



GUIDE TO HUGS RESPONSIVE CAREGIVER STRATEGIES

When a caregiver-child interaction becomes frustrating for either the caregiver or the child, it is important for caregivers to be systematic and respond to the child. Practitioners can help caregivers recognize a frustrating interaction by the following:

Signs of caregiver frustration:

- Yelling
- Saying things you will later regret
- Assuming the worst of the child
- Showing physical aggression
- Withholding affection/interaction
- Assigning unreasonable expectations/punishments (e.g., sit here for the rest of the day)

Signs of child frustration:

- Getting overly excited
- Tantruming
- Moving away from caregiver
- Disrupting the environment
- Saying mean words
- Using sounds (crying or whining) rather than words
- Hurting himself/herself
- Being extremely upset
- Hitting, grabbing, biting, spitting, kicking
- Causing danger to himself/herself/others

Prior to helping the child regulate his/her emotions, the practitioner can help the caregiver prepare for the interaction by co-regulating their emotions. Taking a deep breath, counting to ten, smiling, tensing and relaxing the body, and engaging in positive self-talk (e.g., "I can be calm and support my child needs right now") can help with regulating emotions.

Below are some **hear, understand, give, and success** strategies that practitioners can teach caregivers to use to help calm the interaction and communicate in socially appropriate ways. Caregivers can focus on using **hear, understand, give, and success** strategies that help both the caregiver and the child be available to participate in and learn from the interaction. Keep in mind that not all strategies have the same effect on all children, and caregivers may need to observe and learn what helps support the child's communication and participation.

HEAR

The first step in calming the situation includes showing the child that the caregiver is tuned-in to the child and interpreting the child's behavior as an attempt to communicate an idea, need, or emotion. Practitioners can teach caregivers to diffuse a tense interaction by showing the child that they are tuned-in and **hearing** the child's communication. Below are some caregiver responses that can help the child know that the caregiver is tuned-in and **hearing** the child's communication. These responses allow the caregiver to create positive emotional environment that **invites** the child to engage appropriately, allows for the caregiver and child to **engage** in a joint activity, and enables the caregiver to **teach** the child new communication behaviors.

- Respond immediately and positively to your child to show you are tuned in and paying attention to the cues
- Bend to the child's level
- Look the child in the face
- Stay calm/neutral
- Give the child the personal space or touch he/she needs
- Tune in to what the child is communicating/needing
- Think about the possible messages the child might be trying to communicate

UNDERSTAND

Children learn to take turns listening and **understanding** when adults model this behavior. Below are some strategies practitioners can teach caregivers to use to ensure the child knows that he/she is understood:

- Let the child know you understand what he/she wants and/or feels.
- Use a voice that matches the situation and compliments the child's emotions (when the child is excited consider a quiet voice; when the child seems sad or angry consider a sad voice; when the child is withdrawn or clingy consider using an excited voice).
- Recognize, accept, and name the child's emotions.
- Use gestures that match your words.
- Let the child know you see his/her concerns the same way he/she does.
- Let the child know you understand what he/she likes.
- Use short and simple phrases one time.
 - "I hear you telling me..."
 - "It looks like you are showing me..."
 - "You are showing me you feel..."
 - "I can tell you want..."

GIVE

When the child knows that he/she is heard and understood, he/she can learn to hear and understand what the caregiver is communicating and may become open to the message the caregiver wants to **give**. Below are some strategies and examples practitioners can introduce to caregivers that caregivers use to teach the child successful communication strategies when giving a response to the message the child may have been communicating:

- Give a response to the child's communication (e.g., "You can't have a cookie right now.").
- Give the child positive words to let the child know what he/she CAN do (e.g., "You can have your drink right now and your cookie after dinner.").
- Give the child consistent rules and routines (e.g., "We don't jump on the furniture.").
- Give the child new or alternative ways to meet his/her need (e.g., "You can jump on your pillows or on your trampoline.").
- Give the child a small number of choices (e.g., "You must hold on when we cross the road. Do you want to hold my hand or hold onto the dog leash with me?").
- Give the child a chance to decide what and how he/she wants to do activities that interest him/her.
- Give the child the sensory input he/she needs to get in control of him/herself (e.g., "Can I give you a tight hug and help you feel better?").
- Give the child reassurance that you will help him/her through the challenging time (e.g., "I'm going to sit here with you if you need me.").
- Provide the child with physical support (e.g., holding hands, hugging, picking the child up, putting the child down).
- Compliment the child for choosing positive or requested behaviors (even a little step).
- Provide the child with chances to be in control. (e.g., "We have to hold hands when we are in the parking lot. Do you want to hold my hand, or do you want me to hold yours?").
- Provide the child with age-appropriate challenges.
- Join the child in an interest-based activity or routine.
- Join in the child's play.
- Provide the child with appropriate wait time.
- Add new materials to the activity or routine to increase what the child gets to do.
- Note how the child responds back and make sure he/she understands.
- Praise the child for demonstrating requested behaviors. (e.g., "Fantastic! You remembered to say please when you asked for more snack.").
- Create and use the same routines, language, and rules with the child every day. (e.g., "Every time, we wash our hands after your diaper has been changed.").
- Help the child practice taking turns.
- Provide the child words, phrases, and gestures to communicate his/her messages. (e.g., "We're leaving, say/wave bye.").
- Help the child maintain the sensory input he/she needs to be at his/her best.
- Provide the supervision the child needs in order to stay safe.
- Use safety features in the home that keep the child safe.

SUCCESS

Practitioners prepare caregivers to continue to practice multiple **hear**, **understand**, and **give** responsive strategies during everyday activities and routines, providing children with many chances to practice regulating and communicating to learn new skills. The practitioner and caregiver should refer to the *Joint Plan for Using HUGS Responsive Caregiver Strategies* insert to list responsive strategies the caregiver plans to use with the child between visits. Practitioner supports the caregiver in selecting an everyday activity as the focus activity for the next home visit and schedule the home visit at a time that provides the best opportunity to practice the chosen activity.