

## Unlocking the Secrets to Quality in Early Childhood Education: As Easy as Answering: How Would I feel?

As teachers we are often perplexed as to what quality decisions should be made in deciding how we care for young children. We often ask ourselves questions such as: What do these children need from me? Why do they behave in the ways they do? The many questions we have send us in tailspins as we mull over the answers.

Foundationally, however, we ought to get to the heart of the issue. We need to pose the following question to ourselves: Why do we view children any differently than ourselves? The answers to our questions about children and quality child care can be satisfied if we are introspective and reflect on one key question: How would I feel in the situation? From there we can glean many of our answers as to what quality child care should look like. Consider the following scenarios and how they relate to one another. Once we see the relation to common situations in life, we can contemplate their remedy.

A (Adult): A mom and her teenage son live together in a large house and have adjacent bedrooms. The arrangement of the home, with adjacent bedrooms, was never a problem until mom acquiesced and allowed her son to have a drum set for his birthday. Now her room, previously a sanctuary of rest after a tough day at work, has now become a place of stress. The noise of the drums pound in her head and she cannot find the peace she once had. Headaches and outbursts of anger in otherwise calm situations at home are more prevalent. Mom is contemplating refinishing the basement so the drums and her son can be moved away from her quiet space.

C (child): Two year old Joe was up all last night with a belly ache from eating too many jelly beans. He comes to school tired and not wanting to play with anyone, which is strange because he is usually outgoing and loves to play with everyone. Joe goes into the cozy/library area where he hopes to find peace and quiet. Instead other children are using the area for wrestling. Also, a nearby music center and block center are creating a noisy environment for him. Joe is getting a headache and is lashing out at his friends. He wishes the classroom was arranged so quiet activities were located away from noisy activities.

A: Shopping on black Friday is not too much fun, but I go because I know the deals are inviting. I arrive at 9 am only to find the store already crowded and the shelves are a mess from previous shoppers picking through items. I travel down the toy aisle to find that there is a traffic jam of carts. I wait patiently as I observe the last Elmo toy at the end of the aisle. I hope the traffic jam of carts clears before someone gets it. My patience lasts a few moments, but I am scared I may not get that last Elmo. I begin to try to ram my cart through the aisle, I know I am being rude, but I do it anyway. Why, because if I left my cart behind, I know others would steal from it. I wish this chaos could be cleaned up somehow.

C: There are so many toys, shelves, and people in this classroom that it is crowded. I do not have ample space to move and someone is in my way. I tried to use my words and say excuse me, but he won't listen. I push him aside so I can get where I am going. He pushes back and now we are both in time out. While in time out I realized that someone took a toy from my pile that I was playing with. This made me even angrier and I am in time out again. This stinks. I wish this problem would go away. I wish it were not so crowded in this room.

A: During a quick visit to the grocery store, I need picnic food. I totally forgot I was having friends over and now I need to hurry. I travel down the condiments aisle and find that both the ketchup and mustard are in the same aisle which saves me time. I have to go to a different aisle for hotdogs and a third aisle for the buns. This trip is taking longer than I think because I have to go into yet another aisle for the paper plates, plastic forks and spoons. Wouldn't it be nice if all I needed was in one aisle?

C: I want to play with blocks. I am going to build a zoo. I go to block center where I find the blocks on the shelf. I need animals for my zoo; they are in the science center. Gosh, if I go get them, someone might steal my spot in the block area. Well, I will risk it. I also need people for my zoo and they are located on the other side of the classroom. Wouldn't it be nice if everything I needed for my zoo were right here with the blocks?

A: I am going shopping for a new toaster. At the store I find it on the top shelf. I cannot reach it on my own so I try to find help. The sales associates I can see around me are busy helping other customers, so I climb the shelf to get it myself. Wouldn't it be nice if the toaster was on my level to begin with?

C: I really want to play with that puzzle but it is up high on the shelf. I look to my teacher to see if she is available to help me. She is helping Sarah in the bathroom. My other teacher is busy too. I will climb the shelf. The puzzle, along with many others, falls on me. I am in trouble for climbing and creating a mess. If only the puzzles weren't stored that high to begin with.

A: I am an old woman now. Although I can still comprehend everything around me, I can't speak clearly anymore because of a stroke. And most embarrassingly, I cannot control my bowels. My family has placed me in a nursing home to live out my days. After lunch, I soil myself and need to be cleaned up by a nice competent and discrete nurse. Four of them have been to see me since lunch and no one is acknowledging my predicament. It is really making me mad. I know it is not a job that is pleasant, but it is necessary. I wish I could tell my family about this.

C: My diaper is dirty. It is becoming stinky and itchy on my bottom. Ms. Sarah must smell me. Why won't she change me? Is it because in 30 minutes Mr. Mark comes in to help? Is she waiting for someone else to notice? This is uncomfortable. I wish I could tell my family.

A: At a professional development event attended to meet the required DPW hours, the trainer experiences technical difficulties with the DVD player. The event, previously keeping the attention of everyone there, has now experienced a glitch. While the trainer works furiously with the technology expert to resolve the problem, the audience is engaged in conversations with one another and some have left to use the restroom. After the problem is resolved, the trainer graciously asks the group to refocus on the presentation that is now beginning again.

C: The children are asked to sit at the table for an art activity. The teacher passes out the paper and the paint but realizes she has forgotten the paint brushes. She furiously digs in the cabinets to find them. During this time, the children are talking with one another, some have gotten out of their seats and others have started painting with their fingers. This is an unexpected glitch in the plan, as with the DVD from the previous example. Does the teacher graciously get the group back on task, or does she get angry that they did not remain seated and remain quiet while she found the brushes?

As you can see from the previous scenarios, children are not little subjects that we must intently study as if they were not human. They are miniatures of us who have the same desires and feelings and goals we do. Young children often behave as we would. So when you are experiencing a problem in your classroom, before brainstorming solutions, find out why it is happening by putting yourself in their shoes. Experience what they undergo. A solution may be easier to find using this method.

Good luck!!!

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