Quality Interactions and Communication: *Circles of Communication*

ACTIVE LISTENING & CONTINGENT RESPONDING

Quality Communication involves two key elements: **Active Listening** and **Contingent Responding**. Both are critical to supporting children's communication skills.

ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening (engaged listening) means paying close attention, making supportive comments, and asking pertinent questions. Active Listening involves...

- Taking time to focus on what the child is trying to communicate
- Using body language (e.g., physical proximity, eye contact, nodding your head) to show you are engaged
- Restating the child's message
- Validating the ideas or feelings the child conveys
- Valuing what the child communicates and responding to his communication with a relevant question, or comment

When teachers actively listen and respond contingently to the child, they are **supporting the child's communication skills** while building and deepening the teacher-child relationship.

CONTINGENT RESPONDING

Contingent Responding involves back-and-forth conversations, in which the teacher follows the child's lead by responding to the child's comment or question in a way that keeps the conversation going. This type of responding...

- Builds on and extends the child's action, comment, or question
- Keeps the focus on the child's interest (is meaningful to the child)
- Encourages children who are verbal as well as those who are nonverbal to continue to communicate
- Gives children opportunities to practice expressing their thoughts in words/ sentences
- Helps children learn about back-and-forth communication by engaging in "turn-taking" (i.e., you say/do something, they say/do something back)
- Focuses the teacher's attention on the child and lets the child know that what he is communicating is important

In order to respond contingently, a teacher pays close attention to the message the child is expressing. This practice is called "Active Listening" and is a **powerful tool in supporting children's communication skills.**