

Respect the Family's Role in the Child's Development



Understanding the Developmental Process

Observing a child grow and develop can be both exciting and confusing. As the child achieves milestones, families and providers often feel pride and joy. However, the path to achieving these milestones can bring about frustration for the child as well as confusion and doubt for adults.

A child's social–emotional, cognitive, physical, and language development is an integral part of the child's healthy development and well-being, with healthy relationships as a foundation. All these areas of development are connected and influence one another. Development can be surprising yet predictable when we understand how the process works. As a child works on gaining a new skill (a milestone) and experiences this burst in one area of development, a temporary regression may occur in another area. It is hard for a little one to practice all their skills at the same time!



A regression can show up temporarily during a stretch of time when a child does not demonstrate a skill already developed or as a change in the child's habits or routines (such as eating or sleeping). Although they are a normal part of the developmental process, the changes that come with these temporary regressions are often confusing for families and providers because the change in behavior may mistakenly suggest that the child has lost a skill or may upset the caregiving routines.

Regressions may cause families and providers to wonder about the child and themselves (e.g., Is my child OK? Am I doing OK as a parent?). As children develop, the adults in their life observe their developmental process, and they learn with and from each other. You can use these predictable periods of regression as opportunities to deepen your understanding of the child in your care by thinking ahead about what changes might occur while the child is working on a new skill.

Providers working with families join them in the journey of their child's development. When you partner with families to understand their child's development by thinking ahead about the changes and disruptions that might occur, you strengthen the parent-child relationship. Parents come to understand that even the more difficult changes in behavior are a natural and necessary part of their child's development of new skills and increasing independence. Joining with families in understanding their child's behavior allows them to feel more confident and supported before and during periods of regression.

You can join with the families you work with to:

- **Explore what their child's behavior means to them**
- **Develop a shared understanding about their child's behavior**
- **Support the parent-child relationship**
- **Decide together how to respond to their child's behavior**

Shown below are a few common examples of children experiencing bursts and regressions.

Infant	Toddler	Preschool
Regression/Burst Example	Regression/Burst Example	Regression/Burst Example
<p>Alyssa is a one-year-old who used to sleep through the night and has recently begun to wake up in the middle of the night. She is learning how to walk and is no longer interested in sitting down to eat.</p>	<p>Samantha is an 18-month-old who recently started shouting "No!" and is having more frequent tantrums. She recently started speaking short sentences.</p>	<p>Luciana is a three-year-old who recently started to avoid the toilet because she thinks there are monsters in the places she can't see like under the bed and inside the toilet. She has just mastered going to the restroom independently.</p>
<p>Juan is a four-month-old who used to stay focused during mealtimes. He is starting to notice more of what is around him.</p>	<p>Joseph is an older two-year-old who recently started having tantrums more often and they are lasting longer. He recently started learning about how to use the toilet.</p>	<p>Hiro is a four-year-old who has recently begun hitting his friend again when things don't go his way. He is in the process of understanding that letters represent certain sounds.</p>
<p>Alex is a nine-month-old who is starting to resist going to people who are not his most familiar loved ones, including caregivers and some family members. He recently started to move more independently.</p>	<p>Kie is a 15-month-old who has started to become clingy with her parents again. She recently started moving beyond walking to learning to run.</p>	<p>Noah is a five-year-old who has recently become afraid of things that didn't use to bother him and begun waking up at night. He is gaining better control of his body when he has angry feelings and aggressive impulses.</p>

Sharing the Care of Young Children

As a young child enters any learning setting, families are sharing the care of their young child with you. Families may feel a range of emotions about their child building relationships with another caring adult. They may sharply feel the loss of the special times they had together and worry about another important adult in their child's life, even if they are grateful for our care. They may also feel relief that they are not alone in tending to their child's needs. All sorts of mixed feelings can come up!

When parents share the care of their child with you, their mixed feelings can also be expressed in actions that influence your relationship with the family. For example, they may disagree about caregiving practices, routines, or how best to discipline their child. Although it may be uncomfortable, sharing the care can be a starting place to communicate and develop mutual trust. Providers can reflect on their own feelings and remember that supporting the parent-child relationship is the priority.

Another dynamic that may arise when adults share the care of a young child is the urge to protect the child. These protective urges develop because families and providers both care deeply for the child and want the child to be safe and healthy. When families believe a provider or another person is not nurturing or treating their child the way they would hope, they will experience strong feelings. Providers may also experience strong feelings if they disagree with the way families respond to or care for their child.

Common developmental changes within the context of adults sharing the care of a young child may affect how providers and families react to each other. One reaction providers may have is to give parents advice about what to do, yet it is always worth the time and effort to learn about what's important to parents before you give advice.

There may come a time when parents want to hear your ideas, but they may distance themselves or feel criticized or insecure if you start with what you think is best. To avoid this reaction, you can use the strategy Listen Actively to help you discover what matters to parents first. You can then use the Relationship-based Practice: Observe and Describe the Child's Behavior to Open Communication (see below). This practice shows respect for the role of the family in their child's development, and then you can ask the family if they want any ideas about what to do next.



Observe and Describe the Child's Behavior to Open Communication

The California Early Childhood Educator Competencies (Competencies) advocate for collaborating with families “to clarify differences in interpretation of observation” (CDE, 2018, p. 57). Additionally, families' input, data, and interpretation should be considered and used for joint observations. The Competencies also identify that “intentional early childhood educators are mindful about the engagement of families in supporting children's learning” (CDE, 2018, p. 3). When describing observations of a child with their family, create a shared process with the family. You can use the Relationship-based Practice: Observe and Describe the Child's Behavior to Open Communication to support your conversation. See below for selected examples for how you might use this strategy.

<p>Observe the child's behavior.</p>	<p>Notice what the child is doing. Choose a behavior to describe—it could be something that shows what the child is working on developmentally, or you might focus on something related to the relationship between the child and parents.</p>	<p>You've observed Jayda, an 18-month-old who used to immediately begin playing upon arrival to the program. Jayda has now begun to cling to her parent upon arrival.</p>
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<p>Describe what you observed.</p>	<p>Describe what you observe to the parents without interpreting what it means.</p>	<p>You say, "I noticed that when Jayda came in with you today, she had her arms wrapped tightly around your leg."</p>
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<p>Pay attention to what the parents share.</p>	<p>Pause and listen actively to what the parents share about their child's behavior, what it means to them, and what matters to them. This practice gives parents an opportunity first to share their perspective and their thoughts on what the behavior means.</p>	<p>Parent says, "Yes! I don't know what's going on. She has always loved coming here, and now she acts like she can't be away from me."</p>
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<p>Collaborate with the parents.</p>	<p>Once you have listened to what the behavior means to the parents and what is important to them, then you can work together to create a shared understanding of what the behavior means and decide how to respond.</p>	<p>You say, "You said that it seems like she can't be away from you. I'm wondering if you have noticed anything else that is new with Jayda?"</p>
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Working with young children and their families gives you the unique opportunity to join with them during times of both joy and vulnerability. You can help them grow to appreciate that their child's development requires periods of challenge as well as success. By understanding the developmental process, you strengthen the parent-child relationship, allowing parents to feel more confident and supported during periods of regression. You also deepen the partnership you have with families. When you recognize and respect the role of the family in the child's development, you join with them to explore the child's experiences in a responsive way.

To learn more about the family engagement strategies, check out the Family Engagement Online Toolkit: www.qualitycountsca.net/FEtoolkit

Adapted from:

Brazelton Touchpoints Project, Inc. (2019). Touchpoints Curriculum.

Brazelton, T. B., & Sparrow, J. D. (2006). Touchpoints-Birth to Three: Your Child's Behavioral and Emotional Development.

Resources created by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement.

References for this resource can be found in the [Module 3 Reference List](#).

Adapted from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (2018). *Strategies for Family Engagement: Attitudes and Practices*. To learn more about Family Engagement, check out the Family Engagement Online Toolkit, qualitycountsca.net/FEtoolkit. Copyright © 2019. Facilitated and Funded by First 5 California. qualitycountsca.net

