

# Eight themes for good interaction



Dialogue guide  
for parents and other adults

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# How do you see your child?

To be able to understand your child as a person with his or her own feelings, desires and needs, you must try to understand what it is like to be this person – what it's like to be in your child's shoes. In specialist language we would call this **empathic identification** with the child. This means that you not only see what your child does, but also try to understand *why* he does what he does and *what* needs, thoughts and feelings lie behind the actions. To be able to understand this, you must ask yourself the question: if I were the child, what would I have felt, thought or wanted?

## **Who you are yourself affects how you see your child**

There are many factors that determine how you see your child. For example, you will be influenced by your own personal childhood experiences. Your own social and financial situation is also a factor, and you may be influenced by cultural, religious or personal values that you carry with you consciously or unconsciously. All of this goes into shaping how you see your child.

## **The child's temperament also plays a role**

All of us have a typical way of feeling and reacting – a **temperament**. And your child's temperament affects how you perceive him or her. Is your child calm and easy to please? Or does your child tend to be sensitive and easily upset? Is she active? Is he independent? We also have a tendency to put labels on children depending on how they behave. For example, we may say that a child is noisy, quiet or difficult. Sometimes we can get locked into one description and let this influence our entire impression of the child. How you perceive your child helps to determine how you engage with him or her.

## **What you see and think ties in with what you give**

How you see and understand your child is important for how you and your child get on. It also creates the basis for your caregiving and parenting. All children need a loving and secure relationship with their parents. This is the foundation that they will build the rest of their lives on.

## Show that you love your child



Just like you, to feel secure and confident, your child needs to feel loved and valued. And just like you, your child cannot read others' thoughts. That is why it is so important that you express love for your child, in both words and actions. This also applies to young children who have not yet learned to talk. They still feel pleasure and sorrow and they sense love and rejection. Both young and older children read and interpret what you mean, from your facial expression and tone of voice, for example.

### How can you show that you love your child?

- by smiling and laughing together with him
- by giving her a hug or a pat on the shoulder
- by telling your child you love him
- by playing and messing around with your child
- by talking in a warm and kind way
- by comforting your child and helping her to calm down
- ...

### Think about:

- What is the most natural way for you to show you love your child?
- What do you think makes your child feel confident that you love him?
- What is the thing about your child that you love best?
- Is there anything you can do to be better at showing you love your child?

Try to think about how you do this together with your child in everyday situations, and notice how your child reacts.



## See and follow your child's initiative



To be together with your child in a good way, it is not enough that your body is there. Your head must be there too. As adults, we often have our minds on other things, because we are on the telephone for example, or worrying about all the things we haven't done. But if you really want to be together with your child, you must adapt and relate to what your child is concerned about, thinks about and feels.

Children must be allowed to follow their own ideas and do things in their own way - within certain limits. This is how they develop. It is therefore important that you do not decide everything for your child, but give support and encouragement, as well as the time the child needs to come up with his or her own ideas. When you follow a child's lead, the child discovers that it can also take the initiative, act on its own and have influence. In a good interaction, you and the child are equals and both are allowed to object if there is anything they don't like. This does not mean that it is the child who controls you. As the adult, you are responsible for the interaction.

### Think about:

- How are you there for your child?
- Is there anything that could make your child feel ignored, such as the mobile phone or television?
- How does your child react when you give him attention?
- How does your child react when he tries to make contact but does not get a response?
- Might your child's body language be telling you anything about how she feels?

Try to think about how you do this together with your child in everyday situations, and notice how your child reacts.

### How can you see and follow your child's lead?

- by responding to the child's initiative
- by showing interest in what the child does
- by interpreting the child's body language
- by finding out what the child desires and feels
- by responding to what the child desires and feels
- by adjusting to the child's mood and preferences as far as possible
- ...



## Share your child's feelings

Have you thought about what a sensitive alarm system tiny babies have? When they are upset, they cry, so that we come and console them. Older children also need support in understanding that feelings are not 'bad' but completely natural and normal.

A child who is afraid needs someone to make her feel secure. A child who is sad needs to be comforted. In the same way, a teenager needs understanding when he thinks it is embarrassing to wear braces on his teeth.

If your child is angry or frustrated because you have set a necessary limit, he needs help in calming down, as well as your understanding of his feelings. If you are in a shop with a four-year-old who is asking for sweets, for example, you can say "I understand that you would like some sweets now, but that's not possible". Understanding the child's feelings is not the same as changing the limits that you have set. But you make it easier for your child to accept the limits if you explain why you are saying no, and explain that you understand that this is difficult for the child.

### Talk to your child - right from Day 1

Even a tiny baby is able to have what we could call an "**emotional conversation**", that is to say, communicating through the expression of feelings. Baby bonds with you by means of eye contact, expressions of pleasure and positive movements. When you mirror your baby's feelings, she perceives that you have noticed and understood what she was trying to tell you. This non-verbal contact is very important for the baby later being able to develop speech and social skills and to feel that communicating feelings is both safe and good. So when you talk to your baby, use all of yourself - your mouth, eyes and hands.



Good, close contact between you and your child is just as important after babyhood. Older children are also vulnerable and need care and comforting, for example by means of a good conversation in which they feel they can talk freely about personal issues. That is why it is important that your child can feel sure of you.

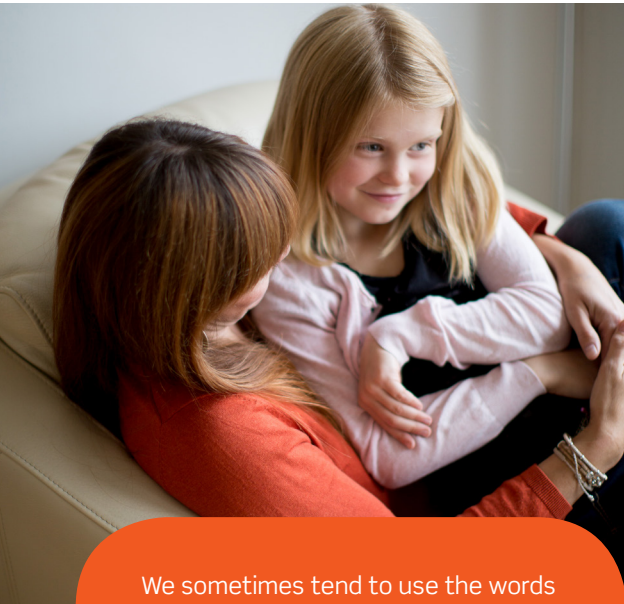
### How can you share your child's feelings?

- by taking the time to "talk" to your baby
- by having eye contact and imitating infant body language and sounds
- by providing comfort if your child is sad - whether she's a toddler or a teen
- by making your child feel safe and secure if he is afraid
- by calming your child if she is angry
- by being there when your child wants to talk to you in confidence
- ...





## Give praise and show recognition



We sometimes tend to use the words **self-confidence** and **self-esteem** interchangeably. Your self-esteem says whether you are happy with yourself and how “worthy” you feel you are. Self-confidence is more about how you rate yourself on the basis of what you achieve, and what you believe you can achieve. When you have **realistic self-confidence** you have a correct picture of what you can achieve.

All children, even babies, need to be recognised for who they are and praised for what they do. So praise your child whenever it is natural – even for little things. Praise and recognition are important so that your child understands that you value her as an independent individual, and for building **self-confidence** and positive **self-esteem**. Praise helps your child to feel that he is worth something and can achieve things. It is also important that you say what is good and why. This helps your child to develop **realistic self-confidence**.

By praising your child when she does something good for others you are also helping your child to develop social skills. In this way the child learns what is good social behaviour and what is not.

### How can you give praise and show recognition?

- by showing your child that you “see” him – seek eye contact
- by being specific, for example, by linking the recognition to something that you experience together (“I had a nice time with you today”, “I could tell you enjoyed it too”)
- by telling your child what is good and why it is good (“that was good, because when you do that...”, “it’s so good that you help your little brother, because...”)
- by using smiles, greetings and positive touch as recognition
- ...

### Think about:

- What is praise to you?
- How do you react when someone praises you?
- Would you say that you praise your child often? (Give examples of how you do this in practice.)
- Could it harm your child not to receive praise? Or to receive too much praise?
- How does your child react when you give it praise and show recognition?
- How do you think that a child who never receives praise from its parents will relate to others?
- How do you give praise and show recognition to a baby?

Try to think about how you do this together with your child in everyday situations, and notice how your child reacts.



## Shared attention - shared experience



Experiencing something together is a prerequisite for good contact and communication, because without a shared experience of things around us it is difficult to talk to each other or do things together. This is a good and essential basis for learning.

Children and adults are often taken up with different things. For example, an excavator digging up the other side of the street might be more interesting for your child than you explaining how traffic lights work. In such situations, as the adult, you can help ensure that you focus on the same things and so have a shared experience of your surroundings. For example, you could do this by pointing and saying “Look at that!”. Or you can direct your own attention at what the child is perceiving. In this way you show that what the child experiences is also important.

When you help your child to focus her attention, you are not only laying a foundation for good shared experiences. You are also helping your child to practise the ability to concentrate. Concentration is a prerequisite for children to be able to understand and learn new things.

### How can you help your child to focus her attention?

- by thinking that both of you should have a shared experience of a situation
- by helping your child to direct his attention at what you want the two of you to experience together, for example by pointing, trying to establish eye contact and saying “come on!” or “look!”
- by following what your child is taken up with and fitting in with her preoccupations
- ...

#### Think about:

- Do you and your child have time together to spend on shared experiences of what interests you both?
- Give examples of how you help your child to focus his attention. How does your child react?
- How do you think that a child who seldom gets help in focusing its attention will develop?

Try to think about how you do this together with your child in everyday situations, and notice how your child reacts.



## Make experiences meaningful

For your child to understand what you experience together and put it in context with other experiences, it is important that you say what things are called and explain how they work. By showing positive feelings and being engaged in what you both do, you also help your child to remember the experience. You help to make it important and meaningful.

When your child perceives that she is sharing “reality” with you, she also notices that language is something you share and that words have the same meaning for others as they have for her. She learns that tangible (physical) things have names like “house” and “food”, but that there are also words for abstract (invisible) things, such as feelings. It is important that you as an adult help your child to name and understand different feelings that are linked to what happens. For example, you can say: “I think your baby brother was sad that he wasn’t allowed to come”.

Older children also need someone to talk to when they have experienced something that is difficult to understand, such as bullying, someone dying or dramatic events in the media.

### How can you help your child to make sense of things?

- by talking to your child about what you experience together
- by describing and naming what you both see
- by showing your child how things work
- by showing enthusiasm and engaging in what you experience together
- ...



### Think about:

- Come up with examples of how you do this in practice. How does your child react?
- If a child has nobody to help it make sense of experiences, how do you think this child will relate to those experiences?
- How can we convey sense and meaning to children of different ages (a baby, a 3-year-old, a 14-year-old)?

Try to think about how you do this together with your child in everyday situations, and notice how your child reacts.

When you put what a child sees or experiences into words, you help the child to understand what is happening around it, to develop language, to function together with others and to become more confident. This is actually something that we often do without thinking about it, right from when children are tiny babies.



## Make connections



Parents are the most important teachers for their children. It is the parents who teach children to become curious about things around them and find out about things they don't know. Children are learning long before they start school.

Building on knowledge and experiences and putting them in context is important for your child's **intellectual development**, that is, development of the ability to learn. When you help your child to link past experiences to new ones ("do you remember...", "that is why we are now ..."), your child understands connections and can relate to words and concepts in a more **abstract** way. Imagine that you and your child are out walking and you see a cat. You can point to the cat and explain that it is related to tigers. Ask the child: "can you see any likeness between the cat and a tiger?" In this way you help your child to see connections and to think beyond the here-and-now. This is very important to help your child develop what are called **cognitive functions**, that is, the ability to understand, learn and think. It is also important for language acquisition.

### How can you help your child to make connections?

- by telling, explaining and finding reasons why things happen
- by explaining and talking to your child about what she has experienced
- by comparing with another experience and finding similarities and differences
- by finding connections to the past and future
- by making up and telling stories about what you experience together
- by drawing, singing or looking at photos of your shared experiences
- ...







## Plan



Part of what helps your child develop self-control is the ability to look ahead and have a sense of predictability. By planning activities step by step with your child you help him to develop the ability to make his own plans and keep an eye on the individual stages that lead to a goal. A walk in the woods might be a good activity to plan together: What do we need to take so we don't get cold? How much food will we need? Where shall we go? As specialists, we call this developing **cognitive maps**.

Cognitive maps also make it easier for your child to concentrate on a goal over a period of time. By helping your child to establish set routines for regular activities such as sleeping, eating and doing homework you give her important tools for independently structuring her life and making it more predictable.

### How can you help your child to stand on her own two feet?

- by teaching your child to plan step by step
- by setting goals that will be achievable with your help
- by establishing set routines for regular activities (sleeping, eating, doing homework etc.)
- ...

#### Think about:

- How do you help your child to plan step by step?

Try to think about how you do this together with your child in everyday situations, and notice how your child reacts.

## Support



All children depend on support for their development. In ICDP we use the term **graduated support**, which means supporting your child when needed but withdrawing the support in time when you see that your child is able to cope unaided. Too much support can cause children to lose confidence in their own abilities, and remain reliant on further support in order to try something new. Too little support could make them feel bad because they cannot manage to do things.

Teaching children to ride a bicycle is a good example of graduated support. We steady the back of the saddle, but let go as soon as we can feel that the child is beginning to balance. And if the child starts to wobble we can quickly grab hold again.

### How can you support your child in a positive way?

- by supporting your child just enough
- by letting him gain a sense of accomplishment and independence
- ...

#### Think about:

- How might you support a child *too much*?
- Do you ever support your child too little?

Try to think about how you do this together with your child in everyday situations, and notice how your child reacts.

## Facilitate

Right from when they are quite young, children learn to regulate their behaviour in different situations. For example, they behave differently at home and at the kindergarten or school. Sometimes they need help with regulating themselves, such as when a conflict arises in the playground or school grounds. As an adult, you can use what we call **situational regulation**, which means you intervening in the situation instead of the child, by changing the setting or the rules of the game. When children find that things improve because the situation changes they also gain better strategies for their own way of doing things.

### How can you facilitate your child's self-regulation?

- by intervening in situations instead of dealing with the child's reactions
- by changing rules and settings
- by talking to your child about different ways of tackling a situation
- ...

#### Think about:

- Why is it a good idea for you to regulate the situation instead of the child?

Try to think about how you do this together with your child in everyday situations, and notice how your child reacts.



## Set positive limits



Setting limits for children can be difficult but is essential for them to be able to develop a **moral code, empathy** and a sense of responsibility.

**Negative limit setting**, such as a ban or threats of punishment, is not effective in the long run. If you want your child to learn something valuable from the limits you set, you must use what we call **positive limit setting**. This means setting limits in a way that the child finds helpful and sensible. You can achieve this by explaining why you are setting a limit and, ideally, also suggesting alternative activities. With older children it can be a good idea to negotiate where the limit should be put. They will then find that they are involved in the decision and that they are being taken seriously.

When you set positive limits for your child you help her to understand for herself what is right and wrong. You will be helping her to make the right choices herself, by not stealing from a shop for example - not out of fear of punishment but because she understands that it is wrong.

Feelings rub off on others. In particular, anger in a child can easily trigger anger in adults. The difficult task for us as adults is therefore to calm ourselves down before we can calm the child. So to be able to regulate a child we must also be able to regulate ourselves. It is important to remain calm when we set limits, even if we are upset.

### How can you set positive limits for your child?

- by explaining why you are setting limits
- by giving your child alternatives
- by using negotiation as an aid
- ...

#### Think about:

- Why are limits important for children?

Try to think about how you do this together with your child in everyday situations, and notice how your child reacts.

## Explanations of terms used

|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| abstract                       | something thought; the opposite of physical or tangible   |
| recognition                    | showing that you value your child just the way she or he is   |
| empathy                        | being able to put yourself in another person's situation and understand what the other person is feeling                              |
| empathic identification        | understanding what it is like to be another person  |
| emotional conversation         | communication through the expression of feelings  |
| good interaction with children | means loving and caring, but also having requirements and setting limits  |
| graduated support              | supporting the child when this is needed but withdrawing the support in time when you see that the child is beginning to cope unaided |
| intellectual development       | development of the ability to learn and think   |
| cognitive functions            | the ability to understand, learn and think  |
| cognitive map                  | about the ability to make plans and keep an eye on the individual stages that lead to a goal  |
| moral code                     | understanding the difference between right and wrong, between good and bad behaviour  |
| negative limit setting         | setting limits with bans and threats of punishment  |
| positive limit setting         | setting limits in a way that the child finds helpful and sensible   |
| realistic self-confidence      | a correct picture of what you can achieve   |
| praise                         | showing your child that you value something that he or she does   |
| self-esteem                    | about whether you are happy with yourself and what values you see in yourself as you are  |
| Self-confidence                | about how you rate yourself on the basis of what you achieve, and what you believe you can achieve                                    |
| situational regulation         | changing the setting for, or rules of the situation so as to help the child to cope or accomplish things                              |
| temperament                    | an innate tendency towards a typical way of feeling and reacting  |

# Play together so as to be great together

Bringing up a child is one of the most important and challenging things you can do. Your child is not a mini version of you; a child is an individual who gradually develops his or her own identity and becomes independent. As an adult, it is your responsibility to support your child and to be a balanced, reliable and loving parent. As well as loving and caring for your child, you will need to make requirements and set limits so as to help your child gain confidence and independence. This is what we mean when we talk about **positive interaction** between adults and children.

## **ICDP – help in finding good ways of being together**

ICDP (International Child Development Programme) is a programme for giving guidance to parents that has been developed by experts from many countries and is based on many years of research. It addresses the challenges that many parents face and describes strategies for secure, positive contact between parents and children. As a participant in the programme, you will meet other parents in a group in which you can exchange experiences and points of view. In this way you can help to make each other more confident parents and you can gain new ideas on how to engage with your child.

The publication “Eight themes for good interaction” is both a workbook for use in the groups and a reference that is useful to have after the group meetings have finished. The guide will teach you something about how children develop and what needs they have at different stages of development. While reading, you will be encouraged to think about each of the themes. It can help you to see a situation from a new angle and give you some ideas about how to tackle specific issues and develop the relationship between you and your child into something even better.

The guide is by no means a definitive guide to every parenting situation, but is intended as a resource for building your confidence in positive interaction with your growing child.

We encourage you to make notes in the guide as you go through the programme and to be active and actively involved in the group sessions.

Welcome!

## **Need more information?**

Visit [bufdir.no](http://bufdir.no) and [foreldrehverdag.no](http://foreldrehverdag.no) to learn more about child-parent interactions.