



Best Practices in Intergenerational Programming: Practice 9

Facilitators Consider the Social Environment and the Role of Staff Members

Practice 9 • Social Environment

Intergenerational programs are most effective when facilitators consider the social environment, including the role of staff members.

In addition to the physical environment of a space or program, the social environment can influence participants' experiences with intergenerational programming. Examples of the social environment include how safe participants feel sharing ideas with the group and how staff members pair children and adults based on common interests or friendships.

Staff members are critical elements of the social environment. Their comfort with the participants' ages and abilities influences how the children and adults feel about each other. How staff members move around the space and offer help and encouragement is central to an activity's success. Facilitators do not have to be at the center of things to be effective; being able to step back when participants are interacting well is a good sign of the activity's success.

Social-emotional development is fostered through relationships. When children and elders see each other often, it helps build relationships, as do chances to share stories and preferences. Staff can encourage these exchanges. For example:

"Sam, please tell Miss Jo about your trip to New York. She used to live there."

"Mr. Jorge used to build boats. He will help us with our 'What floats?' experiment."

"Decide with your partner which type of seeds you will plant for our garden."

Application of the Practice

Offer settings between children and seniors that allow them to build their relationships. Suggestions include mealtimes, dramatic play (with costumes and props), and reading.

Some great book titles to share between old and young include:

- *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman and illustrator Caroline Binch.
- *The Doorbell Rang* by Pat Hutchins.
- *A Chair for My Mother* by Vera Williams.
- *Jennie's Hat* by Ezra Jack Keats.
- *Dear Mr. Blueberry* by Simon James.
- *No, David!* by David Shannon.

Project TRIP

Transforming Relationships Through Intergenerational Programming

A Children's, Youth, and Families at Risk project of Virginia Tech.

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This is one of 11 fact sheets on the emerging best practices associated with intergenerational programs.

Intergenerational programs are those that connect younger and older generations to foster positive experiences. Research continues to grow, noting that, when successfully delivered, intergenerational programs result in positive health effects, child learning, and appropriate socialization for both young and old (Jarrott 2011). For more information on IG practice, visit. <https://u.osu.edu/bridge2health/>.

The ninth practice relates to social environment.

- *Epossumondas* by Coleen Salley and illustrator Janet Stevens. *The Old Man and His Door* by Gary Soto and illustrator Joe Cepeda.
- *Tops & Bottoms* by Janet Stevens.
- *The Gardener* by Sarah Stewart and illustrator David Small.

Program Ideas

Staff members who intentionally connect with participants while guiding their engagement support positive interactions.

- Learn about participants, including normative and non-normative aspects of their development to build understanding and comfort with the population.
- Encourage participants to ask questions (formal and informal) among themselves.
- Pair participants based on common interests, backgrounds or complementary abilities.
- Give participants time to respond to questions.
- Allow participants time to get to know one another through frequent interactions that allow them to share stories and preferences.
- Introduce the activity and then step back to allow for child and older adult interactions.
- Help participants interpret discoveries through sharing.
- Ask questions and model curiosity: "I wonder what would happen if ...?" "How could we ...?"
- Show confidence in connections within relationships. Note ways that participants are working well together, sharing, and helping each other.

Best Practices for Intergenerational Programming

1. Staff members of the adult and child programs *collaborate* to plan activities.
2. Participants are *involved* in decision-making about the activity and during activities.
3. Participation is *voluntary*.
4. Participants are *prepared* ahead of time and reflect on the activity afterward.
5. *Activities reflect interests*, backgrounds, and social histories of program participants.
6. Activities are age- and *role-appropriate*.
7. Activities support *interaction* among intergenerational partners.
8. Facilitators skillfully *stage the environment* to promote interaction.
9. **Facilitators consider the social environment and the role of staff members.**
10. *Adaptive equipment* is used as appropriate.
11. Facilitators *document and communicate* experiences to build on in future activities.

Additional Resources

- Children, Youth and Families Education and Research Network (CYFERnet). See the Parent/Family tab of www.cyfernet.org.
- Dombro, A. L., J. Jablon, and C. Stetson. 2010. "Powerful Interactions Begin With You." *Teaching Young Children* 4 (1): 12-14.
- Willis, C., and P. Schiller. 2011. "Preschoolers' Social Skills Steer Life Success." *Young Children* 66 (1): 42-49.

Reference

Jarrott, S. E. 2011. "Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going? Content Analysis of Evaluation Research of Intergenerational Programs." *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships* 9:37-52. doi:10.1080/15350770.2011.544594.



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