

SELF - It All Starts Here!

YOU! You are probably the most important aspect of the learning environment. After all, you plan the experiences, you gather materials, you prepare meals, you provide guidance...in other words...you do it all! Your role is very, very important in many different ways. The first step is to recognize that the children are watching and listening to you every single moment of every day. No pressure there, right?!

So, what should do (or not do) to make sure that you are your best "self" each and every day? Here are just a few ideas:

Be positive! Even when things go sideways, it is very important for you to remain positive and to approach situations in a positive way. This can be challenging at times, but it is very important.

Think before you speak. The orange juice just spilled all over the floor...for the third time today. A child decides that dumping out the blocks, again, is a lot of fun. You discover a two-year old drawing with chalk on the floor. All of these scenarios could cause you to lose your cool ... and with good reason! But it is very important to remember that in most cases, children are not intentionally being "bad." Instead, they are experimenting or trying new things as they attempt to learn more about their world. A big part of this experimentation is learning about cause and effect. So, your response to these types of scenarios can take what would be a negative interaction and turn it into a positive learning experience. For instance, when a child spills his/her orange juice on the floor, respond with, "Hmmm. Seems like there's a spill. What do you think we should do take care of this so no one falls?" Then, have the child help you clean it up. Same thing with the blocks or even the chalk on the floor. Yelling, belittling or demeaning a child will not stop this type of behavior and for some children, may actually become positive reinforcement and they may do it again and again in order to get your attention. This is definitely NOT the type of attention you want, right?

Nonverbal communication speaks volumes! A smile is a great way to give encouragement. Catch a child doing something great? Give a smile and a nod. See a child about to do something he/she knows is not a good idea, simply shake your head and watch. If the child stops, smile and nod. High fives, fist bumps, and, if appropriate for your group, hugs are wonderful nonverbal ways to enhance and build a positive environment in your program.

Get your rest and eat healthy. Just as children need to eat healthy foods and get plenty of rest, so do you. There is no way you can be at your best if you are tired and/or hungry. After all, if you do not take care of yourself, how can you possibly take care of others? We know...this is hard but it is VERY important so please try!

Enthusiasm is contagious! This is SO true. If you are excited about experiences and activities, guess what? The children will be as well. Also, be sure to join in the fun during free play ... especially when playing outside. Being engaged with the children as they play is a great way to build caregiver-child bonds. Let them direct you! Play is just as important for adults as it is for children but in today's busy world, we too often forget that fact.

