



Supporting Social and Emotional Development

What All Early Interventionist Can Do

Parent Empowerment & Education

Strategy

Example

Why It's Important

Boost the parents' confidence

"I love how you grabbed Mario's attention by bringing the snack near your face..."

When parents feel confident, they are more likely to engage meaningfully with their child, implement strategies effectively, and build stronger emotional bonds. This confidence supports their own well-being and their child's progress.

Provide info to support good decision making

"When you ask Enrique a question and pause, you are giving him an opportunity to process the information and respond."

Transparent communication empowers caregivers to feel included and capable. Understanding the 'why' behind actions fosters trust, reduces anxiety, and encourages consistent application of strategies at home and in the community.

Discuss developmental milestones

Use tools such as the CDC Milestone Tracker.
"Carlie is about 18 months old. Would you like me to share more information about what to expect at this age?"

Frequent milestone discussions help caregivers stay informed, set realistic expectations, and detect any concerns early. This encourages proactive support and reinforces the caregiver's role as an advocate.

Support caregiver's self-care practices

Ask about the caregiver's own needs and encourage practices like rest, support networks, and time for themselves.

When caregivers prioritize their own well-being, they are more emotionally available and resilient. Supporting self-care reduces burnout, promotes mental health, and models balance and emotional regulation for their child.

Identify and share strengths

"I love how animated your tone of voice and expressions are when you model songs and words."

Highlighting strengths promotes a strengths-based approach to intervention, builds parental resilience, and fosters motivation to continue working toward goals.

Child Emotional Development

Strategy

Example

Why It's Important

Label emotions

"You're feeling frustrated because..."

Children who understand and name their emotions are better able to regulate them. This early emotional awareness contributes to social success and helps prevent behavioral issues.

Explain the importance of comfort

"That hug really helped him feel calm."

Comfort nurtures secure attachment, which is foundational to a child's ability to trust, explore, and form healthy relationships. It also teaches children how to self-soothe. Often parents get mixed messages about comfort from society – sometimes it seems as if comfort is the same as creating a weak child. We can bust that myth by sharing the information we know about the role of comfort in early brain development.

Model the behaviors you wish to see

"What characteristics do you want Victor to have as he gets older?" "Tell me ways you model those traits."

Children learn how to manage big feelings in large part by watching their adults manage big feelings. By consistently modeling empathy, patience, and emotional regulation, caregivers teach children important life skills through observation, reinforcing these behaviors naturally over time.

Support the child's self-esteem

Start with easy tasks a child can perform well before challenging them. Make each success a celebration by smiling and clapping.

Children tend to avoid difficult tasks. After all, nobody likes failing. Boosting a child's self-esteem gives them confidence to explore and try new things.

Routinely screen

Use ASQ:SE tools biannually

Regular screening ensures timely identification of delays, allowing for earlier and more effective intervention, and reassures families when development is on track.

Parent-Child Interaction & Bonding

Strategy

Example

Why It's Important

Focus on positive interactions

Peek-a-boo, silly games

Playful and joyful exchanges strengthen emotional bonds, make learning feel safe, and encourage cooperation. They also provide natural opportunities for developmental growth.

Increase nurturing responsiveness

Gentle touch, following lead, awareness of child's perspective

Responding sensitively to cues builds a secure base, fosters trust, and supports emotional and cognitive development. Children learn that their needs matter and are understood.

Observe relationships

Watch interactions for signs of connection

Observations help identify attachment patterns, strengths, and areas needing support. This insight informs individualized and effective intervention strategies.

Behavior Regulation & Support

Strategy

Example

Why It's Important

Use [positive behavior supports](#)

Redirection, give choices, celebrate successes, provide a safe place to calm down, set limits, modeling

A strengths-based and proactive approach helps reduce parental stress and increase [positive behaviors](#) in children. These strategies decrease reactivity and should be individualized for each child and situation.

Read cues and intervene early

Ask parents to reflect on their child's cues with a question like, "What are some signs that she is getting overwhelmed?"

There are four stress responses a child may experience: Green zone, red zone, blue zone, or combo zone. Click [here](#) to read the checklist that identifies different behaviors associated with each zone. Positive emotions are associated with the green zone and negative emotions are associated with the other stress responses. Children are more likely to come back and stay in the green zone when parents are attuned to their moods and feelings. Becoming a detective for your child's stress cues can be a great tool to improve attunement.

Provide structure and routine

Talk with parents about routine in terms of a child's need for predictability. We can ask questions like, "How does your child know when the next thing is going to happen?"

Predictability creates safety and helps children understand what to expect, which reduces anxiety and supports emotional regulation.

