



Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study Lab School Suggestions for Establishing Rapport

Building rapport is a necessary part of conducting research with children. The goal is to give children the opportunity to become well enough acquainted with you that they will feel comfortable leaving the classroom to participate in your testing procedures.

Rapport is a practical as well as an ethical matter. Some children are naturally confident and outgoing, and a brief friendly encounter a day or two before you want them to participate may be all that is needed. Other children may need more time to be assured that you are both familiar and trustworthy.

PART 1: Establishing Rapport

The Institute of Child Study would like to offer the following practical suggestions for establishing rapport:

1. **Plan to be systematic about establishing rapport with each child you plan to include in your research.** Get a list of the children from the Research Coordinator so that you can be familiar with their names before going into the classroom.
2. **Establishing rapport takes a concentrated period of time at the beginning.** Be sure to talk to the teacher about how long s/he would like you to spend in the classroom before inviting individual children to participate in your research. Do not expect to take children out of the classroom on your first visit.
3. **Approach children individually or in a small group.** Sit down next to the child on a small chair or on the floor, placing yourself at her/his eye level. Look friendly and begin a conversation or show interest in her/his activities. You don't have to start by asking the child's name, but that's not a bad beginning. Volunteering your own name or commenting on the child's activities are other ways to get started.
4. **Use a quiet, calm manner with children.** Speak quietly, clearly, and directly to the child. Always treat children and adults respectfully; remember that children are people too, and deserve your utmost respect.
5. **For children who seem a little reticent about conversation, avoid questions.** Begin by commenting on something s/he is doing ("you are using a lot of bright colours in your painting") or something s/he has ("you are wearing a blue shirt today, just like me"), without obligating the child to respond. Give her/him a little time to return the friendly gesture. If the child seems shy but interested, stay and talk more. If s/he seems

uncomfortable, embarrassed, or very shy, say that you'll see her/him again some other time, and move on to a different child. Keep in mind that you'll need to approach the shy child again, perhaps several times. You can often get acquainted with a reticent child through the friendliness of another. If a child has been cool to your overtures, notice her/his whereabouts and when s/he is in the presence of a friendly child, approach the two of them together. Occasionally a child openly rejects all overtures from unfamiliar adults. Don't push too hard, but don't ignore her/him either. Look for many different opportunities to establish brief social contact with her/him instead of trying to sustain a lengthy interaction.

6. **Look for opportunities to do things for individual children or small groups.** Help reach a hard-to-get toy, help a child climb down from a ladder, help children get into their coats for recess, etc. By helping children when they need it, you will help them both become more familiar with you and learn to trust you.
7. **Feel free to use the materials yourself.** Work with some playdough alongside a child, help with some puzzle pieces, or read stories to children. Shy children may feel less self-conscious if some of your attention is on something besides them.
8. **Participate in group or snack time.** This gives children an opportunity to see you as one of the adults in the classroom rather than as a visitor. Group time may also be used to introduce your “games” to the children telling children about the activities that you will be inviting them to do outside the classroom. Discuss this possibility with the classroom teacher.
9. **Try to avoid standing around the room a lot,** except perhaps to see which children are there. Children learn very quickly that visitors are not necessarily there to get acquainted with them. Indicate your intention to get to know the children by placing yourself at their eye level so they can see your face and learn to recognize you.
10. **Avoid spending the bulk of your time with one or two very friendly children.** Though tempting, this is not an economical use of your time in the classroom. Once a child seems ready to go with you when asked, you don't need to do anything more. It is often helpful to tell a child that you will bring some games the next time you visit, and that s/he can have a turn to play. Her/his reaction to this invitation will inform you of her/his willingness to participate.
11. **Since you are a newcomer, you may not be seen as an authority figure by some of the children.** Therefore, a child may try to tease or test limits with you. Should this happen, it is best to ignore the behaviour and move on to another child or group of children. If problems persist, be sure to inform the teacher.
12. **Please keep conversations among adults to a minimum.** While the atmosphere at school is far from sacred, please respect the learning environment, and recognize that children will notice adult conversations. Conversations between you and the teacher or between you and other researchers should be quiet and brief. If you must talk about individual children, please do so outside of the classroom children are very sensitive to being the subject of conversation.

PART 2: Withdrawing Children from the Classroom

Once you have spent sufficient time in the classroom building rapport with the children, you may begin inviting them to participate in your research.

Please be flexible in your schedule for testing children. Additional visits are often needed to withdraw the last few children from a classroom, so be prepared to allocate extra time if necessary.

We recommend the following for withdrawing children from (and returning them to) the classroom:

1. **Avoid approaching a child to go with you unless you feel quite confident that s/he will say 'yes'.** Do not invite a child to leave the classroom when s/he is absorbed in an activity of high interest for her/him, or if s/he looks reluctant when you approach. Children can quickly get into a pattern of saying 'no' to researchers.
2. **When asking a child to participate, you might try the following invitations:** “I have some fun games to play would you like a turn?” or “It's your turn to play my games now are you ready?” Be sensitive to any reluctance on a child's part, and suggest that you can come back another time if s/he is not ready.
3. **Please do not promise other children that they will be next.** If a child expresses an interest in going with you, say that you will be sure to let her/him know when it is her/his turn. Promising children that they will be next preoccupies them with waiting around for you to return and can interfere with ongoing classroom activities.
4. **Allow extra time in your schedule for getting the last few children in a classroom,** as this will often include children who are more reluctant to go and may require some waiting or additional visits on your part. If you have given a child a fair share of time and you still think s/he is unlikely to say 'yes' or if s/he has already said 'no,' talk to the teacher about a plan to proceed.
5. **There are a few children in every classroom whose participation requires the help of the teacher.** The teacher will help you identify these children, and may assist you in encouraging them to participate in your research. Remember that this does not relieve you of the obligation to get acquainted with all of the children you plan to test.
6. **Do all you can to return children to the classroom feeling that they had a pleasant time.** Unhurried, friendly conversation on the way back to the classroom is one way to do this. Upon returning to the room, spend a few minutes helping children find an activity and show interest in the activity they choose. In addition to helping children re-enter the classroom, this will go a long way toward predisposing them to participate in future research.
7. **If a child becomes upset while participating in your testing procedures, be sure to tell the teacher upon returning to the classroom.** The teacher can then talk to the child or inform her/his parents if necessary. Of course, if a child becomes very upset during the

testing procedures, or if a child does not want to continue, return her/him to the classroom immediately. It is important to communicate any and all negative reactions to the teacher, since the child's attitudes toward school and toward research participation may be threatened by the experience.

8. **For studies in which the child is left alone in the room or is exposed to a mildly frustrating experience, be sure to offer reassurance.** Friendly conversation and explicit appreciation for her/his participation are particularly helpful. A brief play period in the testing room before returning children to the classroom is also useful in evoking a relaxed, positive feeling.
9. **It is against school policy to offer rewards to the children for their research participation.** Instead, conclude the testing session by thanking children for their cooperation (“Thanks for being such a good listener!”) and help (“I really appreciated your help today”). Verbal encouragement and appreciation rather than material rewards should be emphasized.