What is Developmental Parenting?

Excerpt from:

CHAPTER I

WHAT IS DEVELOPMENTAL PARENTING?
HOW CAN PARENTING-FOCUSED PROGRAMS FACILITATE IT?

Developmental parenting is what most parents are doing when they clap their hands for their baby’s first steps, soothe their toddler who gets hurt, encourage their child to sing a song, or ask their child what happened at school. It is the kind of parenting that values a child’s development, supports a child’s development, and changes along with a child’s development. Developmental parenting is warm, responsive, encouraging, and communicative. For many programs serving infants or young children, especially home-based programs, it is the kind of parenting that the program hopes to increase as a result of home visits or other parenting support services the program provides.

Valuing Development

Valuing development doesn’t mean everyone values the same aspects of development equally. Almost all parents value many of the new skills and ideas children acquire in the early years, from a baby’s first steps and first words to first learning to ride a bicycle, but not all parents value the child’s first “no” or first “why?” or first “why not?” although these too are important milestones of development in the early years.

Also, not all parents are aware of children’s many small steps in acquiring the skills of exploration or communication that are needed before that first step or first word. In fact, some parents may need help noticing some of these small steps of development and
supporting them. Even in the best of circumstances, it is often hard for parents to notice all the small steps of a child’s development. For some parents, life can be too hectic, stressful, or chaotic to take note of something as big as a child’s newly acquired ability to climb until something gets broken or the child gets hurt.

When parents notice a child’s development, they can respond to it, and responding to it is what provides young children with support for further development. Some parents are more concerned about raising a smart child, while others are more concerned about raising a polite child. Most parents want both of these outcomes and other good outcomes as well, like a child who grows into a happy healthy adult with a good education, a steady job, close relationships, and a clean arrest record. There are many ways parents respond to their children’s development in the early years to help make these and many other positive outcomes more likely.

**Supporting Development**

Supporting development requires, first, the major job of keeping children safe and healthy, but research tells us that parents make a difference in their children’s success in life by being *warm, responsive, encouraging, and communicative*. These developmental parenting behaviors are linked, in study after study, to three important outcomes in children’s early development—*attachment, exploration,* and *communication*.

The parent-child relationship provides a major context for much of early development. The interactions between parent and child promote development in children’s social behavior, their language, and their thinking. When the parent-child relationship is positive, infants and toddlers develop a sense of security, explore with
What is Developmental Parenting?

confidence, and learn to communicate their needs. These three outcomes are the foundations of social-emotional, cognitive, and language development, which are, in turn, the foundations of the outcomes parents dream of for their children, because all three of these domains of development support school readiness, academic success, social competence, and mental health (see Table 1.1).

Table 1-1

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early developmental supports</th>
<th>Research findings</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent-child interactions</td>
<td>Parent-child interactions influence child development in social-emotional,</td>
<td>Culp et al., 2001; Estrada et al., 1987; Fewell &amp; Deutscher, 2002; Gardner et al., 2003;</td>
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<td>language, and cognitive domains that are of central importance to children’s later</td>
<td>Hubbs-Tait et al., 2002; Lee et al., 2002; Shonkoff &amp; Phillips, 2000</td>
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<td>school success.</td>
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<td>Specific kinds of parenting</td>
<td>Social-emotional, language, and cognitive development are all linked with parent-</td>
<td>Bornstein et al., 1992; Bornstein &amp; Tamis-LeMonda, 1989; Estrada et al., 1987; Hart &amp; Risley, 1995;</td>
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<td>interactions</td>
<td>child interactions characterized by supportiveness, nurturance, and engagement in</td>
<td>Harnish et al., 1995; Kelly et al., 1996; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 1999</td>
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<td>play and conversation.</td>
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<td>Warm, loving interactions</td>
<td>Warmth, including physical closeness and positive expressions, is related to less</td>
<td>Caspi et al., 2004; Dodici et al., 2003; Estrada et al., 1987; MacDonald, 1992; Petrill et al.,</td>
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<td>antisocial behavior, better adjustment, more compliance, and better school</td>
<td>2004; Sroufe et al., 1990</td>
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<td>readiness.</td>
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<td>Responsive interactions</td>
<td>Responsive interactions are important both directly and indirectly through secure</td>
<td>Booth et al., 1994; Bornstein &amp; Tamis-LeMonda, 1989; De Wolff &amp; van Ijzendoorn, 1997; Easterbrooks</td>
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<td>attachment for the child’s continuing social, cognitive, and language development.</td>
<td>et al., 2000; Goldberg, 1977; Kochanska, 1995; Londerville &amp; Main, 1981; Roggman et al., 1987;</td>
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<td>1994; Youngblade et al., 1993</td>
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<td>Encouraging exploration</td>
<td>Playing together increases children’s initiative, curiosity, and creativity in</td>
<td>Bakeman &amp; Adamson, 1984; Hunter et al., 1987; Landry et al., 1996; Roggman et al., 2004; Smith et</td>
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<td>through play</td>
<td>their play and their developing social and cognitive skills.</td>
<td>al., 1996; Spencer &amp; Meadow-Orlans, 1996</td>
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<td>Teaching and talking</td>
<td>Conversations with adults and exposure to many words helps children learn</td>
<td>Bornstein et al., 1998; Hart &amp; Risley, 1995; Snow, 1983</td>
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What is Developmental Parenting?

### Other regular home experiences
- Reading books, telling stories, and sharing family routines support language and early literacy.

DeTemple, 1999; Dickinson et al., 1999; Lyon, 1999; Snow, 1983; RAND, 2002

Parents express their love for their children in many kinds of ways, but however the parent shows affection, children benefit from that sense of closeness and connectedness. When children feel close and connected to their parents, they are more likely to be compliant and less likely to tantrum and misbehave. From a parent’s responsiveness, a baby learns to trust and forms a secure attachment to the parent, providing the foundation of social-emotional development. Babies who are securely attached, compared with those who are not, grow up to be more sociable, better able to handle stress, and better able to maintain close relationships and become good parents. In the early years of life, parents’ responses are often to their children’s physical distress in the context of caregiving—picking up the crying baby, feeding the hungry toddler—but also to their children’s actions and expressions in the context of interaction and conversation, such as taking an offered toy or answering children’s questions.

When a toddler offers a parent a toy or reaches for something, for example, the response of the parent creates an opportunity for the child to explore objects and how they work in the world, providing the foundation of cognitive development. Similarly, when a young child asks “why?” the parent’s answers to the child’s question offer the child an opportunity to use communication to learn, providing the foundation of language development and the motivation for future learning. From a parent’s encouragement and play, toddlers learn to explore, try new things, become more independent, and acquire skills that help them take care of themselves. From talking and communicating with caring adults, children learn to understand and use language. These are the fundamental
What is Developmental Parenting?

foundations of child development.

A child who is confident and curious about exploring new things and who has the language to communicate and ask questions is more likely to enter school ready to learn academic skills and to succeed in the years of school that follow. Children who start school insecure and anxious, wary of new situations, and with limited language skills are simply not prepared to learn and succeed in school. But those who are prepared to succeed in school will be less likely to face problems of unemployment and poverty later in life.

**Changing with Development**

Changes in parenting that go along with a child’s development are a direct result of a parent being responsive to a child’s developmental needs. This doesn’t mean that parents should stop doing one kind of behavior, such as showing warmth and affection, and start doing another kind of behavior, such as teaching and talking, when a child reaches a certain age or developmental milestone. It does mean, however, that how a parent shows affection or what a parent talks about with a child will change as the child grows and changes. Few parents would play peek-a-boo with a four-year-old, but some parents may not notice when their child is ready to put on their own clothes or choose what to have on a sandwich. Helping parents notice developmental changes and read emotional cues from their infant or toddler will help parents learn to develop and adapt their parenting skills to support their child’s development at any age.
Facilitating Developmental Parenting

If developmental parenting is so important for children, how can we make it easier for all parents to do? To facilitate something is to make it easier. How can we facilitate developmental parenting? Developmental parenting may be easy for many parents, but it is hard for some. Even for parents who find developmental parenting easy, some additional encouragement and ideas can help them do even more to support their children’s development. Parents living in tough economic circumstances, trying to adapt to a new culture, or struggling to survive past trauma or abuse, are often too stressed or distressed to notice their children’s everyday developmental needs, to see ways to incorporate play and talk in family routines to support their children’s development, or to think about how their parenting may need to be changing as their children get older. These parents need even more help to make developmental parenting easier. They need encouragement, guidance, and support to focus on their parenting. Yet practitioners working in parenting programs sometimes find it particularly challenging to focus on parenting with the parents who need it the most.

What about Parents in Crisis?

For a parent worried about finding shelter or food or a parent needing mental health or substance abuse treatment, those services need to be provided immediately. A parent in crisis is unlikely to show much developmental parenting. For parents in extremely difficult situations, who are homeless or hungry or severely depressed, developmental parenting is not only hard but next to impossible. The child, however, is still developing and still has developmental needs, and many parents will find a way to
comfort and interact positively with their child even in extremely difficult circumstances. The child’s development will not wait while the parent finds shelter, food, and relief. In fact, any situation that is so traumatic to interfere with parenting is likely to be even more traumatic for a very young child, because young children are easily stressed and have only a child’s resources for coping. When children are not learning to trust, play, and talk, they are more likely to be learning to be insecure, anxious, and timid.

Consider, for example, a family who has survived a natural disaster such as a major flood, hurricane, tsunami, or earthquake. For the parents, there may be urgent and frightening challenges to take care of, to treat injuries, find shelter, obtain food and water, or cope with the loss of their home or other family members. Having a 2-year-old to take care of at the same time only increases the stress. For the child, however, the challenge of getting comfort and care when everything is strange and frightening can be completely overwhelming. Infants and young children have limited resources for coping with stress, and their main resource is getting comfort from their mother or father. When that comfort is not available, the grief, fear, and sense of loss can leave some children seriously disturbed for long periods of time, having recurrent problems sleeping, eating, or controlling their emotions or behavior. For most families, the situation is never so extreme, but the chaotic and stressful situations faced by families can get in the way of their parenting. And their children often suffer for it.

Recommendations for parents and other adults who care for children in crisis situations typically include taking time to reassure and respond to the child and find even a few minutes to play and talk. In other words, the best way to help children in a crisis situation is through the same things we call developmental parenting. Some families may
What is Developmental Parenting?

need other people to take care of their child for short or long periods of time when there is a crisis that interferes with their parenting, but for many families in crisis, parents can benefit from support and encouragement to provide developmental parenting for their child in ways that are realistic and comfortable for the family. By facilitating developmental parenting, we can help parents, even in difficult situations, help keep their child learning, growing, and developing. Even in chaotic circumstances, if we help parents develop secure relationships with their children, it will help to sustain them both, now and in the future.

**Focus on Parenting**

Various programs for infants and young children aim to increase developmental parenting. Some of these programs send practitioners into family homes to work with parents and their children. These practitioners are often called home visitors, but are sometimes called family educators, home educators, parent educators, parenting facilitators (our favorite), or any one of a number of titles. They may include educators, social workers, nurses, or other kinds of practitioners. While the term home visitor may be the most common and easily understood title, it is also a term that offers little description of what happens on home visits. Most programs intend for the home visitor to do more than visit and do not restrict the visits to occur only in families’ homes. Practitioners could also meet with parents at a center or anywhere else in the community where parents go with their young children. The assumption, however, is that they work individually with parents and their children together, on a home visit or someplace else.

When practitioners in programs for infants and young children work with parents, in their homes or in other contexts, they typically use one of two basic models: child-
focused or parent-focused. *Child-focused* models provide direct services to the child. *Parent-focused* models offer services to the parent. A growing number of programs, however, use a *parenting-focused model*, sometimes called an interaction-focused model (see Figure 1-1), which is different in four ways from the other two models. First, it provides indirect child development services through the parent, and through parenting to the child. Second, it emphasizes developmental parenting as a primary outcome of the program. Third, it addresses broad foundational areas of early development across a wide age range rather than specific milestones at only one age. Finally, as indicated by the double-ended arrows in Figure 1-1, in a parenting focused model, the practitioner follows a parent’s lead, by observing and responding to the parent’s values, existing skills, and resources, and guides the parent to follow the child’s lead, by noticing and responding to the child’s emotions, interests, and emerging skills.

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<th>Child-Focused Model:</th>
<th>Parent-Focused Model:</th>
<th>Parenting-Focused Model:</th>
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<td>Practitioner</td>
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<td>Child</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Parenting Interactions</td>
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*Figure 1-1.* Models of home visiting.

*Child-focused model.* In a child-focused model, home visitors or other practitioners plan and provide specific infant-toddler learning activities, similar to the kinds of developmental learning activities that would be offered in an enriched center-based classroom environment. The practitioner then does these activities directly with the child (see Figure 1-2). In this model, the role of the parent is typically that of an observer who is expected to learn through imitation and later do a similar activity with the child.
Although there is an advantage to a child-focused model, there are disadvantages as well.

An advantage of working directly with the child is that someone with expertise in child development can provide rich and varied experiences that nurture the child’s development and provide a good example for the parent to imitate. In this child-focused model, the practitioner typically “models” or demonstrates developmental learning activities for a parent to observe and then encourages the parent to do the activity several times before the next home visit. The activity may be scripted for the parent, may involve materials the home visitor leaves for the family, and may encourage the parent to keep data. This model can be effective with some parents, and it is easy for a practitioner with child development background to implement with limited training.

**Child-Focused Model:**

- **Practitioner** → **Child**
  - Provides rich opportunities for child (+)
  - Relies on parent imitating, following through (-)
  - Sends message that parent cannot teach child (-)

*Figure 1-2. The child-focused model.*

A disadvantage of this model is that if the parent does not imitate the practitioner, the opportunity for the child to engage in the learning activities occurs only when the practitioner is present. If the parents do not follow through between visits, the learning activities happen only during a limited time, when the practitioner can interact with the child, and are not likely to have much impact on development. For many families, this model does not work well. Some parents do not have time to do structured learning activities with their child or do not like doing them.
A more serious disadvantage of the child-focused model is that even though it can show the parent a good model for fostering development, it can undermine the role of the parent. A child-focused model often sends an implicit message, whether intended or not, that compared to the expert practitioner, the parent is inadequate at promoting their child’s development. For some parents, this implicit message actually discourages them from trying to do similar activities or any other learning activities with their child. Sometimes, in home visiting programs that use this model, parents have been known to go in another room to do household chores or take a break on their own, leaving the visiting practitioner and child to interact alone! Sometimes, the practitioner provides activities for the child because of fears that no one else will. Either way, the potential impact of the program is limited. Support for development provided by the learning activities is over when the practitioner is not present, thereby limiting both the intensity and the long-term effects of the program.

*Parent-focused model.* A parent-focused model, in contrast, focuses on helping the parents (see Figure 1-3). This may entail obtaining help to get the family’s basic needs met, accessing community resources for housing, food, education or employment, and providing emotional support for distress resulting from the parent’s problems in life. It may also involve providing information about child development or parenting or making suggestions for learning activities for the parent to do with their infant or toddler. Often the practitioner provides and discusses written materials with the parents, pamphlets and printed handouts with information on topics related to the parent’s concerns and problems. In addition, the practitioner typically spends a lot of time listening to the parent, building a relationship, and providing emotional support. The
advantage of this model is that it can provide effective case management for families in crisis while still providing some supplemental information about child development and parenting.

![Parent-Focused Model: Practitioner → Parent]

- Provides referrals, information, and support to parent (+)
- Relies on parent using child development information (-)
- Sends message that life problems can interfere with parenting (-)

**Figure 1-3.** The parent-focused model.

For a parent and family with multiple needs, it may seem much more important to get food than to play games with a baby! It is true that a hungry baby is not a playful baby. Basic needs do come first. And a depressed and anxious mother is not likely to be a responsive parent without some essential emotional support that can, in turn, help her attend to the needs of her child. The child’s development does not stop, however, while the parent focuses on solving family and personal problems. A disadvantage of a parent-focused model is that it is unlikely to help parents observe, support, or adapt to their children’s development. Information may be provided about child development, but the parent is not necessarily helped to put the information into practice. The implicit message is that the parent’s problems interfere with responding to the child so it might be hopeless to try. The tendency for a troubled parent to ignore their child’s developmental needs would then become even more likely.

*Parenting-focused model.* A parenting focused model is different from the other two models because it emphasizes parents’ support of their children’s development. The
practitioner focuses neither directly on the child nor on the parent but rather on the parent-child interactions that support child development (see Figure 1-4). The practitioner may bring some materials to do a planned activity, but the family’s available household materials are often used. Activities are often based on regular family routines that can be used to support the child’s development, and the activity is usually planned ahead of time so the parent can be prepared. The practitioner helps a parent identify ways to enjoy the activity with the child and ways to use developmental parenting behaviors they already do to promote early development. The practitioner also helps guide the parent to observe and interpret the child’s cues and respond to the child’s needs, interests, and emerging developmental skills. There are multiple advantages to this approach.

![Parenting-Focused Model](image)

**Parenting-Focused Model:** Practitioner ➔ Parenting Interactions ➔ Child

- Respects parent as child’s teacher (+)
- Builds developmental parenting skills (+)
- Builds parent confidence in parenting (+)
- Helps parent use child development information (+)
- Helps parents keep parenting during a crisis (+)
- Establishes an enduring context for a child’s development (+)
- Requires more practitioner training and skills (-)

*Figure 1-4.* The parenting-focused model.

A parenting-focused model sends an implicit message of respect for the role of the parent as someone who can provide good developmental experiences for the child, even in difficult times. Parent-child interactions during everyday activities are central to both early and later development. The research literature is clear on showing that
What is Developmental Parenting?

Supportive parent-child interactions contribute to children’s social-emotional, cognitive, and language development. These developmental domains are of central importance to children’s later academic and social success. Parents often need information and encouragement to increase the amount of developmentally supportive interactions they have with their infants and toddlers. In a parenting-focused model, the practitioner serves as a consultant to provide that information combined with direct help and encouragement to put the information into practice.

In addition to needing information, help, and encouragement to provide good developmental experiences for their young children, parents often first need confidence about their ability to provide those experiences. By focusing on the parent as the person best able to support the child’s development, and by building on the parent’s strengths and sharing expertise collaboratively, a parenting-focused model increases parents’ confidence along with their knowledge and motivation. An additional advantage of the parenting-focused model is that as parents develop skills for providing developmental opportunities for their children, they can more readily incorporate these opportunities into their everyday family routines.

By helping parents take advantage of daily activities to provide developmental opportunities, a parenting-focused model ensures that supportive interactions and activities are likely to continue on a regular basis even after the parenting program has ended. The parent-child relationship is likely to be an enduring one, while the practitioner-child relationship is likely to be a temporary one. The best context for development is an enduring relationship, so the parenting-focused model supports the parent-child relationship as a primary context for development.
This parenting-focused model does have disadvantages. It requires a higher level of practitioner skills and makes it impossible to follow a tightly scripted curriculum because the practitioner responds to each parent’s values, interests, and parenting skills while encouraging the parent to respond to their child’s emotions, interests, and developmental skills. Using this model to deliver child development services through parents, requires knowledge and skills related not only to child development, which are definitely required, but also to parenting and adult development. It also requires sensitivity and responsiveness to each family’s values, goals, and culture.

**Using a Parenting-Focused Model**

Parenting-focused models use a facilitative approach to promote developmental parenting that supports early child development. Parenting-focused models, therefore, do the following:

1. Deliver services from practitioner to parent and through parenting to child.
2. Help parents observe, support, and adapt to their child’s development.
3. Address foundations of social-emotional, cognitive, and language development.

*What is a facilitative approach?* A facilitative approach makes developmental parenting easier by emphasizing child development and the parenting behaviors that support it, focusing on parent-child interaction, and building on family strengths. A facilitative approach could be applied to various services, but when applied to a parenting-focused model, it means that practitioners deliver child development services by helping parents use their own skills and resources to support their own child’s development. How is a parenting-focused model implemented with a facilitative
What is Developmental Parenting?

1. Emphasis is on child development.
2. Focus is on parent-child interactions that support development.
3. Strategies are used to assess and expand family strengths to support early development.
4. The emphasis, focus, and strategies make developmental parenting easier.

Both of the following vignettes describe a good home visit with a parenting-focused model. Only one of them uses a facilitative approach. Look for the differences.

### A Traditional Approach

**Amy**: Hi, come on in. Sorry about the mess.

**Janice** [while giving a quick hug to Jacob, Amy’s son who is almost 2 years old]: No problem. How have you been?

**Jacob** [jumping around while singing Janice’s name and reaching for her bag]: Jaanish, Jaanish, Whatcha got? Whatcha got?

**Janice** [with smile and a wink]: Be patient Jacob—you just have to wait a minute.

**Janice** [turning to Amy]: Any progress on solving the conflicts with your trailer park manager?

**Amy**: Well, we can stay here for now.

**Janice**: Good news! I bet that’s a relief for you, Amy. I know you were really worried about moving. How did the reading time with Jacob go this week?

**Amy** [after hesitating]: Well, things were pretty hectic. We didn’t get much of that done.

**Janice**: Maybe next week will be better now that you don’t have to worry about where you’ll be living!

**Janice** [while pulling a book out of her bag]: Jacob, can you tell me what’s on the front of this book?

**Jacob** [excitedly]: “El-phant! El-phant!

**Janice** [to Amy]: I noticed last week that he was really interested in the elephant puzzle so I brought a book with an elephant this time. Would you like to read it to him?

**Amy**: No thanks, you go ahead. I’m so tired.
Janice: Are you sure? Well, ok. Here Jacob, let's look at this book. What do you think it's about?

Jacob: El-phants!

Janice: That's right, it is about an elephant, a special elephant named Edgar who can't find his shoes. Where are your shoes? [Jacob points to his shoes.] That's right. Show your mom your shoes, Jacob.

Jacob: Ma, my choos!

Amy: Good boy!

Janice: He's saying so much more now that even a few weeks ago, Amy.

Janice reads the book to Jacob, stopping often to ask questions about the book and about Jacob's experiences related to what is in the book.

Janice: Do you ever lose your shoes, Jacob?

Jacob: My choos!

Amy: He lost a shoe last week and I still can't find it.

Janice [to Jacob]: Did you lose a shoe?

Jacob: Choo gone.

Janice: Well, Edgar lost both of his shoes! Let's see if he can find them.

After finishing the book, Janice pulls out and opens a small container.

Janice [to Jacob]: Here's some play-dough for you to play with, Jacob, while I talk to your mom. See? You can roll it into balls.

While Jacob squeezes the play-dough, Janice goes over several handouts with Amy, one on easy snacks for toddlers, another on preventing colds, one with rhyming finger-plays, and one with a recipe for homemade play-dough.

Janice [to Amy]: You can make some this week and try it out.

Janice [to Jacob]: Would you like mama to make you some play-dough Jacob?

Jacob: Pa-do ma!

Amy [with little enthusiasm]: We can probably do that.

A Facilitative Approach

Janice parks alongside the old mobile home in the trailer park on the outskirts of town. She goes up to the trailer door and knocks. Amy opens the door.
What is Developmental Parenting?

Amy: Hi, come on in. Sorry about the mess.

Janice [while giving a quick hug to Jacob, Amy’s son who is almost 2 years old]: No problem. How have you been?

Jacob [jumping around while singing Janice’s name and reaching for her bag]: Jaanish, Jaanish, Whatcha got? Whatcha got?

Janice [with smile and a wink]: Jacob, Jacob!

Janice [turning to Amy]: Any progress on solving the conflicts with your trailer park manager?

Amy: Well, we can stay here for now.

Janice: Good news! I bet that’s a relief for you, Amy. You were concerned about how Jacob would take the move.

Amy: I was. He seems so attached to his blanket and bear and routines, it was hard to imagine how he’d cope with moving in with my mom and not having a real place to live for a while.

Janice: Well, blankets and bears can be carried along with you and that often helps kids, but you’re right that moving is hard on kids this age. So what have you and Jacob been up to this week?

Amy [after hesitating]: Well, he had a pretty good week. He had a friend over and they were ‘building things.’ That was fun, huh Jacob?

Janice: Wow, tell me more about that—were they pretending?

Amy: Oh, they were mostly just stacking blocks and knocking them over but they said they were buildings.

Jacob: Bidding crash!

Amy [to Jacob]: Go get your blocks from under your bed to show Janice.

Janice [to Amy]: That’s pretty cool! Using blocks like a real building is a kind of pretending that’s a big part of cognitive development and language development too.

Amy [after a pause]: I like that it’s good for him to play with blocks. He sure can spend a lot of time just stacking them up and knocking them down so it’s good to know it’s good for something.

Janice: Blocks are great for pretending because they can be so many things—they could be cars, the sides of a road, or even people. We could play with the blocks next time and come up with even more games like that if you like.

Amy [with some enthusiasm]: Oh, he’d love that. It would be fun.

Janet [after pausing and glancing out the window]: Actually, rather than going to the park for our visit like we planned, we could just play with blocks now because it’s looking like rain.

Amy [to Janice]: Sure, if that’s ok. You know, these blocks are actually ends of wooden boards that his dad brought home and sanded smooth, but they’re easy for him to stack.

Janice: That’s wonderful that he made these blocks that Jacob can play and pretend with. They are great educational toys for talking and pretending, and they’re the right size for small hands.
What is Developmental Parenting?

Amy [laughing]: Well, the price was right! They were just throwing the ends away where he was working, so he bought a bunch home for free.

Janice: I wonder what Jacob wants to do with them today.

Amy [to Jacob]: What do you want to build? Let’s build a tall skyscraper.

Jacob looks quizzically at his mom.

Janice: Does he know that word?

Amy [to Janice]: Maybe not.
Amy [to Jacob]: Jacob, let’s build a really, really tall building. That’s called a skyscraper.

Jacob [squealing]: A sty-staper!

Amy [frowning]: He doesn’t pronounce some things right.

Janice: Many kids this age don’t combine sounds very well, but it’s more important that they are learning a lot of words and that you can understand them.

Amy: Well, I can understand a lot of what he’s saying, and that’s a lot better than it used to be.

Janice [nodding]: I remember that he wasn’t talking this much even just a couple months ago and he was hard to understand.

Amy: I know, he’s saying a lot more words now.

Janice: So he’s probably more interested in new words too. What new words have you noticed this week?

Amy: Oh my gosh, he’s been saying so many new words. He asked for ‘ice-keem’ and said ‘socks’ where before he had been saying ‘choos’ for both shoes and socks and he said something about the ‘ba-tub’ too.

Janice: Wow, he’s been taking off in his language and you’ve been paying attention!

Jacob interrupts with a word Janice doesn’t understand.

Janice [to Amy]: What’s he saying?”

Amy [laughing]: I think he’s saying this is a road only without the ‘r’.
Amy [to Jacob]: Is this your road, honey?

Jacob: Oad!. . . .
The two approaches are similar in some ways. In both vignettes, the interactions between the home visitor and family are warm and positive, and the child is happy to see the visitor. However, the two approaches are different in many ways. See Table 1-2 to see “How is a facilitative approach different from a traditional approach?”

The differences between the two vignettes are primarily in the roles of the practitioner and the mother. In the facilitative model, more of the direction for activities is left up to the parent who knows what her child likes, what the family has, and what she is comfortable with herself. Following are several important characteristics of the facilitative approach that we recommend to best promote developmental parenting.

- A facilitative approach emphasizes child development and the parenting behaviors that promote it.

A facilitative approach maintains an emphasis on the kinds of parenting behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes that support children’s development. Parenting includes what the parent does with a child but also what the parent knows about the child, the parent’s goals for their child, the values they want to teach the child, and the home environment they share with the child. In a parenting-focused program using a facilitative approach, services always include the

Table 1-2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How is a Facilitative Approach Different from a Traditional Approach?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A facilitative approach sounds more like this…</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Visitor (HV) helps family think about whatever materials they have available to use for children’s learning activities, and encourages use of available materials.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is Developmental Parenting?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation about family problem emphasizes the child’s feelings, the mother’s concerns about the child, and the mother’s insights about the child.</th>
<th>use them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conversation about family problem mentions only the mother’s feelings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HV asks open-ended questions about what the parent and child did together during the week.</th>
<th>HV asks whether or not an assigned activity was done, encourages better follow through next week.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HV does activities the HV planned using materials the HV brought to the visit.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HV suggests doing activity for the visit that is something family is already doing. Original activity parent and HV planned together won’t work because of rain so HV listens for alternative ideas.</th>
<th>HV supports parents using recommended practices, for example, by cueing parent to explain a new word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HV uses recommended practices, for example, by asking the child questions about a book, referring to the child’s experiences, and encouraging the child to talk.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HV asks parent about child’s signs of development, such as pretend play, and encourages parent’s observations of child’s new skills, such as use of new words.</th>
<th>Tells mother about child’s developmental progress, and tells child to show skills to mother.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HV gives mother several written documents relevant to her child’s health and development.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HV helps parent understand development in context of what is happening with the child now and the parent’s concerns about the child’s development.</th>
<th>HV encourages parent to use materials and activities the child already enjoys as opportunities for the child to try new things.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HV suggests activity for mother and child to do during the week that family has not done before, that will require some preparation, and that could be messy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parent. For example, if the child’s parent (or caregiver) can’t be there for a home visit, there is no reason for the visit. There can be no service delivery of a parenting-focused child development program if the parent is not there because services are supposed to be delivered through the parent to the child. Table 1-3 shows example statements of what a facilitative approach is like and what it is not like.
Table 1-3

Examples of Facilitative Approach Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A facilitative approach sounds more like this…</th>
<th>And less like this…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;We ask parents what their child is like, what their child can do, and what they want their child to be able to do.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;We test the child’s developmental level so we can bring activities to the home to teach what the child needs for school success.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;We help the parent find their own comfortable style of helping their child learn because we want them to know they will be able to keep supporting their child’s development.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;We do activities with the child to provide a good model for the parent.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;We encourage parents to do activities they already do with their child because that is what they are most likely to keep doing in the future.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;We start out doing activities with the child and then try to bring in the parent.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;We find 'learning activities' in what parents already do so they will be able to keep finding new activities to support their child’s development.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;We do learning activities with the child because otherwise no one else does.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;We help parents take whatever steps they can to better support their children's development.”</td>
<td>&quot;We help parents get resources for their personal problems and before we try to get them interested in child development.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **A facilitative approach focuses on parent-child interaction**

To facilitate developmental parenting requires engaging both parent and child together whenever possible. Whenever possible is whenever the child is awake and present. The focus is on parent-child interaction so both parent and child are involved with each other for as much of the home visit time as possible. One home visiting program sets a standard of at least 2/3 of the home visit time involving both parent and child together. Activities to facilitate developmental parenting should be scheduled when the infant or child is awake and rested. When a baby is sleepy or not feeling well, for example, parent-child interaction may happen for only a small part of the time, but otherwise most of the time should jointly involve the parent and child. Table 1-4 example
What is Developmental Parenting?

and non-example statements of focusing on parent-child interaction

Table 1-4

*Example and Non-example Statements of Focusing on Parent-Child Interaction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A facilitative approach sounds more like this…</th>
<th>And less like this…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“We encourage whatever positive interactions the mother has with her child because the child’s development can’t wait.”</td>
<td>“We have to help the mother before she can interact well with her child.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We build a partnership with the parent by working together to support the child’s development.”</td>
<td>“We establish a good relationship with the parent before working with the child.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We start working with every family as they are, helping parents enjoy whatever interactions they have with their child.”</td>
<td>“The parent/family/home is so depressed/dysfunctional/chaotic, we can’t get the child and parent involved together.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We help parents enjoy whatever interactions they have with their child.”</td>
<td>“We try to get things settled down in chaotic homes before we try to get the parent and child involved in activities together.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- *A facilitative approach uses strategies that build on family strengths.*

Developmental parenting involves activities parents and children do together in their everyday life, using materials they already have. A facilitative approach shows respect for what the parents already know, already do, and already have. Family strengths include the knowledge, people, routines, and resources of each family. Practitioners show respect for family strengths when they ask what parents know, plan activities together with parents as collaborators, remember what parents tell them, and offer resources or information parents really want (not necessarily what the practitioner thinks they need). Building on family strengths involves using family routines and activities to promote early development and using the resources the families have. Table 1-5 shows statements that reflect (or not) how a facilitative approach builds on family strengths.
What is Developmental Parenting?

Table 1-5

Statements of How a Facilitative Approach May (or may not) Build on Family Strengths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A facilitative approach sounds more like this…</th>
<th>And less like this…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“We find out what parents already know about their child and talk about how they can use their knowledge to support their child’s development.”</td>
<td>“We go over lots of wonderful handouts of information they need to know.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We encourage families to use what they already have because they are likely to still have it in the future.”</td>
<td>“We bring in high quality educational equipment the family can’t afford to buy.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We schedule home visits to include everyone in the family because parents don’t parent their children separately.”</td>
<td>“We schedule half the home visit for the 1-year-old and the other half for the 2-year-old.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We guide parents to use the unique resources they have in their own homes to enrich their children’s development.”</td>
<td>“We bring the program to the home by planning the same kinds of activities children would get at the center.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We help parents identify whatever strengths they already have.”</td>
<td>“We recognize that some families are so dysfunctional that they need a lot of help to build any strengths at all.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **A facilitative approach includes content that addresses broad foundations of development.**

  A facilitative approach emphasizes activities that help parents promote their child’s security, curiosity, and communication because these are the foundations of social-emotional, cognitive, and language development. Facilitative practitioners keep the focus on these basic areas of development because children who are secure, motivated to learn, and able to communicate will be developing every day as they play, explore, and interact with the world. By helping parents focus on these basic foundations, practitioners can keep the message simple while making the long-term impact stronger. Table 1-6 shows statement examples of how a facilitative approach addresses broad foundations of development rather than specific skills.
What is Developmental Parenting?

Table 1-6

*Examples of How a Facilitative Approach Addresses Broad Functions of Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A facilitative approach sounds more like this…</th>
<th>And less like this…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“We help parents notice their children’s development and find ways to support development in lots of areas.”</td>
<td>“We assess each child’s developmental milestones and then teach the next step in the normal developmental sequence.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We help parents teach their children lots of words and concepts, recognizing that all language development helps prepare children for school.”</td>
<td>“We help parents teach specific school readiness concepts like colors and shapes to their child.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We emphasize children’s social-emotional development, cognitive development, and language development so they are ready to learn more in all areas.”</td>
<td>“We emphasize phonological awareness and knowing 10 letters so they can learn to read.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

Developmental parenting is what supports children’s development in the early years. Without it, children will end up struggling in school and facing compounded risks often into adulthood. By facilitating developmental parenting, a parenting-focused model can have a long-term impact on children’s development. Maintaining a focus on parenting, emphasizing parent-child interaction, and building on family strengths are often complex tasks for practitioners taking a facilitative approach to working with parents and their children. The basic fundamentals of a facilitative approach include a combination of a parenting-focused program model along with facilitative attitudes, behaviors, and content, or ABCs, described in later chapters.
What is Developmental Parenting?

References


What is Developmental Parenting?


