

Games and Exercises to use with Caregivers to Learn BabyCues

Using **BabyCues A Child's First Language** cards is a fun and informative way to visually convey information to parents and caregivers about the ways in which babies and young children communicate with us nonverbally.

It is also a great way to educate yourself, whether a parent or parent educator, about the amazing non-verbal behavioral cues that babies and young children use. This is especially true for understanding children that are too young to speak. These cards will also help you recognize many of the subtle cues you may have been unaware of before.

All of the below exercises can be adapted to groups, pairs, or one-on-one settings, whether working with parents in their homes, parenting groups, childcare workers, or in college courses. Your imagination is the limit in thinking up new, fun, creative ways to use BabyCues to engage parents and caregivers in learning to read and respond to their child's nonverbal behavioral language.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

EXERCISE 1: Brainstorming

Present parents/caregiver(s) with various scenarios and have the group brainstorm which cues they might observe in each particular situation.

Situation:

I'm teaching my child how to stack blocks.

What "Subtle Cues" might I see that tell me my child needs a break or that I need to change something I'm doing?

- Gaze aversion is an example of possible answers
- Frowning

If I don't recognize and respond to my child's "*Subtle Disengaging*" cues, what stronger "*Potent Disengaging*" cues might my child start sending me?

- Walking away
- Crying

Situation:

I've been feeding my 11 month old in his high chair; he's now fussing and doesn't want to eat.

What "*Subtle Disengaging*" cues might I see that tell me my child might need a break, that I need to change something I'm doing or maybe he just isn't hungry?

- Lip compression
- Looking away

If I don't recognize and respond to my child's "*Subtle Disengaging*" cues while feeding him, what stronger "*Potent Disengaging*" messages might my child send me?

- Maximal lateral gaze aversion
- Pushing food away
- Halt hand

As the facilitator, you can come up with the example situations and then have the parents/caregiver(s) verbally provide answers or pull the cards from the deck that show the appropriate cues.

You could present each situation, and then ask parent(s) to pull some of the "*Subtle Disengagement*" cues they've seen their child display when feeding him/her. Then ask parent(s) to pull some of the "*Potent Disengagement*" cues which they've seen their child display when he or she is full and has had enough food.

EXERCISE 2: Acting

Have learners/caregivers break off into pairs. Give each pair a deck of cards. Have one learner read the name of the cue. Have the other learner display or act out that cue and identify it as a "*Subtle*" or "*Potent*" cue.

Have one learner pull two or three cards from the same category such as "*Potent Disengaging*" or "*Subtle Disengaging*" or "*Disengaging*" and "*Engaging*". The other adult then acts out this "*cluster of cues.*"

The pair then changes places and repeats above. This could also be done in front of a classroom, in parent circles, or in small groups.

EXERCISE 3: Role-Playing

One adult plays the baby, the other the parent.

The adult role-playing the child displays/acts out cues in relation to a specific situation such as a teaching episode, eating dinner, or confronting a new situation.

The purpose of this exercise is to present ways a parent/caregiver can change/modify/repair their behavior in response to the cues the child is sending.

Situation: Parent is teaching the child to squeak a toy. In response, the adult role-playing the child looks away and frowns. Parent then shows an example of how they could modify their behavior, for example take a short break, give the child more time to explore the object, pick a different toy to squeak, or make other changes in their behavior.

Now, baby (learner) shows “*Engagement Cues*” in response to the parent’s change in behavior.

For example, parent takes a brief break, chooses a different toy that doesn’t squeak so loudly and then teaches the task again. Now, the child (learner) raises her head and smiles at the parent.

Other situations you could present to parent(s):

Situation: Parent wants to read to child, child is displaying “*Subtle Disengagement*” cues.

Situation: Parent is feeding baby, wonders how she will know the baby is full. Child is displaying a “*clustering of satiation cues.*”

Situation: Parent brings baby to Aunt Martha’s to meet a house full of new relatives. With much noise and after passing baby around, baby displays “*Subtle Disengagement*” cues ending in “*Potent Disengagement*” cues.

Situation: Toddler arrives at a new daycare center. Upon entering the classroom and meeting all the new teachers and children, child begins to display “*Subtle Disengagement*” cues.

Situation : Caregiver showing child how to put a puzzle together. Child shows interest by displaying “*Subtle and Potent Engaging*” cues.

Learner role-playing child acts out the cues and learner role-playing parent responds to the message the child is sending.

EXERCISE 4: Card Sort

When working one-on-one with a parent or caregiver, try the following exercises.

Sort the deck into what you think might be the most commonly seen cues. Show and explain these cues to the parent. Have parent/caregiver sort cards into the appropriate group, Subtle and Potent *Engagement*, Subtle and Potent *Disengagement*.

You could do this together or have parent sort alone. Ask parent if she’s ever seen any of these in her child. Suggest that it might be fun to notice if she starts to see any of these cues in her child. At your next meeting, have her pull out the cue cards that she’s seen her child display since your last meeting.

After a solid understanding of the cues, it is important to explain that you need to look at the total behavior not just one cue in and of itself. Explain clustering of cues. Explain how recognizing and responding to subtle disengaging cues can help prevent distress and behavior escalating into more potent disengaging behavior such as whining, crying, pushing away, halt hand or walking away. Explain how caregivers can make slight modifications in their behavior that will re-engage the child and bring them back into the interaction.

EXERCISE 5: Group Sorting

Divide class into small groups (4-6 each). Provide each group with a box of cards. On the table put the *Disengaging* card and *Engaging* card. Each group then views cards and sorts into *Disengaging* and *Engaging* piles. Give them about 10 minutes to complete task.

Next, have groups pull the *Potent* and *Subtle* cards and place on the table. Each group then sorts cards according to whether it is a *Potent* or *Subtle* cue.

You can have the group continue this exercise further by sorting cards into *Potent and Subtle Disengaging* piles and *Potent and Subtle Engaging* piles.

EXERCISE 6: Cues My Baby Has Shown Me

Ask parent/caregiver to place *My Baby Shows Me These Cues* card in front of them. If they have seen the cue on the card, have them place it under that card. If they have never seen their baby display the cue, have them place the card in a separate pile.

At your next meeting, repeat this exercise to see if the number of cues parent identifies increases.