

# Slide Handouts: Interaction – Ask the Expert



Recommended Practices Modules

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## Interaction

### Lesson 1: Ask the Expert



Welcome to Lesson 1: Ask the Expert

# Introduction

- What are interaction and interactional practices?
- What available research supports the practices?
- What are the implications for how we work with young children, particularly children with disabilities?

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In this lesson, you will understand why interactional practices are important in your work with children by considering the following questions: What are interaction and interactional practices? What available research supports the practices? What are the implications for how we work with young children, particularly children with disabilities?

# in·ter·ac·tion:

“a mutual or reciprocal action”

What is interaction and what are the DEC recommended interactional practices?

Interactional practices:

- observing
- interpreting
- responding contingently

Interactions are foundational to:

- language
- cognition
- social-emotional development

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What is interaction and what are the DEC recommended interactional practices?

Interactional practices involve observing, interpreting, and responding contingently. Sensitive and responsive interactions are foundational to the language, cognition, and social-emotional development of a child.

# DEC Recommended Practices

INT1-  
INT5

INT1. Practitioners promote the child's social-emotional development by observing, interpreting, and responding contingently to the range of the child's emotional expressions.

INT2. Practitioners promote the child's social development by encouraging the child to initiate or sustain positive interactions with other children and adults during routines and activities through modeling, teaching, feedback, or other types of guided support.

INT3. Practitioners promote the child's communication development by observing, interpreting, responding contingently, and providing natural consequences for the child's verbal and non-verbal communication and by using language to label and expand on the child's requests, needs, preferences, or interests.

INT4. Practitioners promote the child's cognitive development by observing, interpreting, and responding intentionally to the child's exploration, play, and social activity by joining in and expanding on the child's focus, actions, and intent.

INT5. Practitioners promote the child's problem-solving behavior by observing, interpreting, and scaffolding in response to the child's growing level of autonomy and self-regulation.


[Practices](#)[Continue](#)

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DEC recommends the following practices to support interaction. Take as much time as you need to review them. You may download a copy by clicking the "Practices" button. Continue when you are ready to move on.

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### About the Expert

Jeanette McCollum is retired from the University of Illinois, where she developed, administered, and taught in the graduate program in Early Childhood Special Education within the Department of Special Education. With colleagues, she developed the PIWI approach to parent-child interaction intervention, and also conducted cross-cultural research on parent-child interaction in families whose children had disabilities.

Currently she serves as a consultant on several state projects related to the quality of inclusive early childhood programs for children with and without disabilities and their families.

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Click download to read the transcript of Dr. Jeannette McCollum answering questions about early interactions. Click the continue button when you are ready to proceed.



Dr. Jeanette McCollum answers questions about early interaction

### What Does the Research Say?

Research on the importance of early interactions is very clear. In the child development research, specific characteristics of interactions have been linked to virtually every area of early development and learning in children, both during the same developmental period, and as predictive to later development and learning. Areas where research studies have explored these linkages have included relationships with parents and caregivers, peer relationships and friendships, language development, self-regulation, executive functioning, and even later academic achievement and learning, of children with or at risk for having disabilities.

Three characteristics of early interactions, in particular, have been linked to many different types of development and learning outcomes. These three are sensitivity, responsiveness, and contingency, all of which tie what the interaction partner does to the child's focus of attention, intentions, and emotions. Although most of the developmental research conducted in this area has been with children who are typically developing, the same linkages also have been found in studies.

Intervention research based on these same principles also has established these linkages. Adults, whether parents or other caregivers, interventionists from different backgrounds, and even other young children, can change the characteristics of their own interactions with target children, to become more sensitive, responsive and contingent.

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While less common, experimental research has also demonstrated the link between specific strategies based on these principles and changes in specific areas of children's development and learning. But there are limitations to what we know. With some exceptions related to bodies of research around a specific disability (such as autism) or a specific type of child outcome (e.g., language development), both development and intervention research is still sparse when viewed across different populations of children, different developmental and learning outcomes, and different models for fostering these three qualities of interaction.

## Why Is This Important?

An understanding of the three primary characteristics of interpersonal interaction that have been linked to children's development and learning is important in at least three different ways. First, for interventionists, it can become a pervasive way of thinking that makes them continually aware of their own and others' interactions with children, and gives them a way of interpreting what they are observing.

Second, this research provides a foundation for understanding and bringing into focus many different intervention models and individual strategies represented in the research literature.

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The widely used Hanen approach for promoting language development in children who are language delayed is one example. In that model, using the basic principles of observing and responding to a child's communicative signals, parents, teachers and other caregivers learn to use strategies such as imitation and expansion to join the child's focus of attention and establish turntaking sequences. There are many other models that are also founded on these principles and that incorporate similar strategies. Third, this research may be particularly important with children with disabilities. Depending on the disability as well as on other characteristics that would apply to any child, the child may communicate in unfamiliar or unexpected ways that make it harder for the interaction partner to understand and respond contingently to the child's focus of attention, intentions, and emotions.

**Why Is This Important for Children with Disabilities?**

This may be easiest to understand for children with low incidence disabilities such as visual impairment or cerebral palsy, where the child may signal in ways that are not easily interpreted by the adult. But it may also apply to children whose verbal or non-verbal communications differs from more typical interactions because they have emotional or cognitive disabilities that change their ways of interacting. The same considerations apply to a child's interactions with other children, who might also find it hard to interpret what their peer is feeling, understanding or trying to communicate; perhaps for this reason, socially competent peers, who already possess skills in adapting to social partners, are often selected for studies in which the peer takes the role of interventionist.

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In general, the particular interaction abilities of the child may influence the child's opportunities for interaction as well as the quality of the interpersonal exchanges that the child experiences. So observing to figure out that child's ways of showing interest and initiating interaction is critical to responding contingently.

**Bottom Line**

The research on early interactions has shown that whether at home, in early childhood classrooms, or other environments, family members, practitioners, and peers can use a number of evidence based practices and interventions to promote children's social-emotional, social, communication, cognitive, and problem-solving skills.

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# Summary

Family members, practitioners, and peers can use a number of evidence-based practices and interventions that have been developed to promote children's social-emotional, social, communication, cognitive, and problem-solving skills.



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In this lesson, we learned what the definition of interaction is and what research tells us about key characteristics of interactional practices. The research on early interactions has shown that whether at home, in early childhood classrooms, or other environments, family members, practitioners, and peers can use a number of evidence-based practices and interventions that have been developed to promote children's social-emotional, social, communication, cognitive, and problem-solving skills.

# Check Your Knowledge



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Now let's take a moment to check what you've learned.

# References and Resources

Handout 1.1: [Ask the Expert handout](#)

Handout 1.2: [The Research Supporting DEC Recommended Practices on Interaction](#)



This concludes Lesson 1. Thank you for participating. For more information, see the resources listed here. After downloading, you may close this window.