

Practitioner guidance

Using the Centre for Early Childhood's Explainers to support families

Evidence clearly shows that the interactions between babies and young children, and the adults who care for them, are critical for their early development. Nurturing interactions with parents and other caring adults, such as early educators and grandparents, support children's developing social and emotional skills. Experiencing consistent, nurturing interactions in early childhood has benefits that can be felt throughout life.

The Centre for Early Childhood's Explainers are designed to help adults recognise how simple, everyday interactions can support babies and young children's social and emotional development. We hope these films will be a useful tool in encouraging more nurturing adult-child interactions.



Watch the Explainer Series on the
Centre for Early Childhood website
[centreforearlychildhood.org/
the-explainer-series/](https://centreforearlychildhood.org/the-explainer-series/)

Using the Explainers in your practice

It can be challenging to reflect on and change established patterns of interactions. That is why these films have been intentionally designed to be strengths-based: they are designed to support positive, optimistic conversations between practitioners and families. They can also be used in a professional context by trainers or supervisors of practitioners (such as early educators and nurses) who work directly with babies and young children.

The films have been co-produced by a range of practitioners from different settings around the UK who are excited about how they can be used to support parents. The films could be shown to parents directly, as part of a conversation about parenting or children's development. Or it may be that as a practitioner you use the films to build your own knowledge and help in your conversations with families.

We must be mindful that it will not always be the right thing to show families one of these films. A parent struggling with severe mental illness, or in the middle of a housing crisis for example, may not have the headspace to engage positively in thinking about their interactions with their baby: trying to introduce these concepts may be unhelpful in that moment. A practitioner who knows a family's situation can decide when and how to introduce these concepts in a way that feels right for them.

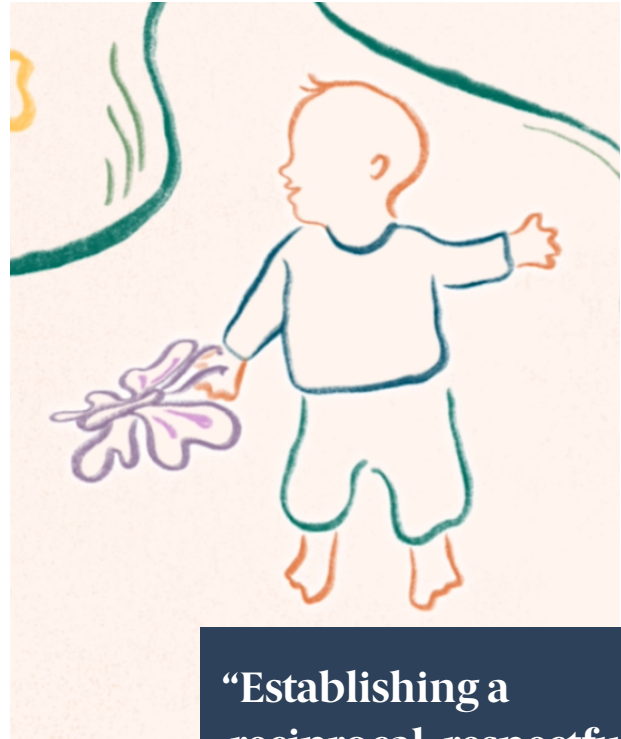
The CREATES acronym has been developed to help you use these films and the concepts discussed within them effectively.

What CREATES the conditions for change?

Connection
Repetition
Experiencing the change
Actionable guidance
Tap into their intrinsic motivation
Empathy
Strengths-based

Connection

People are more open to new ideas when they feel at ease, and when they trust the person they are talking to. Before beginning conversations about interaction, take time to build rapport. Establishing a reciprocal, respectful and warm connection sets the stage for deeper engagement and openness to learning.



Repetition

Change rarely happens through one conversation – it is a process. Adults are more likely to make lasting adjustments in their interactions with babies and young children when ideas are revisited and reinforced over time. You might start by introducing a concept, follow up with a link to the relevant Centre for Early Childhood Explainer, then have a discussion and check-in the next time you speak, revisiting the same idea in a real-world context and offering specific tips and feedback. This ongoing reinforcement helps embed new understanding and behaviours.

“Establishing a reciprocal, respectful and warm connection sets the stage for deeper engagement and openness to learning.”

Experiencing the change

Just as babies and young children thrive on warm, responsive interactions, so do adults. By modelling the kind of attuned, supportive behaviours shown in the film such as pacing, scaffolding, and responsive communication – you not only bring the concepts to life, but also support the adult’s own sense of being valued and contained (safe and protected). This relational safety makes change more likely.

When practitioners provide parents with a containing, supportive relationship – helping them feel safe and “held” – this can free up space in the parents’ mind. This can support them when processing their own experiences and help them become more available for their baby or child.



“We may need to support parents’ own emotional or practical needs and help them to feel safe, seen, and supported, before we can then talk about how they interact with babies and children.”

Actionable guidance

Scientific concepts only become meaningful when adults can connect them to their own lives and behaviour. You can help by using everyday examples to show what a concept looks like in action, and adapt these examples to suit the adult’s context, culture and relationship with the child.

For example, co-regulation might look different for a parent calming a newborn at home, when compared to an early educator supporting a pre-school child. The principle is the same, but the practice must be tailored. Giving specific, actionable tips can bridge the gap between theory and reality.

Tap into their intrinsic motivation

Lasting change is most likely when it aligns with what matters most to an adult. Active, empathetic listening helps us grasp people’s perspectives, values, and goals. By meeting people where they are and aligning your support with their priorities, you tap into their natural motivation to change. When adults feel heard and understood they are also more receptive to advice and new information.

Everyone has something they are striving for, whether it is improving their daily life or creating a better future for their children. For example, if a parent really values a child’s learning and academic success, you might talk more about how positive interactions support learning and language development. If a parent is finding day-to-day life with a toddler difficult, you might discuss how certain strategies will help make daily tasks easier.

Empathy

Caring for babies and young children can be hard at times. Reflecting on our own parenting or practice can also stir up difficult emotions such as guilt, shame or self-doubt. It is important to approach conversations with sensitivity and to avoid unintentionally creating or exacerbating these feelings. Reassure adults that babies and children do not need perfect care – they only need us to be “good enough”.

Some adults may be dealing with life circumstances that make it hard for them to be emotionally available to children. If a parent or caregiver is overwhelmed, unregulated or unsupported themselves, they may struggle to hold the child’s needs in mind. Recognising these challenges is important. We may need to support parents’ own emotional or practical needs and help them to feel safe, seen, and supported, before we can then talk about how they interact with babies and children.



Strengths-based

Positive conversations start with recognising what is going well. By focusing on strengths, however small, we can build confidence and self-efficacy. Affirming positive behaviours fosters trust and helps the adult feel more empowered, paving the way for positive change.