

FOR EXAMPLE...

Two-year-old Tommie has just dumped the contents of six bins of manipulatives into a pile on the floor. His teacher, Sonya, comes over and sits down next to him. Tommie jumps up and runs away. She follows him and gently takes his hand and walks back over to the manipulative area. “You are not in trouble, Tommie. I am interested in the toys you have here on the floor. All of the toys are in a pile. What’s your idea?” Tommie shrugs.

Smiling, Sonya says, “I think it was fun to dump all of the containers on the floor.” Tommie grins and nods. Sonya asks Tommie, “Which toys are you going to play with now?” Again, he jumps up, heading for another area in the classroom. Sonya follows him again and gently takes him by the hand. She kneels down and says to Tommie, “I think that there were too many toys on the floor for you to choose what to play with. I’ll help you put some of them away, so that you can choose.” Tommie walks back to the manipulative area, and with Sonya’s help, begins picking up some of the toys and putting them in the bins. As he works, he finds his favorite motor bike and a few small cars. Sonya notices his interest, and says, “You like the motorcycle and the cars. I’ll help you finish picking up the rest of the toys so you can play with the ones you like.”

As they pick up the rest of the toys, they find two more motorcycles and several more cars. Sonya points out that when there aren’t so many toys on the floor, it’s easier to find the ones you want to play with. She offers to get Tommie a special bin for the motorcycles and cars, so that he can find them next time, without dumping all the toys on the floor. Tommie likes this idea and happily loads up the bin when Sonya brings it to him.

Notice the different feeling between the first vignette and the second. In the first, both Tommie and Sonya ended up upset and frustrated, and neither one learned anything that might help them the next time something similar happened. In the second vignette, Sonya did not get upset and react to Tommie’s dumping activity. She recognized that toddlers love to dump things out and that they

aren't so good at picking things up. Her careful observation helped her figure out what interested Tommie (cars and motorcycles), and why he was dumping out the toys (he was looking for his favorite toys). She also noticed that he is easily overwhelmed when he can't find what he is looking for. She helped Tommie stay in the manipulative center, scaffolding his limited skill in picking up his own messes by helping him to get started. While she didn't allow the cars and motorcycles to distract him from cleaning up, she did recognize his interest and helped him find a solution that didn't involve dumping out all the toys next time.

You might be thinking, "But it took so much time!" You're right, but Tommie was going to take Sonya's time either way. She could either deal with Tommie's frustration and his emotional outburst; or she could spend her time helping Tommie understand his own motivation, developing a plan to help him get his needs met, and helping him stay under control as the problem was solved.

As you begin to use the **SET for Life** teaching strategies and language, it will get easier to identify a child's motivation and emotional needs, and for him to use the **SET for Life** skills on his own. It takes practice, but it will begin to feel more natural with time. The change starts with language. So, practice using **SET for Life** language and see where it leads you. A table of helpful words and phrases can be found in Appendix G. Feel free to post it in your classroom so that you can refer to it when needed.

TEACHING STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION

ENGAGE IN CONVERSATION WITH CHILDREN

While you are participating in children's play, engage them in conversation, and listen carefully to what they have to say. The give and take of social communication is relatively new to children in the early childhood stage. They are just learning the social expectations of turn-taking in conversation, waiting for a response before moving on to the next topic, and how to express what they really mean with a fairly limited vocabulary.