



Recognize Quality: Parent and Caregiver Interactions Matter

Parents have powerful life-long influence on their children. A parent's role is critical, as they are the primary educators of life ideals, values, and motivation. Early interactions and learning experiences shared with a parent helps shape a child's confidence and self control and instills a sense of curiosity, as well as the ability to communicate and relate to others.

When parents and caregivers are equipped with knowledge of what to expect and what to do at each stage of a child's development, learning can be more intentional, making typical moments into teachable moments. Children who experience healthy, everyday interactions with caring adults build confidence, curiosity, and creativity – all of which are key to later success in school and life.

If children are in care outside the home in their early years, parents and caregivers must be active partners to ensure that a child's social, emotional, and cognitive needs are met. Experienced caregivers can share their expertise, helping parents be more intentional in their parenting while instilling a learning culture within the family.

Characteristics of Quality Interactions with Young Children

Whether at home or in other care settings, high quality interactions with caring adults prepare young children for healthy and productive lives.

Attentive, responsive engagement

- Adults show affection, make eye contact, and speak directly to children with an encouraging tone
- Children are soothed and supported when frustrated or challenged, helping them identify their feelings
- Caregivers and families exchange information about the child's development and learning progress

A safe, healthy, and child-friendly environment

- Sufficient and age-appropriate materials and toys are accessible, organized, and inviting
- Safe, outdoor play spaces invite exploration and nurture curiosity
- TV and video are not used to occupy children

Stimulating activities and appropriately structured routines

- Adults thoughtfully organize age-appropriate experiences throughout the day that incorporate language, math, science, art, music, movement, and dramatic play
- Imagination and creativity are nurtured
- As children grow older, they learn to positively interact with other children and to play independently

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS)

Similar to rating systems for restaurants and hotels, a QRIS awards quality ratings to early learning programs that meet a set of defined program standards. Currently, North Carolina and 18 other States have a statewide QRIS that embraces the following elements:

1. Standards ranging from basic licensing to higher quality standards.
2. Accountability measures and monitoring processes used to determine how well programs meet standards and to assign ratings.
3. Program and practitioner outreach and support, such as training, mentoring, and technical assistance.
4. Funding incentives awarded to programs when quality levels are achieved.
5. Parent education efforts. Most QRIS award easily recognizable symbols, such as stars, to programs to indicate the levels of quality and to inform and educate parents.

Source: National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center