# Tips to Support Early Relationships

Consider these tips to support the social-emotional development of infants and toddlers with CVI (check those selected for use).

## How can I create an environment that supports early positive relationships?

* Provide structured and nurturing environments:
  + Predictable daily routines help children to anticipate what is about to happen, which may lead to participation.
  + Calm, organized, and secure environments encourage interaction.
  + Hold the child and offer affection and comfort.
  + Let the child know when an unexpected object or person approaches so that he or she is not taken by surprise and startled.

## How can I support early positive relationships?

* Adjust sensory input and experiences to help the child maintain a calm and alert level of arousal:
  + Whether a child is under-aroused or over-aroused depends upon the child’s temperament, sensory needs, and the environment in a particular situation.
  + A child who is over-aroused needs structured and muted sensory experiences.
  + A child who is under-aroused needs heightened and varied sensory experiences.
* Recognize, interpret, and respond to a child’s signals indicating interest, disinterest, excitement, and distress.
* Teach the child how to reject a disliked object or reach toward you for comfort and security through modeling.
* Help the child explore faces of family members and point out characterizing features, for example, “That’s Daddy’s prickly chin.” Develop and use identification cues such as something the person wears (e.g., Mom wears glasses) or something the person does to greet the child (e.g., the early interventionist taps fingers on child’s palm or sings a familiar greeting song).
* Give the child sufficient time to discriminate facial expressions by slowing them down, for example, count silently to 5 or 7 (depending on the child) when making a positive facial expression (raise eyebrows, open eyes wide, and open mouth) to express delight.
* Provide anticipatory cues to signal an upcoming activity so the child can prepare for it, for example, before picking the infant up, touch the child under his or her arms and slowly say “Up, up, up.” This may reduce startle and upset behaviors.
* Create and play mutually enjoyable turn-taking games, for example, “row, row, the boat,” that facilitate opportunities for positive interactions and play.
* Promote joint attention:
  + Play interactive games that focus the toddler’s attention on the adult’s face (e.g., “eyes, and ears, and nose” or put a sticker on the adult’s nose).
  + Hold a small favorite toy close to one’s own face so the child will reach for it.
  + Imitate a child’s behaviors in play and encourage the child to imitate others, for example, waving “bye-bye.”

## What kinds of everyday activities should I try?

* Make sensory experiences predictable:
  + Show the child the source of a sound that might be startling.
  + Develop a predictable sequence for familiar and favorite turn taking or other sensory games so the child knows what to expect.
* Slow down the pace and sequence of actions in an interaction to help the child handle sensory input, for example, playing a “tickletummy game.”
* Allow the child to control sensory input; for example, do not force a child’s hand into sticky substances such as finger paint or sand if he or she rejects doing so.
* Provide a choice of objects or activities when appropriate during the daily routine, for example, toys, food or drink, or clothing.
  + First, offer a favorite or preferred item. The child’s action (taking, touching, or looking at it) indicates “I want it.”
  + Next, offer a favorite item with a disliked or meaningless object. The child is likely to choose the preferred item.
  + Finally, offer two preferred objects so the child can choose either or both.

## Give me one last tip!

Responsive relationships and nurturing environments are essential for an infant’s healthy social-emotional and brain development. Early social relationships provide the cornerstone for all development.