

Slow Down

Try a thoughtful, reflective approach to caring for children. Many exciting things happen in our day of caring for children. For example, Sarah built an airplane out of blocks, just like the one she rode to California in! Ben drew a whole spider family with lovely details and is saving it for his mother. And Tommy and Jenny were laughing as they looked at a book about frogs. They have become really good friends. Many adults who care for children are noticing that they miss these important happenings because they are so busy attending to other details: tight schedules, adult-planned activities, and all the preparation and effort these require. If you feel rushed, this may be a sign to slow down.

Why slow down?

One good reason to slow down is to be able to spend more time building and nurturing relationships. When caretakers can spend more time playing, listening, observing, and questioning, they begin to form positive relationships and discover more about each child. The more we know about a child, the better we can support their development.

Or should we provide more props to extend the firefighter play? Should everyone clean up and prepare for snack time, even if they are not hungry? Or should we place snack on a table only for those who are hungry and let the play continue? Knowing why you are offering an experience is important.

Children are happier exploring their ideas and environments when adults are less hurried and can enjoy time to interact, guide, and observe them.

Making time for each child daily and staying focused on the interaction with them will be beneficial. Be well prepared in advance (be ready before children arrive) and adjust to the children's rhythms (change your plans if needed).

What does it really mean to slow down?

To slow down means to change. An area that may need change is the schedule. Schedules are needed when caring for children, but must be in tune with the children. Does your schedule meet the needs and interests of the children you care for?

Many caregivers are opting for fewer adult-planned activities to allow for more child-centered, quality play times. For example, do children really need to stop playing fire fighter to make a turkey out of a paper plate?



Time for reflections

Slowing down allows you time for reflection. Instead of just “doing,” you are thinking about what you are doing. Caregivers can reflect on how and what they can do to guide and enrich the play and also to assess developmental needs. Write down your ideas to help in future planning, as well as to share with families.

A good time to use reflection is after the children have left, are sleeping, or possibly even as the play is going on (quick thinking!). Have a notebook and pencil handy at all times. Develop quality questions to ask yourself, such as “How did today’s plan go? Is there anything I can do to extend the ideas I saw? What problems occurred? What did the children do today? What are they really interested in? What materials will I need to support new work and existing work?”

Tips for thoughtful, reflective child care:

- Plan activities, materials, and environments centered on the children’s ideas, interests, and needs. Without looking at a list, recall the names of the children in your group. The child you forgot may be the child you need to spend time with. Be sure to spend time with every child in the group daily.
- Review the daily schedule. Look at how many transitions and activities are involved. Are they all necessary? Is there enough time to play? Is there suitable time for all to interact and form relationships?
- Write each child’s name on paper and list things you know about the child: abilities, personal interests,

likes, dislikes, fears, temperament, family, friends, and areas/materials they often visit. Use this information to help you plan.

- Slowing down allows a caregiver to be in the moment and discover the many facets of each child as well as the group as a whole. It offers the sense of valuing what is important and what makes for a respectful, thoughtful learning experience.

