



Developmental Parenting

A Guide for
Early Childhood Practitioners

Lori A. Roggman
Lisa K. Boyce
Mark S. Innocenti
Foreword by Helen H. Raikes

FOR MORE, go to <https://bit.ly/DevelopmentalParenting>

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by

Lori A. Roggman

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and

Mark S. Innocenti

Utah State University
Logan

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by Lori Roggman, Ph.D., Lisa K. Boyce, Ph.D., & Mark S. Innocenti, Ph.D.

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About the Authors

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Dr. Roggman began her career as a Head Start home visitor and subsequently provided training to home visitors in the western United States for several years. Since the mid-1980s, she has been involved in research with several early childhood and infant/toddler home visiting programs, including research funded by the Administration on Children, Youth and Families. Her approach to research integrates theory-based inquiry with practical questions and program evaluation in longitudinal and intervention research. Her research interests focus on early development, in multiple domains, in relation to parenting by both mothers and fathers. She has studied various aspects of practices used in home visiting programs, the impacts of parenting support programs on children's cognitive, language, and social-emotional development, and the relation of specific parenting behaviors to children's developmental outcomes. With her colleagues, she has developed several tools for improving practices for working with parents, including an observational measure of developmental parenting and a measure of home visiting practices.

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Dr. Boyce currently teaches child development and child guidance courses at Utah State University. She has conducted numerous assessments with children with disabilities and those who are at risk for disabilities. She has also provided parenting support to families with children

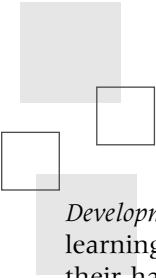
with disabilities through home visits and parenting groups. Her research has focused on facilitating children's language and emergent literacy development through everyday parent-child conversations, self-regulation and development through parenting and preschool practices, and the creation and use of meaningful literacy materials. This work has been funded for Migrant Head Start families by the Administration on Children, Youth and Families and for young children with disabilities and their families through the Office of Special Education Programs.

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What Is Developmental Parenting?



Developmental parenting is what parents do to support their children's learning and development. It is what parents are doing when they clap their hands for their baby's first steps, soothe their frustrated toddler, encourage their preschool child to sing a song, or ask their first-grade 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. It is the kind of parenting that many programs serving infants or young children, especially home-based programs, hope to increase through home visits or other parenting support services.

VALUING DEVELOPMENT

Valuing development does not mean that 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 smile and first words to a young child's first bicycle ride—but not every parent values a child's first "No" or first "Why?" or first "Why not?", although these, too, are important milestones of development in the early years. Not all parents are aware of the many small steps children have to take in acquiring the skills of exploration or communication that are needed before they begin to walk and talk. In fact, some parents need help noticing some of these small steps of development and supporting them. Even in the best of circumstances, it is often hard

for a parent to notice all of 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 significant as a child's newly acquired ability to climb until they see their child someplace unexpected. But noticing the small steps of development is essential for supporting it. It is only by noticing a child's development that a parent can respond to it and thereby support the young child's further development.

Not all parents value the same aspects of development. One parent may be more concerned about raising a smart child while another may be more concerned about raising a polite child. Most parents want many good outcomes, such as a child who grows into a happy, healthy adult with a good education, a steady job, close relationships, and a clean record of no criminal behavior. There are many ways parents can 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 first requires the major job of keeping children safe and healthy. In addition, research shows that parents make a difference in their children's success in life by being *warm, responsive, encouraging, and conversational*. 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 parents and children promote development in children's social behaviors, their language, and their thinking. When the parent-child relationship is positive, children develop a sense of security, explore with confidence, and learn to communicate effectively. These three outcomes—secure attachment, confident exploration, and effective communication—are the foundations of social-emotional, cognitive, and language development. These are, in turn, the foundations of the outcomes that 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).

Parents express their love and affection for their children in many kinds of ways, but however parents show affection, children benefit from that sense of closeness and connectedness. When children feel close and connected to their parents, they benefit by being more likely to be compliant and less likely to have tantrums and misbehave. From a parent's responsiveness, an infant learns to trust and forms a secure attachment to the parent, which provides a sense of security about

Table 1.1. What is the scientific evidence for developmental parenting?

Early developmental supports	Research findings	References
General parent–child interactions	Parent–child interactions influence child development in social-emotional, language, and cognitive domains that are of central importance to children’s later school success.	Culp et al., 2001, Estrada et al., 1987; Fewell & Deutscher, 2002; Gardner et al., 2003; Hubbs-Tait et al., 2002; Lee et al., 2002; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000
Specific kinds of parenting interactions	Social-emotional, language, and cognitive development are all linked with parent–child interactions characterized by the parent supporting, nurturing, and engaging in play and conversation.	Bornstein et al., 1992; Bornstein & Tamis-LeMonda, 1989; Estrada et al., 1987; Harnish et al., 1995; Hart & Risley, 1995; Kelly et al., 1996; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 1999
Warm, loving interactions	Warmth, including physical closeness and positive expressions, is related to less antisocial behavior, better adjustment, more compliance, and better school readiness.	Caspi et al., 2004 ; Dodici et al., 2003; Estrada et al., 1987; MacDonald, 1992; Petrill et al., 2004; Sroufe et al., 1990
Responsive interactions	Responsive interactions are important both directly and indirectly because they foster secure attachment between parent and child, which leads to the child’s continuing social, cognitive, and language development.	Booth et al., 1994; Bornstein & Tamis-LeMonda, 1989; De Wolff & van Ijzendoorn, 1997; Easterbrooks et al., 2000; Goldberg, 1977; Kochanska, 1995; Londerville & Main, 1981; Roggman et al., 1987; Slade, 1987; Sroufe, 1983; Suess et al., 1992; Tamis-LeMonda & Bornstein, 1989; van den Boom, 1994; Youngblade et al., 1993
Interactions that encourage exploration through play	Playing together increases children’s initiative, curiosity, creativity in their play, and their developing social and cognitive skills.	Bakeman & Adamson, 1984; Hunter et al., 1987; Landry et al., 1996; Roggman et al., 2004; Smith et al., 1996; Spencer & Meadow-Orlans, 1996
Teaching and talking; interactions that encourage conversation	Conversations with adults and exposure to many words help children learn language sooner and better.	Bornstein et al., 1998; Hart & Risley, 1995; Snow, 1983
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; Snow & the RAND Reading Study Group, 2002

being cared for and protected and establishes the foundation of social-emotional development. Infants who are securely attached, compared with those who are not, grow up to be more sociable, better able to handle stress, better able to maintain close relationships, and more likely to become good parents themselves. In the early years of life, a parent often responds not only to a child's physical distress in the context of caregiving—by picking up a crying infant, feeding a hungry toddler—but also to the child's actions and expressions in the context of interacting and conversing, such as by taking an offered toy or answering the child's questions. When a toddler offers a parent a toy or reaches for something he or she cannot quite grasp, for example, the parent's response can create an opportunity for the child to explore objects and how they work in the world, providing the foundation for cognitive development. Similarly, when a young child asks, "Why?" the parent's answer offers the child an opportunity to use communication to learn, which provides the foundation for language development and the motivation for future learning. When a parent provides encouragement and play, a toddler learns to explore, try new things, and acquire new skills. When a parent asks questions, provides information, and has a conversation with a child, the child not only practices communication skills but also learns new words and ideas. These parenting behaviors support the fundamental foundations of child development.

Confident and curious children who explore new things and have the language to communicate and ask questions are more likely to enter school ready to learn academic skills and succeed in school. 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

In developmental parenting, a parent's behavior changes over the course of time in response to a child's changing developmental needs. This doesn't mean that the parent 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 the child reaches a certain age or developmental milestone. It does mean, however, that how the parent shows affection or what the parent talks about with the child will change as the child grows and changes. Few parents would play Peekaboo with a 4-year-old, recognizing that most 4-year-olds have moved beyond this type of play, but a parent may not notice

when a child is ready to put on his or her own clothes or choose what to have on a sandwich. Teaching parents how to notice developmental changes and read emotional cues from their children will help parents learn to develop and adapt their parenting skills to support their children'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 who are 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, or to think about how their parenting may need to change as their children get older. Although many parents will find a way to comfort and interact positively with their children even in extremely difficult circumstances, other parents in stressed circumstances 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 the most help.

What about Parents in Crisis?

For a parent worried about finding food and shelter or who needs mental health or substance abuse intervention or treatment, those services need to be provided immediately. A parent in crisis is unlikely to show much developmental parenting. For a parent in extremely difficult situations, who is homeless or hungry or severely depressed, developmental parenting is not just hard but is next to impossible. A child, however, is still developing and still has developmental needs. The child's development will not wait while the parent finds shelter, food, and relief. If a traumatic situation interferes with parenting, then it is likely to be even more traumatic for a very young child who is easily stressed and has only a child's resources for coping. Moreover, when a child is not learning to trust, play, and talk, that child is 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—dealing with injuries, finding shelter, obtaining food and water, or coping 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, the challenge of getting comfort and care when everything is strange and frightening can be completely overwhelming. A child's main source of comfort is from the 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. They may have recurrent problems sleeping and eating or controlling their emotions and behavior. For most families the situation is never so extreme, but the chaotic and stressful situations faced by some 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 children and finding at least a few minutes to play and talk. In other words, the best way to help children in a crisis situation is through developmental parenting. Parents can benefit from support and encouragement to provide developmental parenting for their children in ways that are realistic and comfortable for their families. By facilitating developmental parenting, practitioners can help parents, even in difficult situations, keep their children learning, growing, and developing. If practitioners can help parents develop secure relationships with their children, then even in chaotic circumstances, their attachment to each other will help to sustain the parents and children, 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 (often called *home visitors*, but sometimes called *family educators*, *home educators*, *parent educators*, or *parenting facilitators*) into homes to work with parents and their children. The practitioners may include educators, disability specialists, therapists, 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 one 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 homes. Practitioners could also meet with parents at a center or anywhere else in the community where parents go with their young children. The as-

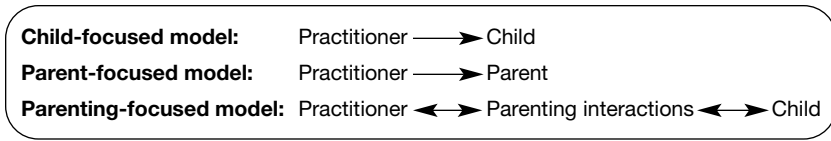


Figure 1.1. Models of home visiting.

sumption, however, is that these practitioners work with parents and children together, in homes or elsewhere.

When practitioners in programs for infants and young children work with parents, they typically use one of two basic models: child-focused or parent-focused models. *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* or a *relationship-focused model* (see Figure 1.1), which focuses on both the parent and child in interaction with each other. A parenting-focused model is different in four ways from the other two models. First, it provides indirect child development services through the parent 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. Fourth, 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. The model guides the parent to follow the child’s lead by noticing and responding to the child’s emotions, interests, and emerging skills.

Child-Focused Model In a child-focused model, a practitioner plans and provides specific child 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, to do a similar activity with

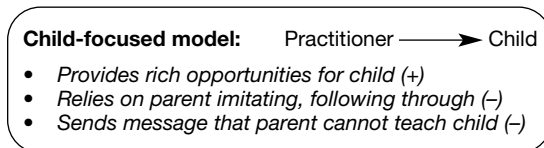


Figure 1.2. The child-focused model.

the child. Although there are advantages to the child-focused model, there are disadvantages as well.

An advantage of working directly with a child is that someone with expertise in child development can provide rich and varied experiences that nurture development and provide a good example for the parent to imitate. In a child-focused model, a 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 left for the family, and may require the parent to make notes. This model can be effective with some parents, and it is easy for a practitioner with a child development background to implement with limited training.

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 parent does not work with the child between visits, then the learning activities happen only 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 children 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 with the expert practitioner, the parent is inadequate at promoting the 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 children. In home visiting programs that use this model, parents sometimes have gone to another room to do household chores or take a break on their own, leaving the visiting practitioners and children to interact alone! A practitioner sometimes provides activities for a child, fearing that no one else will. Either way, the potential impact of the program is limited. When the practitioner is not present, the learning activities and support for development are over, 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 involve making referrals to help get families' basic needs met, obtaining community resources for housing, food, education, or employment, and providing emotional support for distress resulting from parents' problems in life.

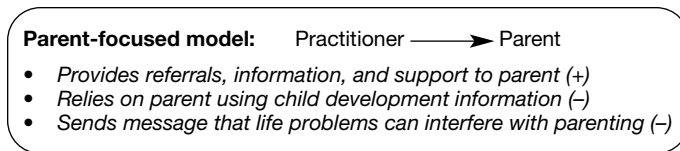


Figure 1.3. The parent-focused model.

It may also involve a practitioner providing information about child development or making suggestions for learning activities that a parent can do with the child. Often, the practitioner provides and discusses written materials with the parent, such as pamphlets or informational handouts 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. An 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.

For parents with multiple needs, it may seem much more important to get food rather than play games with children! It is true that a hungry child is not a playful child. Basic needs do come first. 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. As discussed earlier in the chapter, however, a child's development does not stop while his or her parent focuses on solving family and personal problems. A disadvantage of the 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 parents are not necessarily helped to put the information into practice. The implicit message is that the parents' problems interfere with responding to their children, so it might be hopeless to try. Troubled parents are then even less likely to respond to their children's developmental needs.

Parenting-Focused Model A parenting-focused model is different from the other two models because it emphasizes parents' support of their children's development. Using this model, 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 often are used. Activities often are based on regular family routines that can support the child's development, and the activities are usually planned ahead of

Parenting-focused model: Practitioner \longleftrightarrow Parenting interactions \longleftrightarrow 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.

time so the parent can prepare. The practitioner helps the parent identify ways to enjoy the activity with the child and to use developmental parenting behaviors he or she already does to promote the child's 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.

The parenting-focused model has multiple advantages. It 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 clearly shows that 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 supportive developmental interactions they have with their children. 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 the parent's confidence, 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 use 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, the best and primary context for development, whereas the practitioner–child relationship is likely to be only a temporary one.

The parenting-focused model does have some disadvantages. Practitioners need a higher level of skill and cannot follow a tightly scripted curriculum. The practitioner responds to each parent’s values, interests, and parenting skills while encouraging the parent to respond to the child’s emotions, interests, and developmental skills. This model, in which practitioners work with parents to provide child development services in the context of everyday interactions and activities, requires knowledge and skills related not only to child development 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 with the Facilitative Approach

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

1. Deliver services from practitioner to parent, and then through parenting to the child
2. Help parents observe, support, and adapt to their children’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 children’s development. How is a parenting-focused model implemented with a facilitative approach?

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

Both of the following vignettes describe a home visit using 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.

Lauren [*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 Lauren's name and reaching for her bag*]: Lauwen, Lauwen, whatcha got? Whatcha got?

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

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

Amy: Well, we can stay here for now.

Lauren: 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.

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

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

Jacob [*excitedly*]: El-phent! El-phent!

Lauren [*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.

Lauren: Are you sure? Well, okay. Here Jacob, let's look at this book. What do you think it's about?

Jacob: El-phents!

Lauren: 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!

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

Lauren 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.

Lauren: Do you ever lose your shoes, Jacob?

Jacob: My choos!

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

Lauren [*to Jacob*]: Did you lose a shoe?

Jacob: Choo gone.

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

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

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

(continued)

(continued)

While Jacob squeezes the playdough, Lauren 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 making playdough.

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

Lauren [to Jacob]: Would you like Mama to make you some playdough, Jacob?

Jacob: Pa-do ma!

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

A Facilitative Approach

Lauren 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.

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

Lauren [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 Lauren's name and reaching for her bag]: Lauwen, Lauwen, whatcha got? Whatcha got?

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

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

Amy: Well, we can stay here for now.

Lauren: 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.

Lauren: 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?

Lauren: 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 Lauren.

Lauren [*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.

Lauren: 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.

Lauren [*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 Lauren*]: Sure, if that's okay. 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.

(continued)

(continued)

Lauren: That's wonderful that he made these blocks that Jacob can play and pretend with. They are great educational toys for talking about and pretending with, and they're the right size for small hands.

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

Lauren: 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.

Lauren: Does he know that word?

Amy [*to Lauren*]: 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.

Lauren: Many kids this age don't combine sounds very well, but it's more important that he is 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.

Lauren [*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.

Lauren: 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.

Lauren: That's great; he's been taking off in his language and you've been paying attention!

Jacob interrupts with a word Lauren doesn't understand.

Lauren [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 conversation continues.

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 differ in many ways, as well. See Table 1.2 for descriptions of how a facilitative approach differs 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.

Characteristics of the Facilitative Approach 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 a child'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 the child, the values he or she wants to teach the child, and the home environment that the parent shares with the child. In a parenting-focused program using a facilitative approach, services always include the 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 the services are supposed to be delivered through the parent to the child. Table 1.3 shows examples of what a facilitative approach emphasizing child development is like and what it is not like.

- *A facilitative approach focuses on parent–child interaction.* To facilitate developmental parenting, the practitioner engages both parent and child together whenever possible (i.e., 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

Table 1.2. How does the facilitative approach differ from a traditional approach?

A facilitative approach sounds more like this . . .	And less like this . . .
Practitioner helps the family think about whatever materials they have available to use for the child’s learning activities, and encourages use of available materials.	Practitioner brings all of the materials used for the learning activities during the home visit. The child reaches for the materials the practitioner brings; practitioner controls when materials are available and makes suggestions to the child about how to use them.
Conversation about family problem emphasizes the child’s feelings, the mother’s concerns about the child, and the mother’s insights about the child.	Conversation about family problem mentions only the mother’s feelings.
Practitioner asks open-ended questions about what the parent and child did together during the week.	Practitioner asks whether or not an assigned activity was done, encourages better follow through next week.
Practitioner suggests doing an activity for the visit that is something the family is already doing. Original activity parent and practitioner planned together won’t work because of rain, so practitioner listens for alternative ideas.	Practitioner does activities the practitioner planned using materials the practitioner brought to the visit.
Practitioner supports parents using recommended practices, for example, cueing parent to explain a new word.	Practitioner uses recommended practices, for example, asking the child questions about a book, referring to the child’s experiences and encouraging the child to talk.
Practitioner 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.	Practitioner tells mother about child’s developmental progress and tells child to show skills to mother.
Practitioner helps parent understand development in context of what is happening with the child now and the parent’s concerns about the child’s development.	Practitioner gives mother several written documents relevant to her child’s health and development.
Practitioner encourages parent to use materials the family already has and activities the parent and child already enjoy as resources for learning.	Practitioner suggests activity for mother and child to do during the week that family has not done before that will require some time for preparation, and about which the mother shows little enthusiasm.

Table 1.3. Examples of facilitative approach emphasizing child development

An approach emphasizing child development sounds more like this . . .	And less like this . . .
“We ask the parent what the child is like, what the child can do, and what she wants the child to be able to do.”	“We test the child’s developmental level so we can bring activities to the home to teach what the child needs for school success.”
“We help the parent find his own comfortable style of helping the child learn because we want the parent to know he will be able to keep supporting his child’s development.”	“We do activities with the child to provide a good model for the parent.”
“We encourage the parent to do activities she already does with the child because that is what they are most likely to keep doing in the future.”	“We start out doing activities with the child and then try to bring in the parent.”
“We find ‘learning activities’ in what the parent already does so he will be able to keep finding new activities to support their child’s development.”	“We do learning activities with the child because otherwise no one else does.”
“We help the parent take whatever steps needed to better support the child’s development.”	“We help parents get resources for their personal problems before we try to get them interested in child development.”

at least two thirds of the home visit time involving both parent and child together. Activities to facilitate developmental parenting should be scheduled when a child is awake and rested. When the child is sleepy or not feeling well, for example, the parent–child interaction may happen for only a brief part of the time. For most of the time, the parent and child should be involved jointly. Table 1.4 provides examples of statements that do and do not focus on parent–child interaction.

Table 1.4. Examples of facilitative approach focusing on parent–child interaction

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

- *A facilitative approach uses strategies that build on family strengths.* Developmental parenting involves activities parents and children do together in their everyday lives, using materials they already have. A facilitative approach therefore 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 that parents really want (not necessarily what the practitioner thinks they need). Building on family strengths involves the use of family routines, activities, and resources to promote early development. Table 1.5 includes examples of statements that may or may not reflect how a facilitative approach builds on family strengths.
- *A facilitative approach includes content that addresses broad foundations of development.* A facilitative approach emphasizes activities that help parents promote their children’s security, exploration, 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 develop every day as they play, explore, and interact with the world. By helping parents focus on these basic foundations, practitioners can

Table 1.5. Examples of facilitative approach building on family strengths

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

Table 1.6. Examples of a facilitative approach addressing broad foundations of development

An approach addressing broad foundations of development sounds more like this . . .	And less like this . . .
“We help parents notice their children’s development and find ways to support development in lots of areas.”	“We assess each child’s developmental milestones and then teach the next step in the normal developmental sequence.”
“We help parents teach their children lots of words and concepts, recognizing that all language development helps prepare children for school.”	“We help parents teach specific school readiness concepts like colors and shapes to their children.”
“We emphasize children’s social–emotional development, cognitive development, and language development so they are ready to learn more in all areas.”	“We emphasize phonological awareness and knowing 10 letters so they can learn to read.”

keep the message simple while making the long-term impact stronger. Table 1.6 shows examples of how a facilitative approach addresses broad foundations of development rather than specific skills.

CONCLUSION

Developmental parenting supports children’s development in the early years. Without it, children will struggle in school and face compounded risks often into adulthood. By facilitating developmental parenting, a parenting-focused model will 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. Thus, practitioners need to learn the fundamentals of the facilitative approach, which include a combination of a parenting-focused program model and facilitative attitudes, behaviors, and content (or ABCs), described in later chapters.