

# Mentoring Session 2: Ways to Start Interactions

**Make OBSERVATIONS about what children are doing:**

*I love how you are using only the square blocks!*

*Wow! That tower is taller than you!*

**Ask QUESTIONS:** open-ended is better!

The less you assume and the more you give the child the chance to explain it to you the better! Good questions often start with who, what, when, where, why and how.

*What are you doing over here?*

*What is happening?*

*What are you building?*

**Offer CHALLENGES:** Follow the child's interests and offer a challenge in line with what they are doing. If they don't accept, that's ok!

*Ex: Can you build a tower taller than you?*

*Can you build a tower with just triangles?*

Observations, questions, and challenges go hand in hand. If they feel awkward now, don't worry! The more you play the more natural it becomes, until you don't even realize you're doing it! For now it's Practice! Practice! Practice!

All of the examples above are things you can say and do in *Shape Space*.

**As you play in the other exhibits, brainstorm questions and challenges to use. Try a few out! How does it feel?**

In *Water Ways* a question to ask is: What happens when you pump this pump? A challenge you can follow up with is:

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In *Iway* a question could be: How do I get my car from the Children's Museum to my house? A follow up challenge is:

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What question(s) can you ask in *Littlewoods* if the challenge is: Let's go on a bear hunt! Grab a cart and let's collect the bears!

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What is a question you can ask in *Pets & People* if the challenge is: Pretend to be a veterinarian.

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**Now, brainstorm some other questions or challenges. List one question and one challenge you can offer in:**

*Bone Zone:*

*Coming to Rhode Island:*

Elizabeth's gallery:

*TEETH!:*

Louis' gallery:

*Hey Look!:*

Antonio's gallery:

*The Children's Garden:*

Fefa's gallery:

# WAYS TO PLAY!

Starting interactions with visitors can be intimidating. This guide presents a few strategies that work for us. Try a few different approaches and see what works for you!

## General Tips:

1. Be on the kids' level. Squat down or sit while they stand so that you can look each other in the eye.
2. Starting interactions is all about presenting kids with a new opportunity. You can do this with gestures, sound effects, words, a new object, or just by playing next to a child.
3. Be gentle. Take the time to watch kids a little as they play: think about how old they are, what they seem to be enjoying, and how you could join. Enter their space slowly.
4. One of the easiest ways to start an interaction is just to smile at a child and wave.

## Water Ways:

### *Physical Play:*

- Bring more balls to the toddler tank and set them rolling down.
- When small children pick things up to drop them and make a splash, do the same thing.
- When you see kids filling up the lock with balls, **ask if you can help them**. Start helping. You can ask what they're going to do with all those balls.
- Move a boat around in the water and make motor noises. Send it over the waterfall and make more noises ("Uh-oh-yeeeeeeeeeah... SPLOOSH!). Pour water over it and say "It's raining."
- Hold a small ball under the water and watch it pop back up. Hold a large ball under the water and watch that one pop up. Offer balls to the children and play together.
- Block openings on the fountains to make water squirt and then uncover them again.
- Build a fountain that squirts.
- Build a siphon tube and start pushing balls through it.
- Make a water tornado. Ask kids to help you cover the holes and encourage them to watch what happens. How many different kinds of objects could you use to block the holes?
- Place balls and boats on the geyser tube as kids pump.
- Press your ear against the bubble column and smile. Tell kids that if they do the same thing they'll be able to hear the bubbles. Point to one of the bubbles rising in the bubble column and follow it all the way up. Invite kids to do the same.

### *Questions and Challenges:*

- Ask about the fish. Can you find the biggest one? The smallest? Ask kids if they can find the lobster living in tank 2 (it likes to hide) or the sea star living in tank 1. Ask if they have a favorite fish and why.
- Make observations and ask questions as kids pump the pumps: "That's a lot of water." "This fountain is as tall as *you* are." "What does that pump do?"
- Point out the pumps and invite kids to use them ("Each of these pumps does something different. See if you can figure out what they do.")
- Ask kids if they can connect fountains they're working on.
- Ask kids how they can change the shape of their fountain so that all of the water it squirts stays in the tank.
- Step up to the locks and ask kids what the handles do.

## Pets & People:

### *Physical Play:*

- With very young children, open one of the drawers and drop something in. Do it again. Hand something to the little one so they can drop it.
- Pull all the pets off the shelf one by one and pile them up. Put them back one by one.

### *Questions and Challenges:*

- Grab a puppet or stuffed animal. Let kids know that you work here and that you heard there were animal doctors who might be able to help your squirrel. Could they take a look?
- Ask children if they can help you find a home for a lost animal.
- Stick an x-ray up on the light board and ask some questions. What kind of animal is it? How many legs does it have? Does it have a tail?

- Begin an animal conversation. Make two puppets talk to each other in cat or bird language. Offer one to a child.

## **TEETH!:**

### *Physical Play:*

- Brush the giant teeth. Floss. Do the kids want to help?
- Reach your hand into one of the tooth touch boxes. What's *in* there? Weird! What does it feel like?
- Take the break-apart tooth off its stand, take it apart, and hand it to a child to examine. Can they put it back together?

### *Questions and Challenges:*

- Look at the x-rays. Ask kids to count the teeth or find the baby teeth coming in under the adult teeth.
- Wiggle the middle tooth of the loose tooth display and look puzzled. Ask kids if the third tooth wiggles. Be amazed when it comes out. What about the first tooth, does it wiggle? Why do these three teeth behave so differently? What differences can you see in the shapes of these teeth?
- Let kids know that each animal skull in the case has a match on the mural above it. Can they match the skull with the sculpture?
- Ask kids to look closely at the teeth in the skulls. Ask what they think the animals might have eaten. Why?

## **Littlewoods:**

### *Physical Play:*

- Bring over a puppet or rubber bear. Move it around and make it talk, howl, or maybe sing. Offer the child animals so they can respond.
- Stand by the slide and make a sound or observation as kids go down: "Zoom!" "That was so fast!"
- Jump over the river. Ask kids if they can do it, too. Try hopping on one foot or jumping backwards.
- Use a puppet or your hand to push rocks through the holes in the cave. Make the puppet wave or shout "Ahhh! It's raining rocks!"
- Play peekaboo through the holes in the cave using yourself or a puppet.
- Fill up a cart with rocks or animals. Push it around and make driving noises. Ask kids if they want to push a cart too. They can follow you. You can follow them.
- Present a succession of puppets to infants in the baby's nest. Make them move and let babies reach out and touch them.
- Stack up rocks. Knock them down.

### *Questions and Challenges:*

- Hearing language is the best way for infants to learn it. Making observations about infants and their surroundings will help them learn ("Oh, you're chewing on the green ball now" or "Look at all these butterflies.")
- Ask how many different ways kids can go down the slide.
- Pile up a bunch of animals and look confused. Ask kids to help you put the animals where they live. Where does the owl go? In the cave? In the tree?
- Hide the baby stuffed animals and introduce kids to the grown-up animals. Ask them to help you find mama's babies.
- Tell a child that your animal is hungry. Ask what it might like to eat. Are there any other hungry animals? What do they want to eat?

## **Bone Zone:**

### *Physical play:*

- Hop on the bike and ride. Ask kids if they want a turn.
- Sit down in front of the mirrored skull box and slide the switch. Say "Whoa!" when the skull appears and ask kids if they've seen it.
- Try on some casts.

### *Questions and Challenges:*

- Ask kids who can pedal faster: kids or skeletons?
- Ask what makes the skeleton move.
- Pick up a bone and ask "Where does this thing go?"
- Make ridiculous suggestions. Tell kids that you think the spine is a ponytail bone or a giant tongue bone. Maybe the ribs are hair bones or giant teeth. Could the shoulder blades be ears?

- Ask kids if they can help you identify some bones in the x-rays or help you figure out which x-rays show broken bones and which ones show healthy bones. Sometimes they laugh when you call them “Doctor.”

### Shape Space:

#### *Physical Play:*

- Sit down to build with wooden blocks, magnetiles, or jovo pieces. Put tessellation pieces on the board.
- Ask kids if you can build with them. If they’re building a castle, maybe you can add a town next to it. If they’re making a railroad maybe you can add another track.

#### *Questions and Challenges:*

- Ask kids to show you how to make what they’re making
- Make observations or ask questions about kids’ constructions: “This is very complex - look at all those different shapes.” “What are you building?” “How tall could you build that?”
- Extend your questions. If kids are building a house, ask who lives there. Ask what different parts of their building are for or what color it would be painted.

### Coming to Rhode Island:

- Ask kids if they know the story behind these rooms. Let them know that each one tells the true story of somebody who came to Rhode Island from far away and whose family still lives here.
- Present kids with new pieces of food or other objects.
- Ask what’s cooking.

1640:

#### *Physical Play:*

- Ride the cow. She’s very friendly. Would the kids like to ride?
- Drop pieces of food into the cauldron or stack them up on plates.
- Put on a costume.
- Eat some corn.

#### *Questions and Challenges:*

- Point out the milk bucket. Ask where the milk could have come from.
- Touch the beaver pelt. Ask kids what it feels like.
- Ask kids about the strange hinged metal object by the door. Even if they’re not sure what it actually is, what *could* it have been? Ask what would happen if you put your nametag between the clamps. This was a special candle holder. The pilgrims would dip a long piece of grass, like the kind the roof is made of, and dip it in wax or animal fat. Then they’d clamp one end in the holder and light the other. They used grass candles because they used less wax or fat, both of which were expensive and hard to get. Why do you think they were so hard to get?
- Ask how is this house different from where they live.
- What’s the butter churn for? Why wouldn’t the pilgrims just go buy some butter at the supermarket?

1867:

#### *Physical Play:*

- Make a quilt with the Velcro quilt shapes and felt board. Ask if kids would like to add to it.
- Spin the water wheel. Put food in the slots and watch it fall out as the wheel rotates.
- Sit down to do some washing with the washboard. You might also pick it up and ask kids what it’s for.

#### *Questions and Challenges:*

- Sit down by the stove and start opening doors. Ask what it is. Ask what different compartments are for. How does it turn on?

1892:

#### *Physical Play:*

- Eat one of the big fish. Offer to share.
- Act like a lookout. Shout “Land-Ho!” or something else dramatic.
- Push the big boxes around or stack up the bowls and cups.
- Get seasick!

#### *Questions and Challenges:*

- Ahoy, captain! Where are you sailing? If kids say they don’t know you can offer some options. Would they like to go someplace close by or far away? Would they like to go someplace warm or someplace cold? Maybe you need a ride to Cape Verde or China or Florida. Could they take you?

- Ask about the chickens in boxes. Why would somebody take a chicken on a sailing ship? What can you get from a chicken?
- Ask kids what they can see from the telescopes.
- Ask if they can raise and lower the sail. How can they get it to stay up? What about the anchor? What's the anchor for, anyway?
- Find treasure. What about pirates?

1961:

*Physical Play:*

- Pick up the phone and listen for while. Hand it to a kid and say "It's for you."
- Pile a box full of produce. Put it back piece by piece.
- Weigh things on the scale.
- Play some music with the kitchen utensils.
- Arrange and rearrange the cans.

*Questions and Challenges:*

- Ask to buy some produce.
- Sniff the smell boxes. Ask which smells they like the best. Ask if they can guess where the smells come from.
- Sit down at the lunch counter. Ask if they're open or offer to cook something for them. What would they like to eat? Maybe you need help with the recipe.

Story Center:

*Physical Play:*

- Sit down to play with the basket kit or dominoes. Invite kids to play. You don't have to play dominoes or weave baskets. Maybe you feel like building a castle with your dominoes. Maybe you just want to drop them into a basket one by one and listen to them make clicky noises. Then you can dump them all out.

*Questions and Challenges:*

- Ask if kids have a favorite photo in the photo mural.
- Let kids know that they can leave a message on the talk-back board.
- Hand kids a favorite book of yours from the shelf and tell them a little bit about it.