

Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals Area VI: Effective Interactions (Teacher/Student and Student/Student)

Rationale:

Relationships between caring adults and children and among children themselves create the context for healthy social and emotional development. Because children's relationships with others are based in large measure on their prior experiences, early childhood professionals, regardless of the type of setting in which they practice, must understand the principles and practices that promote an environment that is psychologically safe and secure and that encourages prosocial behavior, conflict resolution, problem solving, and a sense of community for children and their families.

Knowledge:

Developmental stages serve as a guide to understanding children's behavior and interactions with others.

- Successful attachments serve as the foundation for healthy emotional development with other people.
- Children develop a positive sense of themselves and their abilities as they interact in physically and emotionally safe environments that are responsive to their unique individual needs, abilities, and temperaments.
- Children develop successful relationships with their peers as they have opportunities to interact with others of similar and different ages.
- Children's interaction styles reflect their families of origin, cultures, linguistic diversity, and unique abilities and disabilities.
- Theories of social and emotional development, interactions and group dynamics as well as current research related to development, learning, and practice guide the decisions and actions of early childhood practitioners.

Positive and nurturing relationships support and enhance healthy development and foster successful interactions with peers and with persons at various ages across the lifespan.

- Adult actions toward children reflect an understanding of each child's value and worth and demonstrate unconditional positive regard, regardless of gender, temperament, abilities/disabilities, culture, language, race, or home background.
- Healthy relationships and interactions occur in environments that are physically and psychologically safe for children and their families.

Communication with children is based on an understanding of the development sequences of language acquisition, expression, and reception.

- Children's competence in communication reflects their unique abilities as they are expressed within their homes.
- Children communicate with others linguistically as well as non-linguistically using gestures and signs, adaptive devices, and facial expressions.

Children develop competence in managing their own behaviors and solving conflicts with one another by observing and interacting with caring adults who:

- Provide appropriate opportunities for children to become independent by making choices about things that affect them.
- Engage in conversations.
- Provide support in redirecting and solving social conflicts.
- Support children to learn and practice appropriate and acceptable behaviors as individuals and as members of a community.
- Provide daily schedules, routines, and activities that are responsive to the developmental needs and interests of the children as well as responsive to the unique interests and abilities of individual children.
- Assist children to identify and express their feelings in ways that are culturally and socially acceptable.
- Provide structure and support for resolving conflicts as they occur in ways that reflect an understanding of children's developmental abilities.



- Understand that challenging behaviors may reflect a variety of contributing factors such as challenges associated with particular developmental stages as well as environmental conditions that are not responsive to children's age/stage of development (e.g., sitting still or waiting in line too long), emotional stress, disabling conditions that impact a child's ability to adapt, or by not having been taught the behaviors associated with being a member of the learning community.

As children develop socially, they must learn the skills needed to participate as a member of a group; professionals must understand developmental changes related to being able to enter a group and play an active contributing role.

Families are active participants in guiding children's behavior.

- Families hold values, ideas and expectations and they employ various interaction styles that reflect a variety of values, cultures, and belief systems.
- Families and early childhood practitioners can work cooperatively to support and address the behavior of children at school through their respectful interactions with each other and with other professionals who serve as resources.

Practices Based on Knowledge:

Building on an understanding of how children grow and develop, early childhood professionals in all types of programs serving young children establish positive relationships with children and their families. They:

1. Relationships

Create positive and nurturing relationships with each child based on respect, trust, calm approaches, respect for diversity and acceptance of individual differences in ability levels, temperament, and other characteristics.

2. Interactions with Persons of Various Ages Across the Lifespan

Provide a variety of opportunities to communicate verbally and non-verbally in playful engagements with people of a variety of ages across the lifespan.

3. Group Interactions

Use various forms of verbal and nonverbal communication frequently with children, and respond to children as individuals as well as to the group as a whole.

4. Communication

Use guidance practices that are respectful, meet the emotional needs of individual children, clearly communicate expectations for appropriate behavior, promote prosocial behaviors, prevent and minimize behavioral problems through careful planning of the learning environment, teach conflict resolution strategies, and manage challenging behaviors.

5. Guidance

Use knowledge of group processes and developmental aspects of group behavior to guide the complex challenges required to guide groups of children.

6. Family Collaboration

Build positive partnerships with children's families with regard to managing behavior and nurturing development.



Competency	Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV
Early childhood professionals at ALL LEVELS have knowledge related to:	Professionals at Level I implement practices according to program guidelines and policies. They:	Professionals at Level II demonstrate the skills present at the previous level. In addition, they work independently and take initiative in designing environments to facilitate development. They:	Professionals at Level III demonstrate the skills present at the previous levels. In addition, they design, assess, and modify the learning environment to meet children's changing needs. They also model excellent practices and encourage others to develop proficiency in skills. They:	Professionals at Level IV demonstrate the skills present at the previous levels. In addition, they provide leadership for planning, implementing, assessing, and modifying the program to ensure continuous improvement. They conduct inquiry to advance the understanding of best practices for their communities. They:

1. Relationships

1.1 Respect	Treat each child with respect and understanding	Value each child as an individual, making an effort to recognize each child's unique characteristics, temperament, etc. Examples include, but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing children to demonstrate personal interests through choices • Interacting responsively with children of different temperaments, levels of sociability, shyness, etc. • Recognizing each child's strengths • Understanding and accepting individual limitations 	Interact with each child based on the individual child's specific and unique characteristics, strengths, interests, and needs	Use knowledge of child development theory and research as the basis for creating policies, designing environments and schedules, and working with staff and families to build positive relationships with each child in ways that affirm each child's cultural, linguistic, developmental, and individual identity
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Competency	Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV
1.2 Psychological Safety and Attachment	<p>Build trusting relationships with children, provide predictability and physical and emotional security and protect children from emotional harm (e.g., unnecessary fear or criticism)</p> <p>Provide continuity of care (same caregiver over an extended period) when working with children from birth to three years</p>	<p>Build attachment relationships with children by being sensitive and responsive to needs, providing continuity of care and predictability, and physical and emotional security in ways that enhance self-concept, self-regulation, and self-esteem</p>	<p>Model and help others acquire skills for establishing secure attachment relationships and maintaining children's psychological safety</p>	<p>Ensure that the program assistants and staff members establish and maintain an emotionally nurturing environment</p> <p>Stay up-to-date on evidence-based research that informs best practices to facilitate psychological safety and secure attachments, including continuity of care for infants and toddlers from birth to age three</p> <p>Provide continuity of care providers through effective and supportive program management</p>
1.3 Respectful Voice Tones	<p>Speak to children with calm, respectful tones</p>	<p>Nurture children's abilities to use respectful voice tones</p>	<p>Model and help others acquire skills for maintaining an atmosphere characterized by calm, respectful voice tones</p>	<p>Provide support and training to staff and others for achieving this practice</p>
1.4 Building Trust	<p>Provide consistent, predictable routines to ensure familiarity and trust.</p>	<p>Maintain a nurturing emotional climate that provides security for children. Examples include, but are not limited to, consistency and predictability of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults present • Behavioral expectations • Guidance procedures • Daily/weekly routines • Transition activities 	<p>Model and help others create and maintain a nurturing emotional climate characterized by trusting relationships</p>	<p>Provide leadership for continuous monitoring of the environment for practices that nurture trusting relationships and share up-to-date evidence-based research on best practices related to building trust</p>
1.5 Establishing a Calm, Unhurried Environment	<p>Lead activities in a positive, calm, and pleasant atmosphere</p>	<p>Have realistic, appropriate expectations for children's capacity to participate in activities</p>	<p>Model and help others create and maintain a calm, non-hurried environment</p>	<p>Provide leadership for creating and maintaining a calm, non-hurried environment; share up-to-date best practices derived from evidence-based research on maintaining a calm environment</p>
1.6 Respecting Diversity	<p>Demonstrate respect for diversity of children's culture, language, and religion in all interactions</p>	<p>Actively nurture respect for diversity in group and individual interactions through modeling, behavioral guidance, and curriculum activities that reflect a welcoming environment for all young children</p>	<p>Model for and support others as they strive to develop skills for interacting with children and families in ways that respect all people</p>	<p>Oversee the program's strategies for achieving respect for diversity by staying up-to-date on evidence-based research that guides best practices for interacting in ways that respect all people</p>

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1.7 Accepting Individual Differences	Understand and accept individual differences in behavior as influenced by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age and stage of development • Family background • Culture • Ability • Temperament • Individual strengths • Interests 	Model acceptance and nurture children's abilities to understand and accept differences among peers; affirm each child's cultural, linguistic, developmental, and individual identity	Model and help others as they develop skills to nurture children's abilities to understand and accept differences among peers and to affirm each child's cultural, linguistic, developmental, and individual identity	Oversee the program's strategies for promoting acceptance of all persons; stay up-to-date on research and theory that informs professionals' abilities to understand and accept individual differences and to promote similar understanding between and among children
2. Interactions with Persons of Various Ages Across the Lifespan				
2.1 Mixed-age Children's Groups	Appreciate the importance for children of having opportunities to interact with children that are both older and younger than oneself	Create opportunities for mixed age peer-group activities	Model for others successful techniques for managing mixed-age group activities	Provide support to others as they strive to increase this competency by staying up-to-date on evidence-based research that informs best practices
2.2 Intergenerational Activities	Appreciate the importance for children of interacting with persons at different stages across the lifespan (i.e., teens, mature adults, aging persons)	Create opportunities for positive intergenerational activities	Model for others successful techniques for managing intergenerational learning experiences	Provide support to others as they strive to increase this competency by staying up-to-date on evidence-based research that informs best practices
3. Group Interactions				
3.1 Group Process and Structure	Understand group processes (i.e., formation, interaction, dissolution)	Create opportunities for age-appropriate group as well as individual activities that provide children choice about participation depending on readiness for group experience	Model for others successful strategies for facilitating entry into a group, establishing group status, assigning roles, and changing group structure	Provide support to others as they strive to increase this competency by staying up-to-date on evidence-based research that informs best practices
3.2 Managing Group Behaviors	Appreciate the complexity of interactions that characterize group behaviors (in contrast to individual behaviors)	Observe group behaviors and plan further activities in accordance with current status of various groups	Model for others successful strategies for managing group behaviors	Provide support to others as they strive to increase this competency by staying up-to-date on evidence-based research that informs best practices

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4. Communication				
4.1 Engaging in Various Forms of Communication	Engage with children using verbal and non-verbal communication and show individual attention to each child within the group on a regular basis	Use playful interactions as opportunities to build communications skills such as turn-taking, reciprocity, and mutual engagement in a topic of interest	Communicate respectfully with children by listening carefully and responding sensitively to each child as a participant in conversation	Provide support to others as they strive to increase this competency by staying up-to-date on evidence-based research that informs best practices
4.2 Basic Listening	Listen attentively to children, trying to understand what they want to communicate	Respond sensitively to differences in individual children's communication styles, use open ended questions, and active as well as passive listening	Employ responsive listening strategies with children who are typically developing as well as with children who have communication challenges to understand the intent of their communication	Provide support to others as they strive to increase this competency by staying up-to-date on evidence-based research that informs best practices
4.3 Listening for Feelings	Listen respectfully to the thoughts and feelings of others	Actively encourage children to listen with respect to others' thoughts and feelings by modeling, illustrating, prompting, and coaching	Model and encourage others to develop proficiency in helping children learn to listen with respect to others' thoughts and feelings	Oversee the program's strategies for planning, implementing, and assessing the learning environment for appropriate listening skills, and take steps to mitigate deficiencies when identified
4.4 Verbal and Non-Verbal Expression	Use appropriate and positive verbal and non-verbal skills to express thoughts and feelings in respectful and constructive ways	Use appropriate and positive verbal and non-verbal communication to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express thoughts and feelings in respectful and constructive ways • Nurture children's abilities to express thoughts and feelings in constructive ways 	Model and encourage others to develop proficiency in using appropriate and positive verbal and non-verbal communication to express thoughts and feelings in respectful and constructive ways and help others develop proficiency in nurturing these skills in children	Oversee the program's strategies for planning, implementing, and assessing the ongoing use of appropriate and positive verbal and non-verbal communication to express thoughts and feelings in respectful and constructive ways, and take steps to mitigate deficiencies when identified
4.5 Communication Frequency	Communicate with children frequently, using both verbal and non-verbal means and face-to-face interactions	Provide multiple opportunities for children to converse with one another and with adults	Model frequent and effective communications and provide support to others as they strive to increase this competency.	Support others as they strive to increase this competency by staying up-to-date on evidence-based research that informs best practices

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<p>4.6 Vocal Communication Strategies</p>	<p>Articulate sounds and words clearly and appropriately when communicating with children</p> <p>Use various strategies to nurture desirable vocal interactions including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using open-ended questions • Naming objects • Naming actions • Describing relationships and ideas • Describing plans 	<p>Model and encourage children to use these vocal strategies when interacting with others</p>	<p>Monitor the learning environment for frequency and quality of vocal communication and make adjustments if needed, including adjustments in the environment's acoustic properties if necessary to abate interference with communication</p>	<p>Analyze up-to-date information on effective communication strategies and styles, model effective communication, and work with others who strive to support child-child and child-adult conversations.</p>
<p>4.7 Variation in Communication Strategies</p>	<p>Use various strategies to facilitate children's communication including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modeling (self-talk) • Using parallel talk • Using physical and verbal prompting • Using restatements • Expanding statements • Referring one child to another • Interpreting messages between children • Using open ended questions 	<p>Use various strategies including modeling and physical and verbal prompting to facilitate children's communication</p>	<p>Skillfully use and model various strategies including physical and verbal prompting to facilitate children's interaction in a manner that is responsive to the immediate situation and particular child</p>	<p>Oversee the program's strategies for planning, implementing, assessing, and modifying strategies use various communication strategies</p>

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5. Guidance				
5.1 Behavioral Expectations	Set and consistently reinforce expectations that are appropriate for the ages and stages of children and address inappropriate behaviors rather than labeling the child	Understand realistic expectations for children's behavior (e.g., attention spans, interests, social abilities, self-management) at different ages and ability levels	Model and help others achieve realistic expectations for children's behaviors at different ages and ability levels	Provide leadership for continuous improvement in the area of behavioral expectations by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing written policies for guidance that are age appropriate and inclusive of children with disabilities • Staying up-to-date on evidence-based research that informs best practices related to behavioral expectations
5.2 Expectations for Respectful Interactions	Interact with children in ways that reflect respect for self and others	Assist children in identifying and expressing their feelings in culturally and socially acceptable ways	Provide opportunities for children who are developmentally ready for group work to develop cooperative group skills that focus on working in small groups, learning to achieve tasks through cooperation, negotiating, compromising, and problem solving	Provide support to others as they strive to refine skills in promoting respectful interactions
5.3 Nurturing Autonomy and Self-Regulation	Allow children to make simple choices (e. g., choose between two acceptable options for food, clothing, or play activities)	Help children develop inner controls and self-regulation by providing appropriate opportunities for independence and choice among activities and peers and helping them understand the relationship between the choices and the outcomes	Apply theories of child development to improve child guidance by employing practices that take into account children's personalities and levels of development and that demonstrate knowledge of instructional and guidance procedures for including children with and without disabilities	Stay up-to-date on research related to the origins of and relationships between self-regulation and self-assertion and help others to apply up-to-date knowledge in this area
5.4 Logical Consequences	Use guidance techniques that allow child to understand the relationship between choices and consequences in matters where health and safety are not an issue	Communicate to others the principles of guidance through the use of logical consequences	Model and nurture others' ability to use logical consequences	Plan activities to help assistants, staff members, and family members to learn the principles of logical consequences

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5.5 Prosocial Behavior	Model for children and encourage them to practice sharing, helping, and caring behaviors	Implement guidance practices that nurture prosocial behaviors	Plan curriculum experiences that enable children to understand and practice prosocial behaviors as individuals and as members of groups	Provide leadership for promoting prosocial behavior by staying up-to-date and sharing current research and theory on prosocial behavior
5.6 Managing Change	<p>Plan and schedule anticipated changes with attention to minimizing anxiety and disruption of learning</p> <p>Manage unanticipated change calmly and help children understand the reasons for the change</p>	<p>Alert children to changes in activities or routines in advance when possible, and plan activities to facilitate transition from one activity to another</p> <p>Help children understand unexpected events, using the experience as a "teachable moment" when possible</p>	Model and assist others as they develop skills for managing and incorporating anticipated and unanticipated change	Provide leadership for change management by informing staff of strategies for managing change and by reflecting on ways to better manage responses to change
5.7 Prevention of Behavioral Problems	<p>Maintain consistent rules for safety, care of materials, and above all for protection of physical and psychological safety of children</p> <p>Avoid unnecessary conflict by providing sufficient quantities of materials and equipment for the number of children and by minimizing competition</p> <p>Recognize rising tension and promptly redirect the child, group, or activity</p> <p>Help individual children to apply anger interruption and calming techniques for themselves (as appropriate to age and development)</p>	<p>Anticipate and defuse disruptive behavior by avoiding stimuli and circumstances that lead to challenging behaviors.</p> <p>Monitor results of planned strategies and adjust the plan for each child as outcomes dictate.</p>	<p>Adapt the learning environment and curriculum to engage children, respond to children's interests, promote cooperative play, and develop supportive relationships while minimizing potentially challenging behaviors</p> <p>Assess behavior patterns and identify the precursors and triggers for children who have behavior control issues in order to develop individual plans and strategies for adults to apply in avoiding or channeling potentially disruptive behaviors</p>	Design and develop cooperative group activities and stay current research and theory related to prevention of behavioral problems

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5.8 Challenging Behaviors	Consistently enforce behavioral limits that are appropriate for the age and ability level of children	Differentiate between typical testing of behavioral limits versus behaviors that indicate serious adjustment difficulties	Use observational and assessment tools to identify and to respond to individual behavioral problems related to development, learning, environmental conditions or emotional stress and determine appropriate replacement behaviors and strategies for instruction and support of the child in using those behaviors	Develop individual guidance plans, accessing relevant professionals for support as needed
5.9 Conflict Resolution	Use verbal strategies and listening skills to obtain information about conflicts that occur; describe the thoughts, feelings, and goals of those involved; and encourage children to find solutions such as turn-taking, sharing, and restitution	Model problem-solving and conflict resolution strategies and mediate/provide support to children as they work to resolve their own conflicts with others	Model and help others learn various methods for problem solving and conflict resolution and articulate these strategies to family members and peers	Provide leadership and share current research and theories that inform conflict resolution practices

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6. Family Collaboration				
6.1 Positive Communication	Listen to and communicate positively with families regarding behavioral expectations and guidance practices used in the program	Work with families to enhance understanding of children’s needs and appropriate guidance practices	Collaborate with families to develop individually appropriate expectations for children’s behavior and, as needed, refer families to appropriate community and health resources for support in promoting positive behavior in young children	Analyze and articulate current research on child guidance, then share information on guidance techniques and healthy social-emotional development with families
6.2 Respecting Family Values	Demonstrate respect for the values, ideas, and expectations of families	Communicate respect for the values, ideas and expectations of families including differences in interaction styles and guidance practices	Use direct and indirect strategies for helping children and adults develop and communicate respect for values, ideas, and expectations of families without compromising one’s own values. Share the rationale and research for recommended changes in behavior management techniques when encouraging parents to adopt or revise child-rearing expectations and interventions	Support others’ efforts to create a climate of respect that allows for diversity in values, ideas, and expectations without compromising one’s own values
6.3 Collaborative Guidance	Communicate with family members about behavioral expectations, values, and ideas by articulating expectations of the program and listening to concerns of family members	Communicate with families regarding areas of concern, developing cooperative strategies to manage problems	Model and help others develop strategies for communicating with families regarding areas of interest and concern, and by developing cooperative strategies to manage problems	Ensure that the program assists families to meet their unique developmental and behavioral interests/concerns for their children and by staying up-to-date on strategies for collaborative guidance
6.4 Resources for Behavioral Interventions	Seek information and guidance from literature and community agencies that can assist with resolving challenging behavioral issues	Share publications and community resources that provide information and support for responding to challenging behavioral issues	Provide access to information and resources to assist families with children who have unique developmental and/or behavioral issues that suggest outside intervention and/or support	Support others as they develop professional skills for responding to unusually challenging behavioral problems