



Encouraging and Supporting Reflective Practice in Parents



Karyn jumped in, “But that’s just it. I can’t keep up with her now either. She’s getting into everything and I feel like I’m saying ‘no, no, no’ to her more now than ever. I just want my quiet little baby girl back.” Rena smiled reassuringly and acknowledged that while Lenore’s progress did seem to happen overnight, her curiosity had been growing for some time.

She also shared with Karyn that, “‘No’ is the often one of the first responses of many parents when their young children’s behavior tests the limits. Our job is to create ways to support and encourage Lenore’s natural curiosity while keeping her safe.”

Rena brainstormed with Karyn about how she could support Lenore’s new behavior and curiosity at home. Rena added, “We have been able to support Lenore’s new found interests in the classroom by introducing a few new items each week. Rena then asked Karyn about what Lenore liked to do at home. She encouraged Karyn to continue using a variety of toys, books and other items with her daughter. Rena also suggested that Karyn could begin borrowing age-appropriate toys and books from the program’s toy and book library to supplement what she already had at home.

*As our vignette continues, Karyn, a parent who attended the recent parent meeting on **Reflective Parenting Practices...** approaches Rena about a new development in her daughter Lenore’s behavior.*

Karyn was determined to talk with Rena today about Lenore. She understood that new behaviors could sometimes “spring up” in young children overnight, but this seemed sudden. As Karyn approached Rena, who was speaking with another parent, Rena turned her way, smiled and said, “I’ve been meaning to talk with you about Lenore.” Karyn thought, “Oh no. Rena’s going to tell me I need to change something I’m doing with Lenore.”

Rena turned to Karyn and said, “Whatever you’ve been doing with Lenore, please keep doing it!” Karyn was at first stunned, then relieved, then a bit confused. She expected Rena to tell her the exact opposite. Rena went on. “Lenore has so much energy and is interested in everything. She is learning so quickly that we can hardly keep up with her here in the center.”



Encouraging and Supporting Reflective Practice in Parents (cont.)

Parents – the first teachers of their children – do not always have the support or experience to reflect on their own parenting practices and strategies. However, supporting reflection skills in parents through the circle of support and staff-parent partnerships will ultimately benefit the infants and toddlers in care. Parlakian (2001) outlines ways that staff can model reflective practice in their relationships with parents:

- **Ask parents open-ended questions.**

This helps caregivers learn more about the children in their care, and gives parents time to reflect on their reactions to their young children. Sharing information, like developmental stages, and talking about the meaning of infant and toddler behavior can help parents determine whether or not their parental responses support or stifle their child's development. Rena brainstormed with Karyn about ways to support Lenore's home environment and then asked questions for understanding (e.g. "Tell me what happens at home?").

- **Encourage parents to ask "I Wonder Questions."**

This helps parents actively strengthen the skills of asking questions, wondering and brainstorming about their child's development and behavior. Using questions such as, "I wonder what my child would like to explore?", or, "I wonder what my child likes to play with the most?" can help parents develop the skill of reflective practice.

Rena suggested developmentally appropriate items that Karyn could have around her home to facilitate Lenore's newfound curiosity and encouraged Karyn to borrow a few items to help get started. Now, Karyn will look at items for Lenore with an "eye" for what would feed her curiosity. Sometimes all parents need is a gentle "nudge" to help develop their reflection skills.

- **Emphasize and/or model the infant's or parent's perspective.**

This helps parents strengthen their ability to read their infant's or toddler's cues. "Talking through the baby" is one way that caregivers can help parents become more in tune with their children. Rena might say to Karyn in Lenore's 'voice,' "Mommy, I'm so excited about all of these new things I'm learning. It's fun for me. I'm learning about limits. I'm learning what is o.k. to touch and what is not o.k. I want to explore everything." Taking on Lenore's perspective can help Karyn reframe her experiences with and responses to her daughter's new found curiosity for learning.