

Building on Every Child's Abilities

We all have things that we are good at and challenges that we need to work on. Too often, the strengths and abilities of newcomer children are overlooked or overshadowed by their needs. By focusing on the strengths that newcomer children bring to your program you will encourage the development of healthy self-esteem that will be the foundation for their successful transition to life in Canada.

In this tip sheet we will look at:

- Observing children to discover their gifts
- Building your program around children's strengths
- Setting the stage for success
- Taking a positive approach

Observe children to discover their unique gifts.

Spend some time interacting with the children in your care and observing them with an open and accepting attitude.

- Identify the children's strengths, abilities and interests.
- Respond with warmth and interest to each child and their family.
- Talk with the parents and learn as much about the child as you can. Remember that the family plays a key role in the child's success!
- Use the children's strengths to help them develop in their areas of challenge.
- Build your program around the children's strengths and interests.

Build your program around children's strengths.

STEP 1: Identify the child's area(s) of interest/strength.

Observe and get to know the child and their family. What is the child good at? What do they enjoy? Talk with the family and find out what the child likes to do at home.

STEP 2: Identify the child's area(s) of challenge.

What area of development or part of your program is the child struggling with? Has the family identified a specific concern?



STEP 3: Use the child's area of interest/strength to work on challenging areas.

Here is an example: You have discovered (through observation) that four-year-old Mohamud really seems to enjoy building with blocks and is quite good at it. You have also noticed that it upsets him when other children try to join in his play. He also mixes up his numbers and colours in both his home language and in English. You can use Mohamud's ability and interest in block play to help him develop his skills in these other areas. You can join him in his block play to demonstrate and talk about numbers, colours, sizes and shapes. Slowly, when Mohamud feels confident and ready, you can help him to include another child in the block play and encourage some simple turn taking. Block play is a good example of an open-ended activity that can be used in different areas of your program.

Set the stage for success!

- Keep an open mind and allow yourself to get excited about even the smallest accomplishments! Encourage the child to try the next step.
- Have realistic expectations and set achievable goals. Try not to compare children.
- Expand and facilitate the children's learning experiences whenever possible. Join in their play!
- Be creative with your program planning, but remember to plan developmentally-appropriate activities and use materials that reflect the children's interest and skill levels.
- Create a comfortable environment for all of the children in your care by incorporating culturally-appropriate materials. Encourage parents to bring in objects or toys that are of interest to the children.

Remember that a positive approach often has the most lasting effect.

By taking the time to discover and develop children's strengths, you can help the child and their family to develop self-confidence as they settle into a new culture and a new way of life. This positive approach and supportive role will often be remembered and appreciated long after the child and family have left your program.

REFERENCES:

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