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## Handout 7.5

# Effective Responses to Support Parent–Child Interactions

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**Prevention** strategies can be used with any parent in order to provide support and to strengthen parent–child interactions.

- Compliment the child to the parent.
- Comment on the way a parent plays with or responds sensitively to the child.
- Mention how the child’s attention is focused on the parent, or how attached the child is to the parent.
- Help parents and children with transitions at drop-off and pickup time.
- Help parents understand the meaning of the child’s behavior.
- Admire the way a parent is handling a tough situation.
- Help to distract or amuse a restless child.
- Offer a helping hand.
- Give the parent a chance to talk.
- Speak and interact with the parent and child in respectful, warm, and supportive ways.
- Make a joke; use your sense of humor.
- Arrange the environment to make it easier for parents to interact with their children.

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- Provide information about typical child development and behavior.
- Suggest strategies for positively guiding infants' and toddlers' behavior.

**Interventions** can be offered when you see a very stressed parent or a troubled interaction between a parent and a child. Some of the above strategies can also be effective interventions. Here are some others:

- Empathize with the parent's feelings or experience.
- Give the parent and child a chance to take a break from each other until they can become calmer.
- Allow parents to “vent” (express their feelings).
- Acknowledge that parents sometimes have angry feelings toward their children (and children sometimes feel angry toward parents).
- Help parents think of ways to handle anger or frustration that are not harmful to themselves or their children.
- Keep your own voice calm and your pace of speech moderate.
- Encourage parents to observe and play with their child.
- Offer help in noticing what the infant or toddler likes to do, and letting those observations guide the play.
- Invite parents to think about their goals in using particular parenting behaviors.
- Ask parents to think about what their child might be learning from their behavior. Is this what they want their child to learn?
- Agree with parent that sometimes it is hard to know what to do.

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- Help parents think of positive ways to respond when they find their infant’s or toddler’s behaviors to be difficult.
- Help parent to have reasonable expectations of an infant’s or toddler’s abilities and behaviors.
- Offer information on alternatives to hitting or yelling.
- Help the parent to understand the child’s perspective.
- Offer further resources for help and support (support groups, classes, counseling, or other), if needed.