

Developing respectful interactions with infants and toddlers



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ECE resources

The questions below encourage you to imagine how an infant or toddler experiences rushed interactions and well-meaning actions that do not consider their perspective. Use them to reflect on what you think shows respect to infants and toddlers in ECE settings.

Consider what it would be like to be picked up without warning, or from behind. Wouldn't you prefer to be told what was going to happen, or, even better, invited? And, if invited, given time to consider the request, and time to respond and to prepare yourself for the movement?

Consider what it would be like to be put into a highchair, or baby seat or bouncer, from which you couldn't get out by yourself, and which restrains you. Wouldn't you prefer to find your own places to sit or rest, and to decide for yourself how to get there?

Consider what it would be like to be placed in precarious positions, in which you feel wobbly and unsafe, and unable to support yourself. Would placing cushions around you help?

Consider what it would be like to be laid on your tummy, where your vision is curtailed and your head and neck movements uncomfortable, because someone thinks you should build your neck muscles.

Consider what it would be like to be grabbed by the hands and pulled up to exercise your legs, because someone thinks it is good for your development?

Consider what it would be like to be passed from one set of arms to another, to people you didn't know.

Consider what it would be like to have your t-shirt removed, or to have your nose or face wiped without being told. Wouldn't you prefer to be asked, and have time to prepare for the procedure?

Consider what it would be like to have something forcibly taken out of your hand, because it wasn't 'for you'. Wouldn't you prefer to be asked to give it, and have that person wait while you process the request and begin to reply?

Consider what it would be like to have a hat placed on your head as you venture outside. Wouldn't you prefer to be asked?

Consider what it would be like to be taken to bed, even when you weren't tired. How would you like to be made to stay up when you were?

Consider what it would be like to be hungry but have to wait until a set time for something to eat, or to be made to eat when you weren't hungry.

Consider what it would be like to be ignored when you were communicating with someone, or if you were experiencing strong emotions.

Consider what it would be like to have to follow a request immediately. Wouldn't you prefer to be able to finish what you were working on?

Consider what it would be like to be talked about, as if you couldn't understand the conversation. Wouldn't you prefer to be made to feel part of the conversation and given a chance to contribute?

Further reading

Brownlee, P. (2012). In search of the culture of respect. Retrieved from https://penniebrownlee.weebly.com/uploads/1/0/4/3/10437917/quiz_in_search_of_the_culture_of_respect.pdf

Brownlee, P. (2016). Dance with me in the heart. Thames, NZ: Good Egg Books.

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Dr Vicki Hargraves

Vicki is a teacher, mother, writer, and researcher. She recently completed her PhD using philosophy to explore creative approaches to understanding early childhood education. She is inspired by the wealth of educational research that is available and is passionate about making this available and useful for teachers.