

Being Responsive to Children and Families: *Responsive Learning Experiences*

SCENARIOS

Read the brief scenario about a teacher’s/provider’s observations of a child’s development, interests, and learning goals. In your small groups, plan a learning experience that is responsive to the child’s interests and learning goals. The experience does not have to focus on all of the child’s interests and learning goals, but it should address some of them.

Scenario 1

Marisa cares for a group of mobile infants and young toddlers. At pick-up time, Marisa shared with Claire’s mother how Claire spent several minutes slowly shoveling sand into a bucket and then dumping it out. Claire’s mother mentioned that Claire recently filled a large pot at home with toy foods and then dumped it. Claire also has been using her hands to sign for “more” when she’s eating. Marisa wants to support Claire’s exploration of more complex fine motor movement. Marisa also wants to support and extend Claire’s exploration of quantity concepts.

Scenario 2

Miguel recently transitioned into Eric’s preschool classroom. After a few weeks, Eric still observes Miguel mostly playing by himself. When he arrives in the morning, Miguel almost always spends time in the art area—painting on the easel, drawing with crayons, or cutting paper. Eric also notices that Miguel often plays with dinosaurs in the dramatic play area. Because Eric has not observed much expressive language from Miguel, Eric asks Miguel’s father about Miguel’s language at home. Miguel’s father shares that Miguel is quite talkative with his older sister and parents. Eric wants to support Miguel in interacting with peers and adults in the classroom and in using his language to communicate ideas and feelings.

The following questions can help guide you in planning a responsive learning experience:

How will you build on the child’s interests and learning goals when deciding what to explore?

What materials would you provide?

Would this learning experience work best in a one-on-one interaction, small group, or large group?

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Here are some examples of responsive learning experiences based on the two scenarios.

Scenario 1 Examples

- Building on Claire’s interest in pretend foods at home, Marisa can set up a pretend kitchen and provide pretend foods, pots, grocery bags, or baskets. These materials allow Claire and other children to fill up a variety of containers with the pretend food. The pretend kitchen also has knobs to turn on the stove and cupboards to open and close, which provide opportunities for more advanced fine motor skills. While children fill up and dump the pots, bags, or baskets, Marisa can use language that focuses on quantity (i.e., counting items as child fills up container, introducing comparisons of more/less or full/empty).
- Building on Claire’s previous sand exploration, Marisa can provide differently sized shovels and containers in the sandbox. She can invite Claire and other children to help her fill up a big bucket with sand. While they work together to fill the bucket, Marisa can narrate, “We need a lot of sand to fill up this big bucket. Claire has a small shovel, and Myrna has a big shovel.”

Scenario 2 Examples

- Building on Miguel’s interest in art, Eric can set up a small group collage activity with shared materials such as scissors, magazines, paper, and glue. Eric can encourage Miguel to ask his peers for the different materials he wants to use. Eric might invite Miguel and his peers to describe the pictures they choose to cut out. The small group setting allows Eric to help facilitate Miguel’s interactions and communication with peers.
- During circle time, Eric could read a book and sing a song about dinosaurs to help Miguel feel more welcomed and connected to the larger group, while also providing the opportunity for Eric to see which other children might have a similar interest. Eric can provide additional dinosaur props in the dramatic play area—more types of dinosaurs and more objects from their habitat such as trees or rocks. When he notices Miguel playing with the dinosaur materials, Eric can sit nearby to watch how he plays with the dinosaurs. Eric can try to invite one or two other children to engage with the dinosaurs, and if Miguel seems comfortable, try to facilitate peer interactions around dinosaur play.