

Experimental Education Unit  
Staff Orientation Handout:  
TEACHER TALK

### CREATE A POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE

Current research shows that teachers need to provide three positive comments to every one negative comment they make. And that doesn't mean 3 positives to Bob, Sam and Mary after 1 negative to Sally. Go ahead and give lots of positives to Bob, Sam and Mary, but just make sure that you maintain the 3:1 ratio for each and every kiddo. So, what constitutes a positive comment? Positive comments include direct praise (e.g., "*Great job!*") and comments that sustain or increase a desired behavior (e.g., "*You're working really hard!*" or "*Bob and Mary are taking turns stirring the pudding.*" or "*Boy, asking Bob to sit next to you is a 'warm fuzzie'. I'll bet that really made him feel good.*" ).

Positive comments do not require taking a position or placing a value on something. Describing a child's work is very reinforcing (e.g., "*Wow! You used LOTS of red!*" or "*You painted over every inch of that paper!*" or "*That is a very tall tower that you made.*"). Pointing out children's competencies is another way to provide positive reinforcement (e.g., "*Hey, I can see that Mary's ready for circle. She is sitting on her carpet square. She knows just what to do!*"). With comments such as these, we are providing Mary with positive reinforcement while at the same time, using Mary's appropriate behavior as a behavior model for other kiddos.

Since hearing one's name is also reinforcing, use children's names when providing positive feedback (e.g., "*Thanks for putting your dishes in the dish bucket Sally. That's helping us get ready for free choice.*") and do not use children's names when redirecting or disciplining (e.g., "*It's time to clean up. Dirty dishes go in the dish bucket.*").

Teacher's comments needn't be scolding or punitive to be interpreted by children as negative. Tone of voice, facial expressions, and body posture are as important as the words you say. Remember to tell kids what they CAN do and not what they CAN'T do. Making comments like, "*Hey Sarah, help us make some soup*" versus "*Sarah, stop throwing vegetables*" contributes to a positive classroom climate.

### THINK BEFORE YOU ASK THAT QUESTION

If you already know the answer, don't ask it. Questions should be authentic or genuine; otherwise you're giving a test instead of having a conversation. Instead of asking questions, you can comment on the child's actions ("*Wow! You're making that tower VERY tall!*"), on your own actions ("*I think I'm going to make a road over to your tower!*"), about the activities around the room ("*They're painting with cars over at the art area- pretty wacky!*"), about what you see ("*Hey, you have a red car and I have a red car!*"), hear ("*I just heard the 5 minute warning!*"), smell

*(“MMmm, snack smells REALLY good today”), feel (“These blocks are so heavy, you must be strong to carry so many”), and think (“I wonder what we’re having for snack”).*

USE “MANDS” ONLY WHEN A CHILD IS REQUIRED TO DO SOMETHING AND THAT YOU ARE AVAILABLE TO FOLLOW THROUGH

“Mands” refer to either “demands” or “commands” and require a specific response. You are giving the child a directive and therefore you expect him/her to comply. Before issuing a “mand”, consider whether or not you are ready and able to provide the support that may be necessary for the child to meet your “mand”. An alternative to using “mands” is to make observations that provide the child with contextually relevant information so that she can initiate the appropriate behavior on her own. For example, the kids have just been told that circle is over and it is time to wash hands for snack. Bob is still sitting on his carpet square. Instead of saying, *“Bob, go wash your hands”* you can say, *“I see kids washing their hands for snack. Nice job guys! When your hands are washed, you’ll be ready for snack.”* Bob will probably figure out that it’s in his best interest to wash up so that he can eat, but if not, you can wait until an adult is free to provide the direct “mand” (e.g., *“stand up and wash hands”*) and the visual, gestural or physical support needed for Bob to comply.

## LISTEN !!! LISTEN TO WORDS AND TO BEHAVIORS

Remember that we communicate with more than words. Non-verbal behavior is communicative as well. Interpreting Sally's non-verbal behavior helps other children recognize and respond to Sally's attempts to communicate. For example, Sally is pushing away her cup full of juice. You might respond, "*Sally, you're telling me that you don't want any apple juice.*" If Mary hands Sally a cracker and Sally smiles, you can say, "*Oh Mary, Sally is smiling. Smiling is another way to say, 'Thank you'.*"

## BE PREPARED TO WAIT

Many children with and without disabilities take longer than you might expect to respond. Allowing sufficient time for children to process information and formulate a response increases not only the number utterances you will hear, but often the length and complexity of their speech as well. Wait- the pregnant pause –lets the child now that you are interested in what he has to say and that you are ready to listen.

## CONTINUE CHILD INITIATED TOPICS

Strategies for maintaining child-initiated topics include:

- REPHRASING CHILD: "*feed baby*" ADULT: "*You are giving your baby LOTS to eat.*"
- EXPANSIONS CHILD: "*truck*" ADULT: "*GO, truck, GO!*"
- AFFECTIVE COMMENTS CHILD: "*I eat pizza*" ADULT: "*You LIKE pizza. I like pizza, too.*"
- DESCRIPTIVE COMMENTS CHILD: "*I'm driving the truck.*" ADULT: "*You're driving a RED truck and Sasha is driving a GREEN truck.*"

## INITIATING TOPICS

Topics that teachers initiate should be concrete and contextually relevant. For example, at snack you might talk about the food or who likes which food best. You might refer to the colors or shapes of the bowls, crackers or the number of raisins. You might comment on what kids are wearing, what is the same and what is different, or what new things you notice in the classroom. Depending on the children's language skills, you might talk about the activity that immediately preceded snack or the activity that will follow. During other activities you might initiate a topic by making observations or "thinking out loud". "*Wow! Michael and Sam, that is a VERY tall tower you've built. It looks like it was a lot of work.*" or "*Uhoh, looks like that cup is so full that I don't think that we can put even one more scoop of sand into it.*" or "*I wonder what will happen if I put this block on the very top.*"

## EMBEDDING PREACADEMIC CONCEPTS INTO CLASSROOM CONVERSATIONS

There are ALWAYS things to count, colors and shapes to identify, places to put things, etc., etc., etc.

Snack: *"You want fish crackers? How many fish do you want? OK let's count them to make sure."*

Small group: *"I need a red marker to color my apple. Does anyone see a red marker?"*

Free choice (art area) *"Check it out- I have triangle stickers and circle stickers. Which one do you want?"*

Free choice (block area): *"Look, the pig is IN the barn, Whoa, he jumped up ON the barn! Now he's under barn! I wonder where he going to be next?"*

Free choice (sensory table): *"My BIG fish is going to go swimming with my LITTLE fish."*

You get the idea.....

## BEHAVIORS TO PRAISE AND ENCOURAGE

- ! Being a good friend
- ! Sharing
- ! Complying with teacher requests and following directions
- ! Following the classroom rules
- ! Cooperating with others
- ! Paying attention and listening to the teacher
- ! Raising a quiet hand
- ! Solving a difficult problem
- ! Listening to another child
- ! Persisting with a difficult task
- ! Trying
- ! Thinking hard
- ! Giving a compliment
- ! Including others
- ! Keeping hands to self
- ! Being safe
- ! Completing a project or task
- ! Letting someone go first
- ! Taking turns
- ! Being thoughtful (giving "warm fuzzies")
- ! Being patient (it's hard to wait!)
- ! Helping another person
- ! Staying calm, cool and in control in a difficult situation
- ! Regaining control

!!!! Any behavior that you want to maintain or increase !!!!