

# All About HighScope

# 5

## Adult-Child Interaction

*Practical summaries of HighScope's history, educational approach, and curriculum*

### **How do adults and children interact in a HighScope setting?**

In a HighScope setting, teachers and other staff and volunteers interact with children by sharing control with them; focusing on their strengths; forming genuine relationships with them; supporting their play ideas; and by using a problem-solving approach to resolving conflicts in the classroom, lunchroom, or on the playground. We are trained to participate in children's activities primarily as partners rather than as managers or supervisors. We respect children and their choices, and encourage their initiative, independence, and creativity. We also understand how children learn and plan the kinds of experiences children need in order to grow in all areas of development. In this supportive atmosphere, children can work and play with people and materials with curiosity, deliberation, and confidence.

### **Why do adults in HighScope settings share control of the day's activities with children?**

In HighScope settings, a mutual give-and-take relationship exists between children and adults — both groups can participate as leaders or followers, teachers or learners, speakers or listeners. When children and adults share control of the day's activities, children learn how to take responsibility for themselves and one another. They develop confidence in their ability to set the course of their own learning and share their newly found knowledge with their peers. In addition, they learn how to solve child-size problems in age-appropriate ways, knowing there is adult support if needed. Learning becomes a joy

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that comes from within, rather than a burden imposed on them by adults. In a HighScope setting, children realize that they don't have to wait for adults to make things happen — they can act independently, take initiative, and make things happen by themselves.

Remember that sharing control does not mean letting children take over and run wild. Adults in HighScope settings balance the freedom children need for exploration with the limits necessary to guarantee their safety and well-being and support their individual mental and social development.

### What does it mean to focus on children's strengths?

At HighScope, we focus on children's strengths because we believe that children learn best when they are motivated by their own goals and interests. This approach contrasts sharply with programs that are aimed at overcoming children's weaknesses. If adults focus on children's weaknesses instead of their strengths, children may become anxious under the pressure to improve. But when we take time to discover what children are eager to learn and what they are able to do, we can build on children's natural desires and talents by planning learning experiences that they tackle with enthusiasm.

### How do adults in HighScope settings form "genuine" relationships with children?

Being genuine means being an honest, real person. In HighScope settings, we don't shower children with false praise or pretend to be interested in them. We really care about children and respect their choices and feelings. Adults in HighScope settings speak to children in natural tones and listen carefully to what they have to say. Instead of quizzing children about what they know, we ask children honest questions that seek information and thoughtful answers. For example, instead of asking questions that have only one correct answer (such as "Which block is taller?"), we ask children questions that can draw any number of thoughtful responses (such as "What are you going to do with all these blocks?"). In this respectful atmosphere, conversations between adults and children flow as naturally as do conversations between adults. As a result, children in HighScope programs develop rich and expressive vocabularies and learn to communicate comfortably and confidently with others.

### How do adults in HighScope settings support children's play ideas?

Whether it's quiet or noisy, messy or orderly, silly or serious, children put a great deal of energy into their play activities and find playing to be deeply rewarding. In fact, calling these experiences "play" does not really describe how important they are to every aspect of children's learning. That is why in a HighScope setting you may hear us refer to children's play experiences as "work time."

Adults in HighScope settings know that children learn by exploring, making things, and pretending. We have been trained to observe and understand the complexity of children's play and are committed to making play a satisfying experience. As partners in children's play, we follow children's directions and willingly assume pretend roles children assign to us. Rather than acting as all-powerful authorities who dictate the rules for play, we support children's choices and plans, feelings, and ideas.

### How do adults in HighScope settings help children resolve conflicts?

Conflict is inevitable during the course of children's play. Children become thoroughly involved in their individual actions with materials and people and have strong opinions about how things should happen. When something gets in the way — another child wants the same toy or a friend does not want to follow a child's idea — children become frustrated and angry. This does not mean they are being bad, selfish, or mean. Young children simply do not yet have the thinking skills necessary to analyze a situation and approach it from multiple viewpoints. They see the world primarily from their own perspective, which is appropriate for their age and level of understanding. Even so, it's important for children to develop the capacity to handle social conflicts, first with our support and later on their own. If we always step in to settle conflicts, children will never become confident problem solvers in their own right.

Adults in HighScope settings are trained to help children adopt a *six-step approach to solving problems*, including conflicts with friends and family members. In this process, children are kept safe, everyone's feelings are acknowledged, information is gathered, and each child contributes to an agreed-upon solution. As a result of this systematic process, children develop thinking and social skills that apply to many other situations in life. As children learn to make cause-and-effect connections between their behavior and its impact on others, they also learn to take responsibility for their own actions. Because their feelings are respected, children learn to respect the feelings of others. They gradually develop the capacity to solve problems through peaceful negotiation instead of through physical and verbal aggression. These skills take time to develop, but they are among the most important skills learned by children in HighScope programs.

### Can families interact with their children in similar ways at home?

The interaction guidelines that we use in the HighScope setting can certainly be used with children at home. For example, parents can begin to share control of activities with their children by focusing on what they *can*

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do. They can allow their children to make some of their own decisions or to act as “leaders” in a family game or outing. (It is important for parents to remember that sharing control in their home does not mean allowing children to be unsafe, out of control, or unkind to others.) We suggest that parents be themselves and act naturally when they talk to children. Rather than asking them to recite what parents already know they know (children learn nothing new from this line of questioning), we recommend that parents play alongside their

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children and let them decide what to play and how to play it. We also advise that parents become familiar with the six steps of problem solving (described in the fact sheet that talks about resolving conflicts) and help their children use them to resolve conflicts with siblings and playmates. Families can also visit their children’s program and observe how teachers and other staff and volunteers interact with children. Finally, parents can ask themselves, How can I respect and encourage my children in the same ways at home?

**All About HighScope**

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