

Back-and-Forth Interactions

Relevant Satellite Accreditation Standards

I. Interactions and Relationships

A. The provider's verbal and non-verbal communication with children helps build positive relationships and conveys support, respect, and trust.

4. The provider has back and forth verbal and non-verbal conversations with each child every day.



The Basics

What are back-and-forth interactions?

Back-and-forth interactions, also known as serve and return, involve a passing of exchanges between child and adult. These interactions begin when a child initiates an exchange with an adult through behaviors like gazing, pointing, reaching, babbling, talking, gesturing, speaking, or making facial expressions. An adult then returns the bid with a response, either verbal or nonverbal.

→ **Verbal responses** include verbalizations and speech. Examples include reassuring, supporting, noticing, naming, and describing the child's experience.

→ **Nonverbal responses** include body language and action. Examples include helping a child reach a crayon, smiling and nodding from across the room, or raising one's eyebrows.

Why are back-and-forth interactions essential? Back-and-forth interactions provide young children with information about the world around them and their place within it. Serve and return interactions support brain growth and structure by stimulating synapses that send electrical signals throughout the body (Center on the Developing Child, 2021). Back-and-forth interactions also model the turn taking nature of conversations and support children's attention and self-control (Salminen et al., 2021). Children learn social competence, practice self-regulation, and acquire language when adults frequently respond to verbal and nonverbal cues (Yang et al., 2021).

How can I facilitate back-and-forth interactions? Many educators engage in back-and-forth interactions often and naturally when *physically and emotionally present* with children. A cyclical process of observation, documentation, and reflection further supports educators' ability to accurately interpret and respond to children's cues. Below are techniques to consider when serving or returning a bid.

Nonverbal communication

- Use sign language
- Use and mimic gestures
- Use visual aids
- Help achieve a goal
- Imitate facial expressions

Verbal communication

- Narrate behavior
- Ask and respond to questions
- Imitate sounds
- Acknowledge facial expressions
- Encourage persistence

I want to learn more!

- [5 Steps for Brain-Building Serve and Return](#) (Video)
- [Serve and Return: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers](#) (Resource)
- [You're the Best Teacher! Responsive Interactions with Young Children](#) (Resource)
- [Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships](#) (Article)

Books available through Satellite's lending library:

(for Satellite participating programs only)

- *Powerful Interactions: How to Connect with Children to Extend Their Learning* (Dombro, 2011)
- *Teaching and Learning with Infants and Toddlers: Where Meaning Making Begins* (Maguire-Fong, 2015)
- *Being with Babies: Understanding and Responding to the Infants in Your Care* (Kovach, 2008)

