

ENGAGEMENT - Are you engaged?

What is Elena doing in the book center? Why does Jose look upset? Who is banging those blocks on the floor...and why? Being engaged means being alert and aware of what the children are doing. It also means asking questions, opening the door for meaningful conversations. We fully understand that you need to prepare lunch or wash sippy cups, but it is also very important for you to be engaged with the children as much as possible. Why? Because when you are engaged, YOU learn! You become more aware of each child's unique developmental needs. This helps when planning and adapting learning experiences, sharing information with parents/caregivers and completing developmental screening tools. So, how can you ensure you are engaged? Here are a few ideas!

Put down the cellphone. We get it...we really do! Keeping your cellphone handy is important in case a parent/caregiver calls BUT it is also extremely important to be engaged with the children. Let new parents/caregivers to your program know that during certain times of the day, you may not answer your phone immediately. Encourage them to leave a message and ensure them you will call back as soon as possible. The exception to this, of course, would be a true emergency. Checking email, texting and surfing the web have become a part of our daily lives and can be such a distraction if not kept in check. Make sure that you spend more time engaging with the children during the day and less time looking at your phone.

Ask open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are great conversations starters! These are questions that begin with words like HOW? WHAT? and WHY? Generally they are also questions that cannot be answered with one word and often, there is no right or wrong answer. For instance, when children are playing with blocks and their tower topples over, you might ask, "Why do you think the tower fell?" and then continue with, "How could you build it differently the next time?" These types of questions not only engage children but also challenge them to problem-solve and think.

Keep learning styles in mind. Some children are visual learners. They learn best by watching. Other children are auditory. They learn best by listening. Still others learn kinesthetically...through touch. The only way you will learn how each child in your care learns best is by engaging with them on a consistent basis. Chances are good you will find that most children are a blend of different learning styles. This is very common. The key is that unless you engage with children, you will not know which way they learn best. So watch...listen...and learn!

Let the children lead you. OK...we should probably clarify. The children are not going to prepare their own lunches or decide the daily routine but they can, and should, have a role in planning experiences. They can also add their own ideas to activities you set up and initiate. This gives the children ownership and also encourages them to test their own ideas. Both are very powerful ways to promote the learning environment!

