

How to Engage Children who are Difficult to Engage

Essential Considerations:

- When children are engaged, they are less likely to have challenging behavior
- Many children have challenges determining what to do, getting started, and maintaining their engagement
- Strategies to engage children are individually determined

Issue	Try This
<p>Child has difficulty sitting and listening in circle or small group, may not be on same language or cognitive level as other children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give child manipulatives to hold. • Make sure child can clearly see the teacher/book/or materials. • Give child duplicate of materials the teacher is using. • Make sure child is well supported and comfortable in seat. • Give child visual schedule of the activities that will be completed when in the group. • Provide child with more frequent encouragement and feedback for sitting. • Seat a peer buddy or adult near the child who agrees to help the child sit with the group.
<p>Child wanders the classroom and does not settle into an activity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give child limited choice of centers/activities to choose from. • Give child limited choice of materials to choose from in centers/activities. • Set timer for child and provide child with individual directions to stay and play until timer rings. • Recruit several peer buddies to help child find an activity and begin playing. • Individually review with child a “play plan” and then guide to the center to get started. • Provide child with a visual guide for the activity. For example, for art give child a prototype and then prompt to “make one like this” or for blocks, give child a picture of a simple block construction and prompt to “make this in blocks.” • Collect items that you know the child will play with and put in a special box. Provide the box when you are unable to provide redirection to help the child become engaged. • Provide activities that allow the child to periodically take a break from peers or noise (sometimes the activity in the classroom can become overwhelming). Examples of these may be: story on tape to listen with headphones, reading tent where children can hideaway, cozy corner with pillows, or quiet space with toys that is limited to one child. • Provide child with an individual, visual schedule that guides the child to understand the activities of the day and to make choice of activities. • Make sure you have allowed enough time to play. Some children may wander because they want to sample all activities and center time is not long enough to allow children to play in a focused manner. • Take turns with other adult in classroom to monitor the child’s activities and help her find and get started in an activity.

Child actively resists interactions with peers and adults

- Adjust your expectations. Take note of how long child will engage before resisting. Adjust your goals for engagement by working to only double that time (e.g., so if the child will only hang in for 3 minutes now, works toward 6).
- Note the child's preferences and use those toys and activities to build engagement and tolerance for a play partner (adult or child).
- Create a center that reflects the child's preferences and then provide 2 of each of those materials to support parallel play of the child with a peer.
- Note the play abilities of the child and then match activities to those abilities. For example, offer dump and fill activities if that is what the child seems to do well. Develop opportunities in each area where child can engage in those activities.
- Recruit play buddies who will invite child to play with them or follow the child's lead and play parallel to the child.