps that help children learn how to plan for the long-term.¹
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Building Social Skills</i></p> <p>Social competence in children is associated with prosocial behaviors that lead to altruism and social responsibility.²</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model behavior – such as saying “please and thank you.” • Hold children accountable if their actions hurt or offend others. “You should tell your friend you’re sorry you knocked over his blocks.” • Model how to comfort and share with others.⁶

Resources

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Jeffrey C. Silvertooth, Associate Dean & Director, Extension & Economic Development, College of Agriculture Life Sciences, The University of Arizona.

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