

Best Practices in Intergenerational Programming: Practice 2

Participants are involved in decision-making about the activities and during activities.



Practice 2 • Decision-making

Intergenerational programs are most effective when participants are involved in decision-making about the activity and during activities.

When activities are offered, adults and children should have the choice of deciding if and how to be involved. Affecting their decisions may be past experiences, personalities, thoughts, and feelings of commitment or inadequacy; people vary. When individuals are invited to make decisions about programming, they gain power and are motivated in their future involvement. Staff members who skillfully facilitate CHOICES empower adults and children alike.

Options for decision-making can be simple or complex – whatever is appropriate for the child or adult. Participation increases when children and adults feel invested because they shaped the program. Evidence shows that when people choose their level of involvement, there is sustained cooperation (Dietrich 2010; My and Chalvignac 2010).

Application of the Practice

Staff members can invite participants into decision-making. Imagine a continuum along which there are opportunities to invite input. How are invitations different at each age and ability level? How do teachers invite a 2-year-old to indicate preference or choice? What about an older child? Even adults with cognitive impairment, such as Alzheimer's disease, can indicate their preference to a staff member. See the table on the back page for more ideas.



Project TRIP

Transforming Relationships Through Intergenerational Programming

A Children's, Youth, and Families at Risk Project of Virginia Tech.

Shannon Jarrott,
Associate Professor, Human Development, Virginia Tech

Karen DeBord, Extension Specialist, Family and Human Development, Virginia Tech

Contact: Shannon Jarrott,
sjarrott@vt.edu

This is one of 11 fact sheets on the emerging best practices associated with intergenerational programs.

Intergenerational programs are those that connect younger and older generations to foster positive experiences. Research continues to grow, noting that when successfully delivered, intergenerational programs result in positive health effects, child learning, and appropriate socialization for both young and old (Jarrott 2011).

The second practice relates to involving participants in **decision-making**.

Consider a **free-form activity**, which gives children and adults the chance to exercise their decision-making skills and gain confidence in their ability to make decisions. The facilitator might talk about an activity in a general way and ask participants what they think about certain aspects of it, but no exact answer or model is provided. With a variety of supplies or interaction choices, children and adults can reason out for themselves what they think will work best.

Program Ideas

Level of involvement for child or adult	Ways for staff to encourage involvement
Not interested.	Assure comfort in the space; and that they are feeling well. Do they need special attention or redirection?
Not involved but looking on.	Assess interest, ask questions, accompany or gently guide participant to activity, assist in entry to activity.
Sitting as part of the activity but not engaged.	Ask participant to hand you (or another) an item or some materials; assess level of understanding.
Working individually alongside another.	Encourage co-helping, holding, passing materials.
Assisting another with the activity.	Ask child for items by name to be handed to an adult (language development). Ask adult to help with fine-motor difficulties the child may be having.
Sharing in the activity with others.	Praise and encourage the "together" behavior more than the resulting product.
Participating fully in the activity, asking questions/commenting.	Listen for ideas for future activities. What are they noting? What excited them?

References

Dietrich, Cindy. 2010. "Decision Making: Factors that Influence Decision Making, Heuristics Used, and Decision Outcomes." Student Pulse: Online Academic Student Journal 2 (2). www.studentpulse.com/articles/180/decision-making-factors-that-influence-decision-making-heuristics-used-and-decision-outcomes.

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My, K. B., and B. Chalvignac. 2010. "Voluntary Participation and Cooperation in a Collective-Good Game." Journal of Economic Psychology 31 (4): 705-718. <https://mail.sssup.it/~l.marengo/WP11/Chalvignac.pdf>.

Best Practices for Intergenerational Programming

- Staff members of the adult and child programs collaborate to plan activities.
- Participants are involved in decision-making about the activity and during activities.**
- Participation is voluntary.
- Participants are prepared ahead of time and reflect on the activity afterward.
- Activities reflect interests, backgrounds, and social histories of program participants.
- Activities are age- and role-appropriate.
- Activities support interaction among intergenerational participants.
- Facilitators skillfully stage the environment to promote interaction.
- Facilitators consider the social environment and the role of staff members.
- Adaptive equipment is used as appropriate.
- Facilitators document and communicate experiences to build on in future activities.