



Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study Lab School  
Research Procedures and 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 in order to feel comfortable leaving the classroom and participating in your research.

**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.

**All studies conducted with children in the Lab School will require parental consent for their data to be included in the research.** Additionally, for studies requiring children to actively participate in the research, **assent from each child is also required.** Assent to participate in research must be **voluntary** (the child must be willing and not coerced), **informed** (the child must understand what they are being asked to do and why), and **ongoing** (the child must be free to change their mind at any time and withdraw their participation).

### **PART 1: Establishing Rapport**

The Lab School offers the following practical suggestions for establishing rapport:

1. **Plan for an orientation session with the research coordinator** to see the research space, learn about the sign-out procedures for taking children out of the classroom, and review the schedule for visits.
2. **All adults working with children in the Lab School need to provide a current Vulnerable Sector Check** from the local police services of the city in which you reside. The research coordinator can provide more information on how to access this document.
3. **Plan to be systematic about establishing rapport with each child you plan to include in your research.** Get a list of the children who have parental consent to participate from the research coordinator so that you can be familiar with their names before going into the classroom.
4. **At the start of your first visit, the research coordinator or classroom teacher will introduce** you to the class as a whole, telling them you are a researcher who is hoping to learn from the students. This a chance to tell everyone a little bit about yourself and your research goals.

5. **Establishing rapport takes a concentrated period of time at the beginning.** Be sure to talk to the teacher about how long they would like you to spend in the classroom before inviting individual children to participate in your research. Do not expect to necessarily take children out of the classroom on your first visit.
6. **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 their eye level. Look friendly and begin a conversation or show interest in their 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.
7. **Use a quiet, calm manner with children.** Speak quietly, clearly, and directly to the child. Always treat children with warmth and kindness; remember that children are young people deserving of your utmost respect.
8. **For children who seem a little reticent about conversation, avoid questions.** Begin by commenting on something they are doing ("you are using a lot of bright colours in your painting") or something they have ("you are wearing a blue shirt today, just like me"), without obligating the child to respond. Give them a little time to return the friendly gesture. If the child seems shy but interested, stay and talk more. If they seem uncomfortable, embarrassed, or very shy, say that you'll see them again some other time, and move on to a different child. Keep in mind that you may need to approach a more cautious 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 their whereabouts and when they are in the presence of a more extroverted child, approach the two of them together. Occasionally a child openly rejects all overtures from unfamiliar adults. Don't push, but don't ignore them either. Look for different opportunities to establish brief social contact with them instead of trying to sustain a lengthy interaction.
9. **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.
10. **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.
11. **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.
12. **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.

13. **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. Please circulate around the room and try to connect with many children during your visit.
14. **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.
15. **Please keep conversations among adults in the classroom to a minimum.** 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**

The Lab School prioritizes the wellbeing and safety of the children at all times:

- A quiet testing space will be created within the classroom or in a room nearby for very young children.
- No researcher should be alone in a room with a child with the door shut. Please leave the door open.
- Each classroom has a sign-out chart for researchers to fill out when they are taking children out of the room and when they are bringing them back.
- Classroom teachers must be apprised of which children are leaving the space, who they are with, where they are, and when they are back.

Once you have spent sufficient time in the classroom building rapport with the children you may begin inviting them to participate in your research, in consultation with the classroom teachers. Very often children are eager to participate in research, however we know children are unique individuals and their responses may vary day-to-day.

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

1. **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.
2. **Avoid approaching a child to go with you unless you feel quite confident that they will say 'yes'.** Do not invite a child to leave the classroom when they are absorbed in an activity of high interest, or if they look reluctant when you approach. Children can quickly get into a pattern of saying 'no' to researchers.

3. **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 they are not ready.
4. **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 them know when it is their turn. Promising children that they will be next preoccupies them with waiting around for you to return and can interfere with ongoing classroom activities.
5. **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 they are unlikely to say 'yes' or if they have already said 'no,' talk to the teacher about a plan to proceed.
6. **There are usually 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.
7. **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.
8. **If a child becomes upset while participating in your testing procedures, or does not want to continue, please stop the activity and return the child to the classroom, and be sure to tell the teacher upon returning.** The teacher can then talk to the child or inform their parents if necessary. 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 affected by the experience.
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.

Please refer to the research coordinator with any questions: [chriss.bogert@utoronto.ca](mailto:chriss.bogert@utoronto.ca)