

# 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



*"Ba ba baaa,"*

*"Oh, that's what you think about the book? Tell me more!"*

*"Oooooooo ah!"*

*"What? You think that's going to happen next?"*

*"Da ba!"*

*"Wow, you have so much to say today!"*



### What are back-and-forth interactions?

Moments like these between young children and caregivers lay a foundation for healthy brain development. Also known as "serve and return", back-and-forth interactions involve a passing of exchanges between child and caregiver. 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 can include **reassuring, supporting, noticing, naming, and describing** the child's experience. Nonverbal responses comprise everything unspoken – from helping a child reach a crayon, smiling and nodding from across the room, raising one's eyebrows, or imitating a face. These interactions model the turn taking nature of conversations and help children practice self-control. Many caregivers engage in these back-and-forth interactions often and naturally, especially when emotionally available.

[Why are frequent back-and-forth interactions important?](#) Back-and-forth interactions provide young children with information about the world around them and their place within it. With rich opportunities for expanding language, wondering, and solving problems, “serve and return” is more effective than any device or media outlet that markets learning. These moments of caregiver-child synchrony are the building blocks of brain development and emotional regulation, fostering trust and emotional security. Back-and-forth interactions are especially important when young children are experiencing big feelings. Very young children cannot and should not be expected to handle big feelings on their own; they look to caregivers for support. Responses should be immediate and consistent, even if the caregiver is not ready to fully meet the child’s needs. A simple, “I hear you. I am coming soon,” to a toddler ready to be done with lunch might not help calm big feelings in the moment, but it does signal to them that they are cared for and held in mind. Research repeatedly shows that early sensitive and responsive caregiving, in which back-and-forth interactions play a significant role, is linked to social competence, emotion regulation, and executive function later in life.

I want to learn more!

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

This resource is available to you through Satellite Family Child Care System, a YoungStar Connect Partner.

