KIPS Behaviors in Detail

The 12 parenting behaviors selected for the Keys to Interactive Parenting Scale (KIPS) comprise key ingredients that help children develop to their best potential. In selecting these behaviors, we held focus groups with family service providers and completed an extensive review of current research on parenting and child development. In this section you will find explanations and examples of the KIPS behaviors to help you better understand the KIPS perspective. Although the 12 behaviors are related to one another, each represents an important aspect of parenting quality. Focusing on one parenting behavior at a time helps to fairly assess the many facets of a caregiver’s parenting.

Because each parent or caregiver has a unique style of parenting, we expect that caregivers will show different patterns of strengths and needs as they play with their children. With KIPS, you will be able to assess caregivers’ strengths and areas for growth in adapting to their child’s needs and promoting learning and development. Ratings of the quality of 12 parenting behaviors are set on 1 to 5 scales. The ratings for each behavior are shown on the KIPS scoring form with behavioral anchors for ratings of 1, 3 and 5. Behavioral anchors are examples of what the caregiver may be saying or doing during play with his/her child. The anchors were developed to rate a wide range of behaviors during caregiver-child play.

On the following pages, we first discuss each of the KIPS behaviors. Next, we give examples of what you may see or hear when looking for high quality behaviors. For those who would like more information, we provide names of books and websites for further learning.

1. Sensitivity of Responses

**KIPS Perspective**: Numerous research studies and child development experts agree that the caregivers’ sensitivity to the child lays the foundation for cognitive, language, social development, the lifelong relationship with parents, and the children’s future interactions with family, adults and other children. When the caregiver “reads” the child’s cues well, tries to understand the child’s point of view, and reacts “in tune” with the child’s needs, she builds the relationship with her child through responsive or nurturing behavior with the child. On the other hand, when a caregiver is unaware, ignores or disrespects the child’s cues and/or actions, she misses the opportunity to meet the child’s needs.

**Typical Examples of Behaviors Rating a 5:**

- Dad notices 5-month old Lucinda’s gaze at a squeak toy at the end of the couch. “So you’re tired of playing patty cake? It looks like you want Squeaker the Mouse.”
- As Grandpa starts to put a puzzle together for 3-year-old Josh, he notices him beginning to pout. Grandpa quickly responds: “Oh, sorry, I forgot you’re such a big boy. Let me see you do it?”


2. Supports Emotions

KIPS Perspective: A caregiver’s responses to emotions help a child learn to express and cope with emotions. Long-term research indicates that children whose parents understand and support their emotions show better grades in school, enhanced social and emotional well-being and are healthier (Gottman & DeClaire, 1997). Emotional responsiveness is so important that it deserves its own rating. In many situations caregivers who get high ratings for Sensitivity to Responses will also have high ratings for Supports Emotions. But for those caregivers who have difficulty expressing their own feelings, sharing their children’s positive emotions or dealing with their children’s uneasy or negative feelings, untangling his or her Emotions from other parenting behaviors becomes critical. By rating this behavior you will be able to measure changes in the caregiver’s responses to emotions, resulting from intervention. The quality of caregivers responses may also change as the child expresses emotions differently at different developmental stages.

To respond to the child’s emotions (such as joy, excitement, enthusiasm, frustration, worry, sadness, anger, fear), the caregiver must first be aware of them. Then, the caregiver must correctly interpret the child’s emotional cues. Next, the caregiver must appropriately respond to the child’s emotions in ways that show respect and caring for his/her feelings, even if she does not agree with those feelings. By acknowledging the child’s emotions, helping him learn language to express them, and helping resolve unsettling feelings in a productive way, the caregiver can help the child learn to express and handle his own emotions. It is also important for the caregiver to express both positive and negative emotions appropriately to give the child a guide to follow.


Typical Examples of Behaviors Rating a 5:

- When Dad jams his elbow into the block castle by mistake, blocks fly across the room. Four-year-old Jason melts onto the floor whining, “I’ll never be able to build another castle as cool as that one. Dad says, “I’m sorry. It was an accident. You must really be disappointed. What can I do to help you build another one that’s even better?”

- Two-year old Maria is having a tantrum. Mom ignores her for the first minute. When Maria continues, she helps her find words for her distress and then distracts her with her favorite doll. Maria perks up, delighted to have been understood.

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3. Physical Interaction

KIPS Perspective:

The touch, handling and movement experiences that caregivers give babies and young children can convey a sense of security and plant the seeds for their future experiences with other children and adults. Research tells us that touch by trusted caregivers helps babies gain weight, sleep better, be less fussy and more alert (Field, 2003). In addition, safe touch and physical experiences are essential to help children learn about their own comfort levels and what is safe with others in their environment. If these experiences build trust and meet the child’s needs, the child is likely to engage with other people in his environment with confidence. In contrast, rough touch or physical interactions may frighten the child and lead to distrust of the caregiver and other people.

Young children model the behaviors they experience. When children see and feel warmth and affection from their caregivers, they tend to feel more secure as adults. Generally, mothers tend to hug or show physical affection to their children more than fathers in many cultures. Studies indicate that warmth in the parent-child relationship, often expressed through hugs and safe and caring touch, are linked to positive outcomes for children. These include higher self-esteem, better parent-child communication, and fewer psychological and behavior problems (Child Trends, 2004).

The physical interaction that can be observed by the body language, space and movement between caregiver and child creates a “dance” that enhances mutual comfort and communication when they interact. We observe this “dance” when a caregiver matches the child’s movements or moves in synchrony with the child. In many cultures caregivers build positive physical experiences with children by making eye contact, moving to the child’s eye level, or respecting her personal space. For some children, a caregiver may create a supportive envelope or safety net with his body to help the child sit, stand or handle toys comfortably.
Typical Examples of Behaviors Rating a 5:

- Mom pulls 2-month old Jake close to her to cuddle and strokes his cheek gently to get his attention so he will make eye contact with her.
- Uncle Alex swoops from one side to the other to give surprise tickles to 18-month Barrie who giggles as she reaches for his beard.
- Mom lies on the floor, leaning her chin on her elbow, and creates a curved play space with her body, so that she and 4-year old Kena can finish putting the pieces in the puzzle.
- Dad moves from back to front of the dollhouse along with his 30-month old daughter so he can stay involved as she puts her baby to sleep.
- Grandpa moves in close proximity with hands extended as 10-month old Kalla tries to pull herself to her feet at the table.

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4. Involvement in Child’s Activities

KIPS Perspective:

With a young child, a caregiver can be highly engaged in a Child’s activities by talking with the child about what she is doing and actively participating in the activities. This kind of involvement tells the child that he and his play are important and interesting. When a caregiver
often appears to be off in another world and pays little attention to the child’s activities, the child may come to believe that she is not valued as her own person. Through high involvement in play, a caregiver strengthens his or her relationship with the child.

Research shows that when parents are involved and connected with their children’s lives, they develop strong parent-child relationships. This acts as a protector later in life against risky teen behaviors, such as smoking, drug use or early sexual activities. This parent involvement also helps children achieve higher grades in school (ReCAAP, 2004).

**Typical Examples of Behaviors Rating a 5:**
- Dad sits on the floor with his 4-year old daughter and helps her dress her dolls and actively participates in her pretend play.
- Babysitter Cara enthusiastically takes turns with 30-month old Carl as they stack blocks in a tower.

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5. **Open to Child’s Agenda**

**KIPS Perspective:**
There are many times during the day when a young child needs to follow the caregiver’s instructions. However, KIPS assesses free play observations, which provides a special opportunity to assess the caregiver’s openness to the child’s agenda. Play offers children the opportunity to learn, have fun, make mistakes, assert themselves and try out new roles and activities in a safe space. When a caregiver follows the child’s lead, offering support for the child’s choice of activities and interests, the child learns to value her own decisions, pursue their own interests, and develop her thinking skills. On the other hand, when a caregiver takes over the agenda and selects the child’s activities for him, the child may learn not to explore his own interests or follow through on his own inclinations.

**Typical Examples of Behaviors Rating a 5:**
- Granddad pulled the toy chest into the middle of the living room. “OK Charlie, which one of these toys shall we start with today?” He enthusiastically supports Charlie’s choices, and offers new options of things to do with the toy.
Aunt Mady lets her toddler niece turn pages to see her favorite pictures in a book in any order she wants as the toddler says “MY cat—MY bird—MY ball—MY dog!” Showing great interest, Aunt Mady follows up with questions about each picture.

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6. Engagement in Language Experiences

**KIPS Perspective**: Caregiver can help children build their vocabularies, learn about the world through words, communicate clearly, and become partners in conversation. Even before babies can understand words, it is important for caregivers to begin conversations with them in response to their cues and movements, which are babies’ first ways of communicating. A caregiver who builds upon the child’s words or sounds, engages her child in conversation through questions and comments, and relates conversation to the child’s familiar experiences gives a positive message to the child that he is an important partner in conversations. This also helps him understand words as they relate to the world around him instead of labels to be memorized. A caregiver who makes little attempt to talk with her child misses opportunities to teach her child the vocabulary and concepts to understand her daily world, and how to communicate with people around him.

There are countless ways to offer a child language experiences throughout the day. With the focus on school readiness, reading is one type of language experience that is getting increasing attention. By reading to babies and young children, caregivers can help them begin learning the skills they will need in school, such as how to handle and enjoy books, how to tell stories using pictures, the sounds of the letters of the alphabet, and the different shapes and sounds of printed words. Also, sharing books with young children leads to higher reading grades in school and encourages children to enjoy books and read on their own (Child Trends, 2004).

** 관한 Examples of Behaviors Rating a 5:**
- As Uncle Stanley reads *Green Eggs and Ham* to 4-year-old Hakeem, he asks, “Remember what we had for breakfast? ….. Yeah, eggs! But what color were they?”
- Teenager Addie talks to her 2-month-old baby sister whom she is holding on her lap. “Oh, you go girl! You tell me all about it.” The baby kicks with delight and coos some more. “And what else did your Daddy say to you?”

Need More Info?
- K Hirsh-Pasek & RM Golinkoff (2003). *Chapter 4, Language: The Power of Babble* (pp.60-97) and *Chapter 5, Literacy: Reading Between the Lines* (pp.97-125). *Einstein Never Used Flash Cards: How Our Children Really Learn and Why They Need to Play More and Memorize Less*. Rodale Press.

7. Reasonable Expectations

**KIPS Perspective**: Nearly all parent education and support programs focus on teaching caregivers about child development so they will use reasonable expectations with their children as they grow and change. When a caregiver’s requests match a child’s developmental abilities, the child can interact comfortably with the caregiver. If the caregiver builds upon the child’s abilities and offers slight challenges to the child, it will help her learn new abilities that will lead to the next developmental step. On the other hand, if the caregiver uses expectations that are either too high or too low for the child’s abilities, the interaction may become frustrating, boring or dissatisfying for both the caregiver and child.

**Typical Examples of Behaviors Rating a 5:**
- Mom plays peek-a-boo with her 6-month old son, changing the timing between peeks so he will anticipate her smiling face.
- The babysitter of 4-year old Kyree asks her to sing the ABC song, and helps her over the parts she forgets by singing along with her.

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8. Adapting Strategies to the Child’s Interests and Behaviors

KIPS Perspective:

Many years of research about children’s temperament and different styles of learning and behavior tells us that each child is unique in the way s/he approaches the world. During play interactions, the caregiver first needs to match objects and activities to the child’s behavior and interests. Depending on the child’s reactions, the caregiver may be able to extend the child’s attention to the activity by adjusting the toys or the strategies to better fit the child’s interests or style of behavior. This will help the child be successful, enjoy and learn more from her activities. If a caregiver adjusts activities and then offers slight challenges to the child, the child will be much more likely to move to the next step of development.

Typical Examples of Behaviors Rating a 5:

- A 7-month old shows interest in a ball, Mom places it just out of reach and encourages her to go for it.
- A 4-year old is playing with an older sibling’s puzzle and getting frustrated. Dad places several pieces that will fit together near each other, so he has a better chance of finding pieces that fit.

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9. Setting Limits and Consequences

KIPS Perspective:

On KIPS, limits are scored when the caregiver uses words or actions to change the child’s behavior for the safety of the child or others, to keep her in a defined play space, or to help the child learn appropriate social behavior. When caregivers provide clear limits and reasonable consequences, children learn to respect fair limits and become ready to manage their own behavior when caregivers are not
present later in life. A caregiver who sets and follows through on limits and consequences that match the child’s needs helps the child learn appropriate behavior. Sometimes a caregiver may act in advance by removing dangerous toys from the child’s view (such as a golf ball) or placing other harmful objects (such as sharp scissors) out of the child’s reach. This behavior can be considered a limit, even if no words were used. Distraction, redirection or reasoning are examples of high quality behaviors that help the child comply with limits. When a caregiver waivers or doesn’t follow through, it may confuse the child, teach him that limits are unimportant, or suggest that limits and consequence are set at the caregiver’s whim. The goal of limit setting is to develop appropriate behaviors that exist even in the absence of the caregiver. If the limits are unfair, the child is less likely to comply, and will have difficulty distinguishing appropriate from inappropriate behaviors. If the caregiver uses threats or is verbally or physically harsh, the child may learn inappropriate use of power, and instead learn to distrust the caregiver.

Typical Examples of Behaviors Rating a 5:

- Mom removes a marble from 18-month old Raul, and says “That might hurt you,” and gives him another toy too large for him to put in his mouth.
- Dad tells his 30-month old daughter, “If you tear the books, we’ll have to put them away. Do you want to read me a story?”
- With her granddaughter crying in the grocery cart, Grandma tells her, “You can’t have any candy, but you can choose the fruit we are going have for our snack.”

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10. Supportive Directions

KIPS Perspective:

Caregivers can use directions to guide children to think about options and to problem solve during play. The caregiver can do this by making occasional suggestions, modeling, or offering ideas to open the child’s mind to other choices, activities or ways of solving a problem. Directions can be verbal or non-verbal. Supportive directions can help the child learn to listen to others, consider alternatives and make decisions when playing that can apply to daily life. If a caregiver gives directions too frequently or tells the child exactly what to do, without giving the child the opportunity to think, there’s no need for the child to think or learn on his own.
Typical Examples of Behaviors Rating a 5:

- Dad and 4-year old Elam are playing with a farm set. As Elam is thinking about where the chickens should go in the barn, Dad says “I wonder where a safe place would be for the hen to lay her eggs.”
- “What do you think about turning that puzzle piece to see if it will fit?”
- A parent silently demonstrates using her legs to trap the ball.

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11. Encouragement

**KIPS Perspective:**

Children who do not experience early supportive relationships may develop emotional problems later in life. Caregivers need to use positive words, supportive actions, and show interest in what their children say and do to reinforce positive behaviors beginning in early childhood (Child Trends, 2004). When caregivers show interest and use positive words or actions to support children’s activities, it builds confidence to try other activities, and motivates them to find new ways to play and learn. On the other hand, if a caregiver’s words or actions give the message that the child cannot do an activity well or cannot do it at all, the child may become discouraged quickly, and may stop trying a task prematurely. She may then depend on others to lead the way or do activities for her.

Typical Examples of Behaviors Rating a 5:

- Granny Smith says to Sam, “Wow, you put that shape sorter together all by yourself!”
- Mom puts a duck pull toy just out of reach of 8-month old Shakeel as he rocks on hands and knees to get over to the duck. “Come on over. You can get that duck!”
- As 2-year-old Kira pulls a story book from the basket, her Uncle says, “Do you think this book is too hard for you? It has lots of words. Let’s see. I bet you can read the pictures.”

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12. Promotes Exploration & Curiosity

**KIPS Perspective**: A caregiver can support a child in developing curiosity and learning through exploring the world around them. Exploration and curiosity are key to children’s readiness for school and lifelong learning. Caregivers can help children explore their world, ask questions, investigate things of interest, predict consequences, explore cause and effect and discover solutions to problems. Making up a surprise ending to a story together is another way to support curiosity. With babies, a caregiver can promote exploration by creating surprise sounds or movements with favorite toys, such as pop-up boxes, or playing action games, such as peek-a-boo while making funny faces. A caregiver may stifle exploration and curiosity if she moves to quickly between toys before the child is ready to move on or completes a task for the child rather than letting him explore the steps needed.

Research suggests that men and women may promote children’s exploration in different ways. Dads and other male caregivers often support curiosity by giving children time to explore and opportunities to discover how toys work, even if they become a bit frustrated. Moms and other female caregivers tend to model, guide or prompt children to help them explore step by step (Pruett, 1997).

Typical Examples of Behaviors Rating a 5:

- When playing with a brand new barnyard toy set, Dad asks his 3-year old daughter questions about each of the barnyard animals as she picks them up. “Where do you think the chickens sleep? “ “What do you think the cows eat?”
- Grandma is reading a story to 34-month-old Emira. “Karla the Kangaroo looks really sad. What do you think made her feel that way?.....I wonder what she could do to feel better?”

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“As children grow, they master different developmental stages…. To learn to relate to others with compassion requires caregivers who provide nurturing, empathetic interactions. Learning to read social cues requires that caregivers join in interactive play and negotiations. Creative and logical thinking requires that caregivers become partners in pretend play, opinion-oriented discussions, and debates.”

T. Berry Brazelton & Stanley Greenspan (2000)