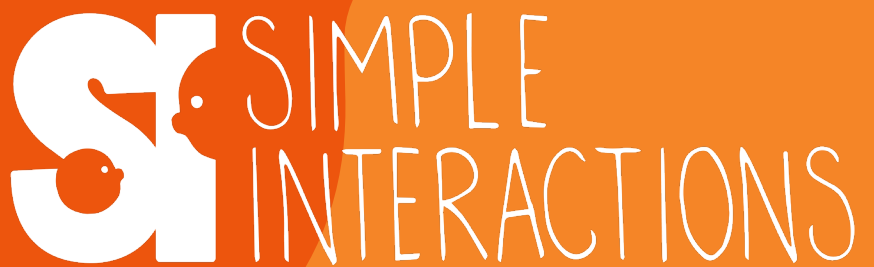


# SIMPLE INTERACTIONS TOOLKIT



[www.simpleinteractions.org](http://www.simpleinteractions.org)





This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (grant number MA-245940-OMS-20). The views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this presentation do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

# ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT & SIMPLE INTERACTIONS

Simple Interactions ([www.simpleinteractions.org](http://www.simpleinteractions.org)) is a practice-based, strengths-focused, and community-driven approach to support people and organizations in many settings who serve children, youth, and families. This approach is collaboratively developed, broadly applied, and includes a freely accessible set of tools and resources. Through the work of Simple Interactions, we focus on strengthening human interactions in a number of ways. These include identifying and capturing adult-child or adult-adult interactions in everyday practice and building and facilitating communities to learn from what they already do well.

Simple Interactions research and professional learning sessions in museums began in 2015 (e.g., Grabman et al., 2019; White et al., 2021). We have found that this professional learning experience fits well with the nature of informal settings where visitors may interact with docents and educators for varying lengths of time.

With a generous grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the Fred Rogers Institute and the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh continued the work of Simple Interactions in informal learning institutions. We engaged with three organizations in Western Pennsylvania: Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, Allegheny County Library Association, and the Westmoreland Museum of American Art. Staff participated in Simple Interactions workshops and did a deep dive into their own practice through Try It Out projects (Akiva et al., 2022).



**FRED ROGERS**  
— INSTITUTE —  
Saint Vincent College

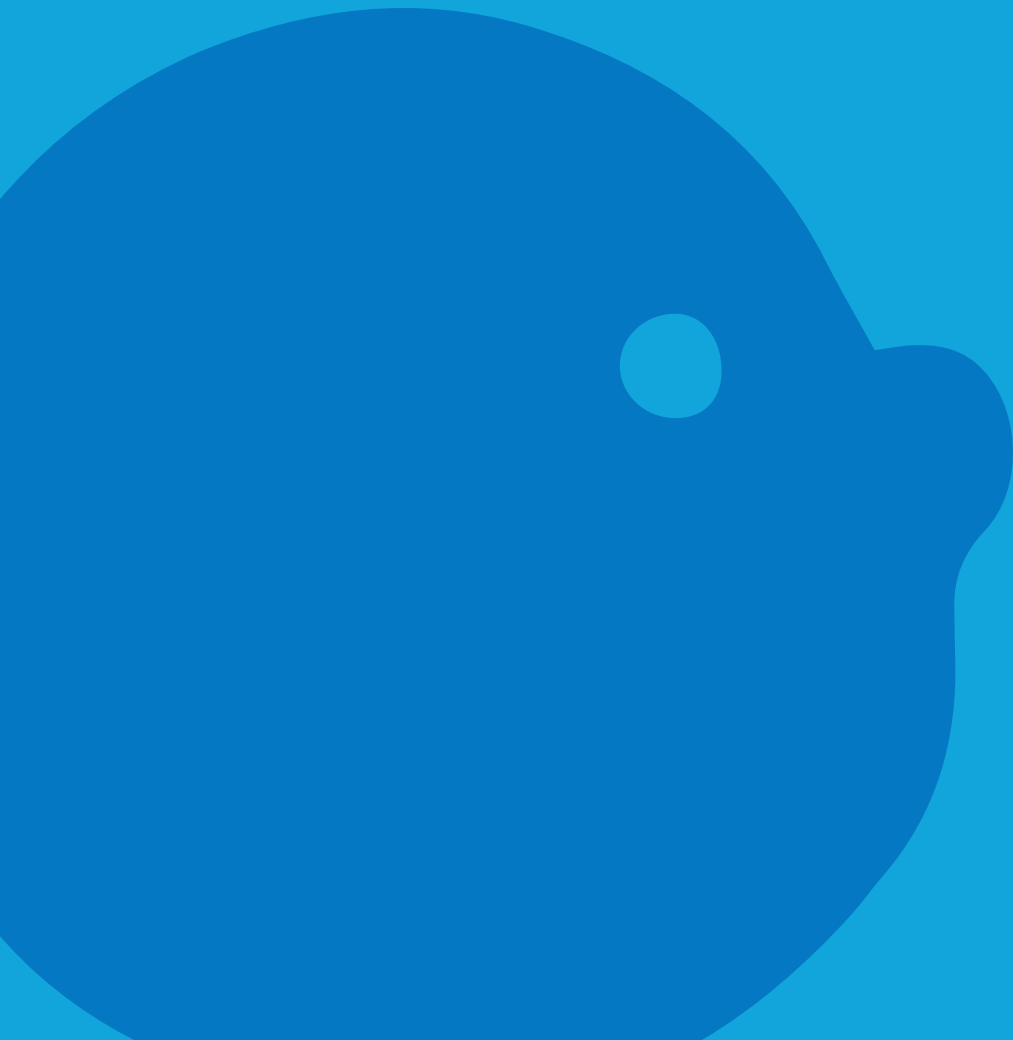


**This Toolkit was developed through the work of this IMLS grant and walks you step-by-step through the Simple Interactions series that informal learning organizations engaged in during the project. This includes:**

- **Appreciating relationships**
- **Getting to know the Simple Interactions Tool**
- **Practicing with video examples**
- **Reflecting individually and in small groups**
- **Planning and reflecting on Try It Out Projects**
- **Celebrating your learning**

The Toolkit is designed to work however you need it. You may choose to use it as a standalone workbook or print off a few pages at a time. All activities are structured for depth and close examination, but there are suggestions for shortening them if time, learning styles, or preferences make a different approach necessary. Our main goal is that you use the Toolkit in whatever way helps you to better understand and appreciate the depth of the simple interactions all around you – and use this insight to celebrate and enhance the important work that you already do so well.

# APPRECIATING RELATIONSHIPS



# GETTING STARTED



Use the spaces below to think or write about a recent interaction in your life.

Think of a meaningful interaction that you had recently:



How did you feel?



What made it meaningful?



## The Power of Ordinary Moments

No matter how many relationships fill your personal and professional life, chances are that your days are also filled with casual, transitory moments.

Use the QR code to see footage from one of our participating organizations. Think about the interactions that you see.



 play video

Use the chart below to record your thoughts and questions.



**What do you notice & wonder as you watch the video?**

Notice



Wonder





## Reflect & Connect: Ripple Effects in Your Day

When we see people, we have no way of knowing if ours is the first smile, greeting, or word of encouragement in their day—or how much our words and actions may affect them.

Even the smallest “simple” interaction can have a ripple effect throughout our whole day.



**Think or write about a casual interaction that “stuck” with you.**

What happened? How did you feel?  
What were its effects on you?



How might the effects of that interaction have influenced someone else’s day?



## Reflect & Connect: My Support System



Throughout each day, we take on many roles. Sometimes, we provide help and encouragement. Sometimes, we need it. Sometimes, the support is mutual. Think about a "typical day" and take a few moments to appreciate all these roles.

I support...



We support each other ...



I am supported by ...



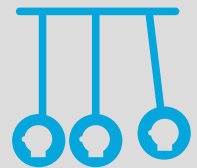
## Read & Reflect: The “Active Ingredient”

We know from research, and our own experiences, that relationships are essential for learning, growth, and resilience. In fact, some researchers refer to developmental relationships as the “active ingredient” of an environment’s influence on children and youth (Li & Julian, 2012).

Having at least one relationship in any setting – such as in the home, school, museums, libraries, and beyond – can make a huge impact for young people (Harvard Center on the Developing Child, 2015).

Relationships are built from simple, everyday interactions. In the context of informal learning organizations, no matter what technology, exhibits, or other resources you have, relationships and the interactions between educators and families are foundational to your organization’s impact.

Think about the “things” that drive people to your organization.  
How do the people facilitating make these experiences special?



## Reflect & Connect: Building Relationships

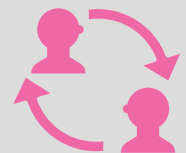


Think about an important relationship in your life. It can be a family member, friend, co-worker, teacher, or helper. Then think/journal about one or more of the following...

How did the relationship start? What were some of the initial interactions you had? How did those connect to form a relationship?



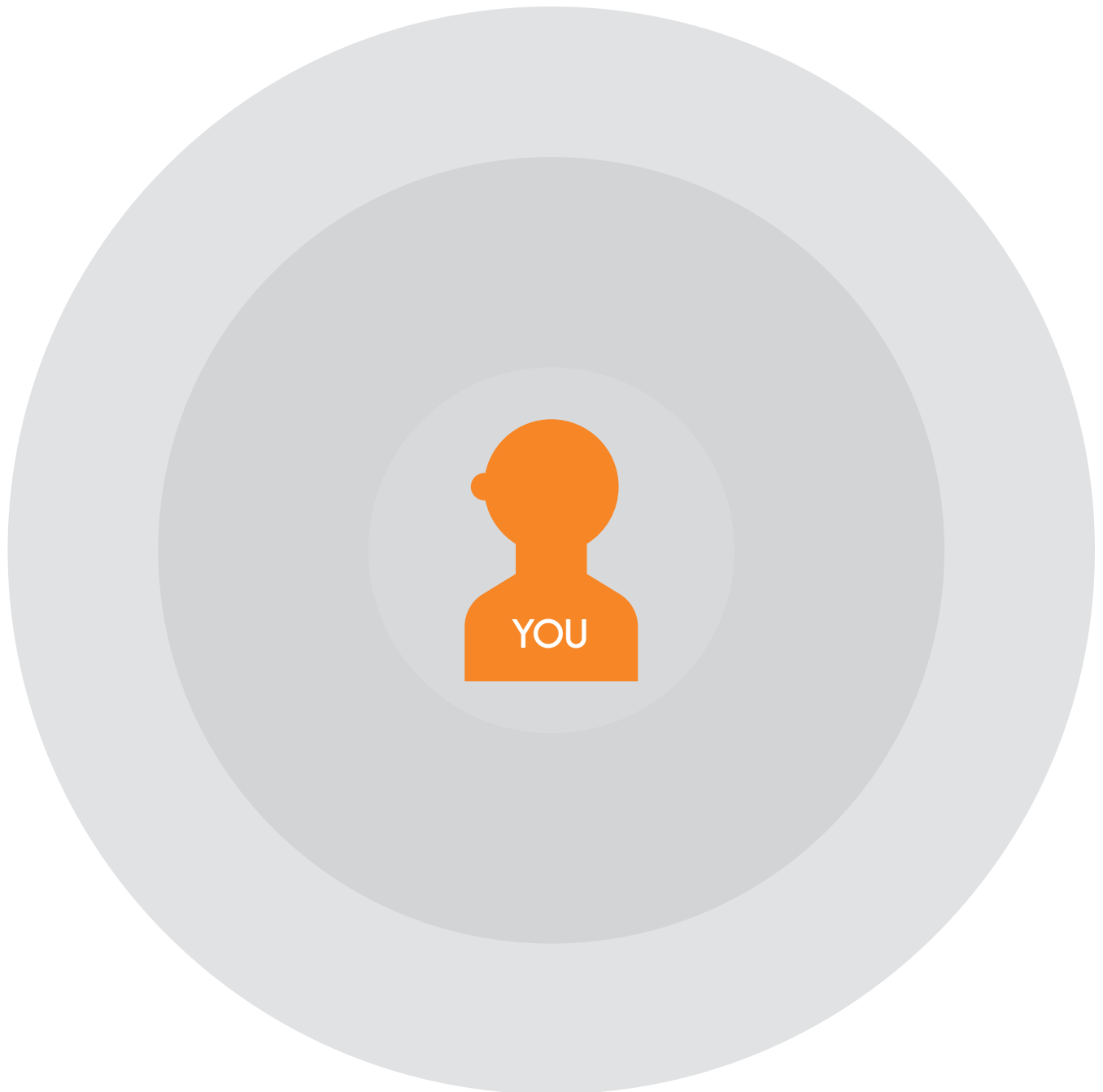
What interactions have helped sustain the relationship? Are there certain ones that seem to repeat? Which ones have been particularly meaningful for you?



## From Relationships to Resilience

No matter what other roles you have in life, you are a support for someone – and in order to be the best you can be, you need support. Before moving on to the next part of this Toolkit, take a moment to look back over the ideas and notes in this section.

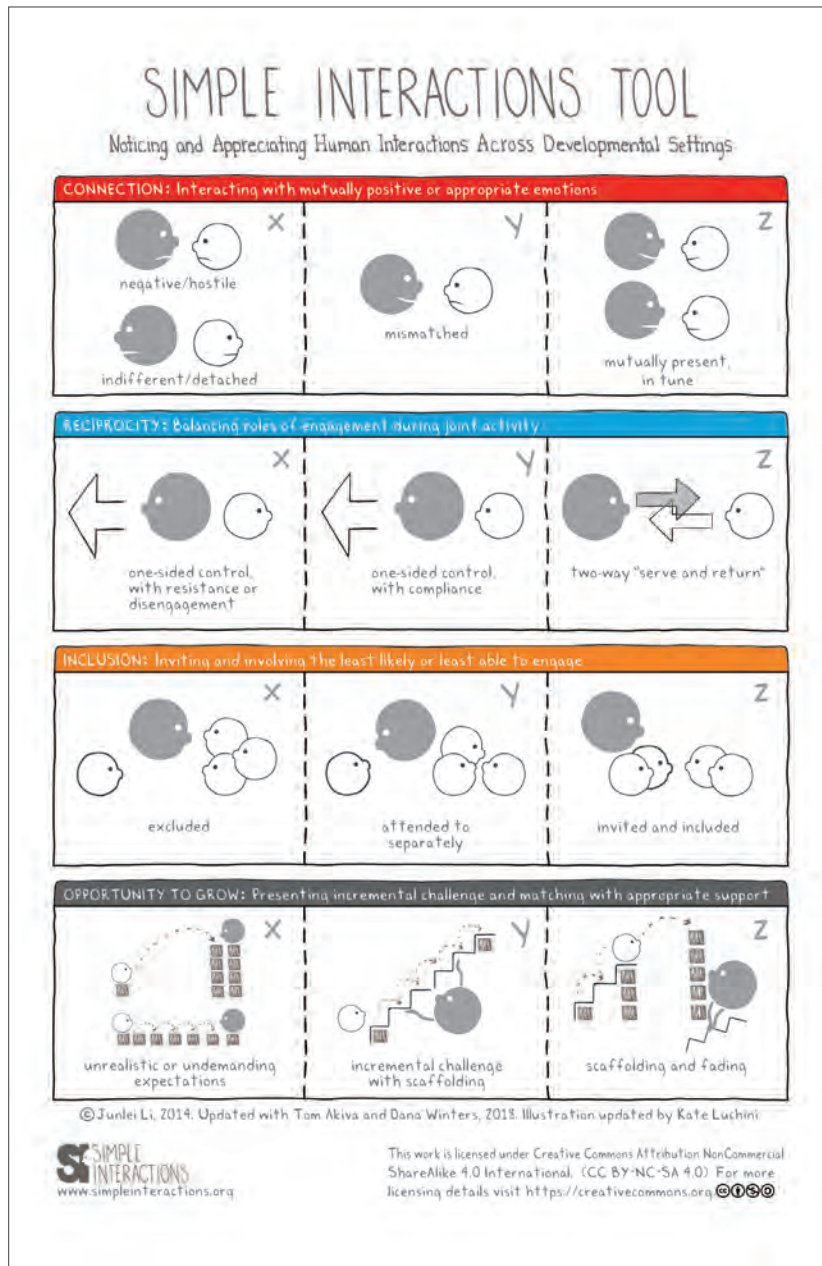
Then, use the space below to note and appreciate all of the people who bolster YOUR resilience – from your “inner circle” to those friendly faces who may just pass you by.





**GETTING TO  
KNOW THE SIMPLE  
INTERACTIONS  
TOOL**

# The Simple Interactions Tool



As a professional learning approach, Simple Interactions is grounded in the belief that the most sustainable practices come from what adults already do well. A key feature of the Simple Interactions approach is a one-page tool that captures what is inside a human interaction. Grounded in developmental science, the underlying elements are: connection, reciprocity, inclusion, and opportunity to grow.

We use the Simple Interactions tool to build a shared language to talk about interactions often by watching video of practice and reflecting on it as a group. The tool is used for reflection, rather than assessment or evaluation, and the goal is for educators to identify strengths within themselves and their colleagues.



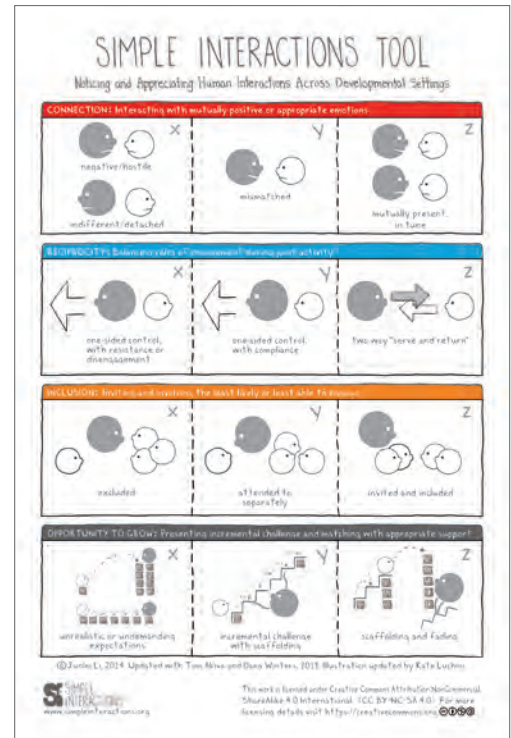
Love research?  
Scan the QR Code for links to scholarly articles,  
presentations and more!

## Now, it's YOUR turn...



The Simple Interactions Tool was created as a result of observation, with researchers noticing and wondering about the human interactions around them. Take out your tool or use the image below to do the same. Take notes and mark up the tool as needed to record your thoughts.

Look closely. What do you notice?



What do you wonder?





# Key Features of the Tool

## Human Interactions

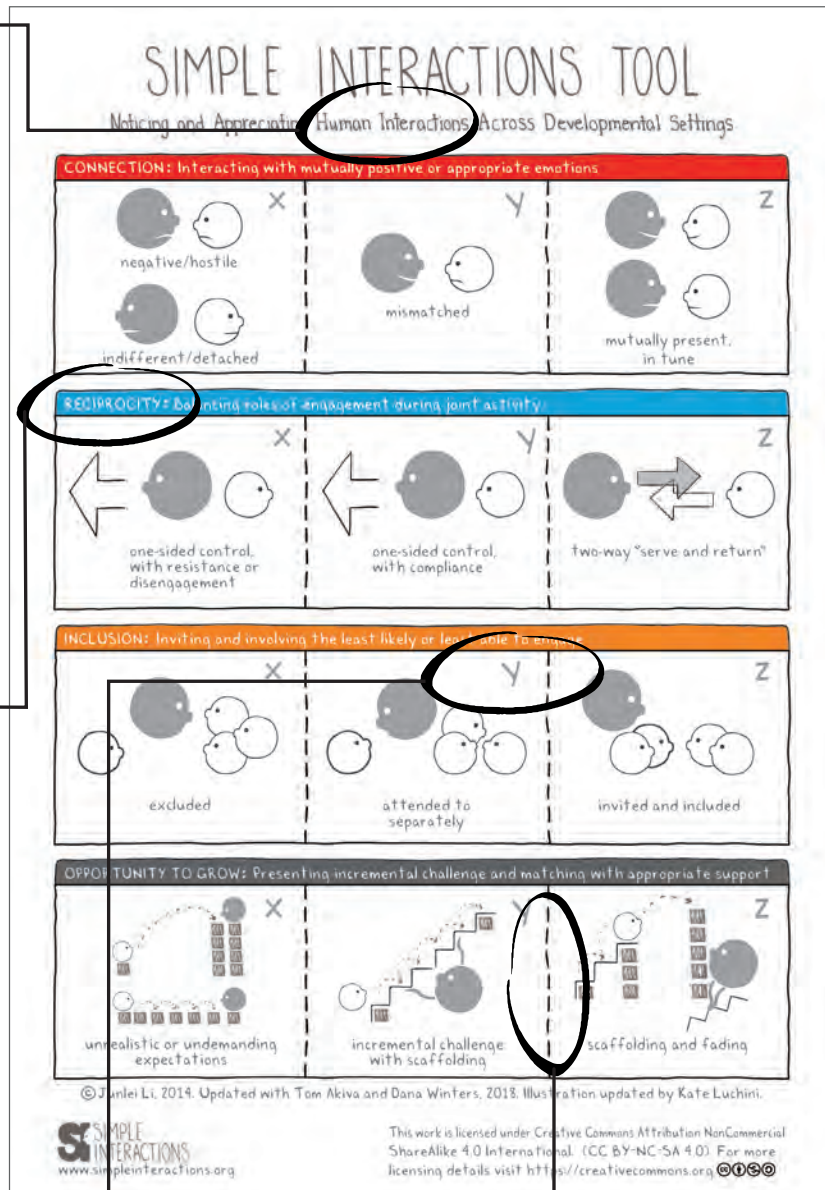
The Simple Interactions Tool focuses on universal human interactions. These happen everywhere all the time. Although some of the heads in the drawings are larger and darker, this is just meant to show who may be "leading" in an interaction. Children can lead as much as adults, employees as much as supervisors.

## Shared Language

It's sometimes hard to discuss things that "just happen." By providing a common language, the Simple Interactions Tool helps us understand and talk about what happened in the moment – helping us to be more intentional.

## Reflective Tool

The Simple Interactions Tool promotes reflection. The dimensions and pictures are there to help us understand what we see and experience, not to evaluate or judge it. Interactions are intentionally labeled "x, y, z" to avoid the suggestion that one is better than another or that there is a desirable grade or score to achieve.



## Fluidity and Flexibility

Interactions are seldom static. The dynamics can change in a split second. The dotted lines on the Simple Interactions Tool reflect this quality. As you use the tool, expect to see movement among the different types on interactions – and to see multiple dimensions working at once.









## Exploring Connection

Take a minute to look closely at Connection.

How do you understand each of the different images shown on the Simple Interactions Tool? What questions do you have?

If it is helpful, you can scan the QR code beneath each depiction to see a moving version of the interaction.

**CONNECTION: Interacting with mutually positive or appropriate emotions**

 negative/hostile X  indifferent/detached	 mismatched Y	 mutually present, in tune Z 
		
▶ play video	▶ play video	▶ play video

## Deep Dive into Connection

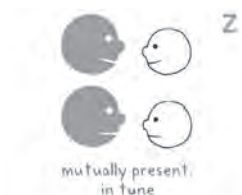
When you see people together, whether 1-on-1, or in a group, you get a sense of whether they are connected, really "with" each other, or appear in tune. They are aware of one another; they are present to one another. In the dimension of Connection, people seek to be present and in tune with each other, whether they are listening, talking, or working together.



In the interaction labeled "X," depicted to the left, people interacting may be mutually in tune, with negative emotions or with little connection. This can happen during everyday activities, such as after hearing disappointing or frustrating information.



In the interaction labeled "Y," people appear to be mismatched emotionally. Different reactions to new or unfamiliar things, memories and associations, and physical sensations are among the reasons why people may not be "matched" in a given moment.



In the interaction labeled "Z," people are mutually in tune with one another, whether this be through positive affect or mutual attentiveness and awareness. Energy and emotional levels feel matched.

Think or write/draw about a time when you experienced at least one of these interactions.



What happened? How did you feel?

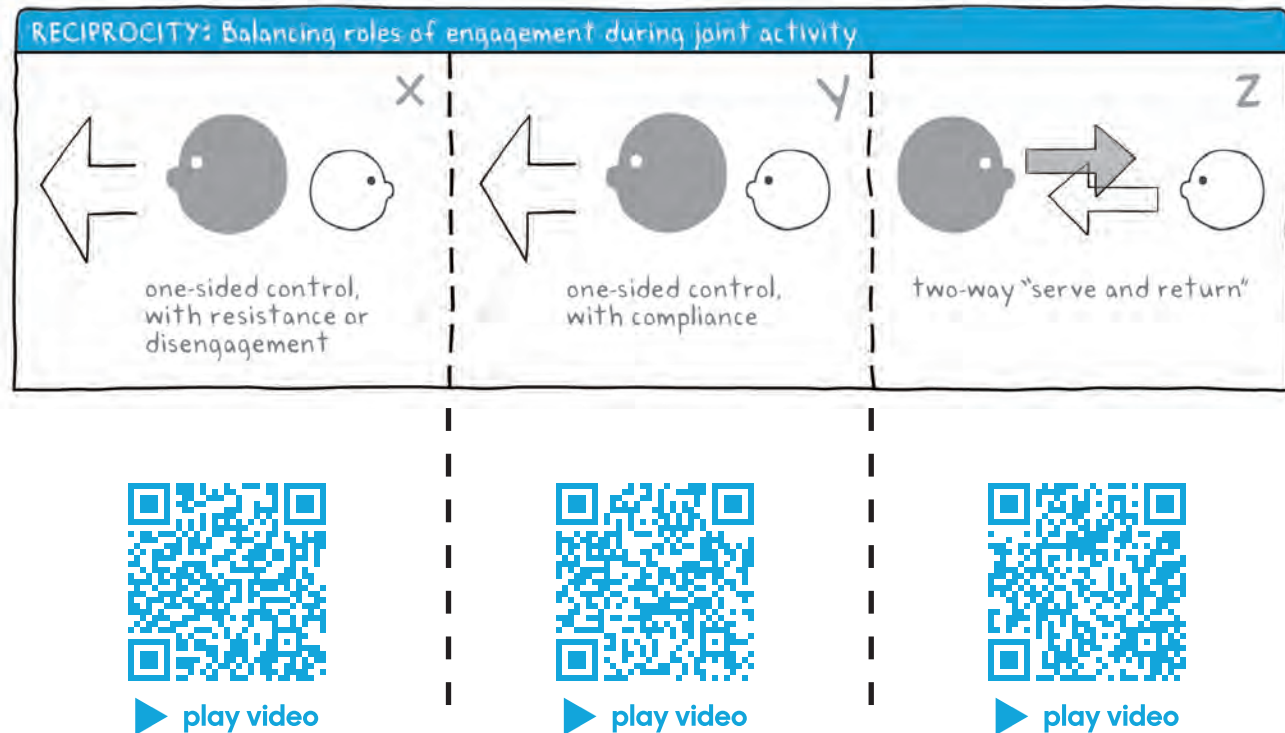


## Exploring Reciprocity

Take a minute to look closely at Reciprocity.

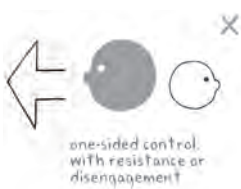
How do you understand each of the different images shown on the Simple Interactions Tool? What questions do you have?

If it is helpful, you can scan the QR code beneath each depiction to see a moving version of the interaction.

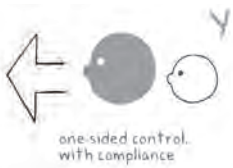


## Deep Dive into Reciprocity

When we do things together with individuals, whether it is to play, talk, learn, or teach, we can have different roles. In the dimension of Reciprocity, people exchange roles, form partnerships, and gradually shift power and control in any joint activity toward balanced "serve and return" exchanges.



Interaction "X" shows an exchange characterized by one-sided control, where others may be disengaged or resistant. These moments may be dramatic (Think: toddler tantrum) or quite subtle (Think: person looking at their phone). Still, it's important to remember that many people multi-task or may not "seem" engaged when they are actually listening quite intently.



Interaction "Y" is characterized by someone complying (passively or actively) with one-sided direction or control. Sometimes, this dynamic is necessary and desirable: Think of a teacher or coach demonstrating a process or technique, or a tour guide leading a group through a site.



The interaction labeled with a "Z" shows balanced, reciprocal partnership where it is difficult to tell who is directing or in control of the interaction.

Think or write/draw about a time when you experienced or witnessed at least one of these interactions. What was the context?



In what other contexts would you expect to see a similar interaction happening?




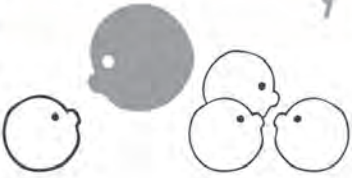

# Exploring Inclusion

Take a minute to look closely at Inclusion.

How do you understand each of the different images shown on the Simple Interactions Tool? What questions do you have?

If it is helpful, you can scan the QR code beneath each depiction to see a moving version of the interaction.

**INCLUSION: Inviting and involving the least likely or least able to engage**

 <p>X</p> <p>excluded</p>	 <p>Y</p> <p>attended to separately</p>	 <p>Z</p> <p>invited and included</p>
--	--	--

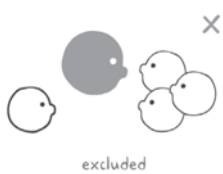
▶ play video

▶ play video

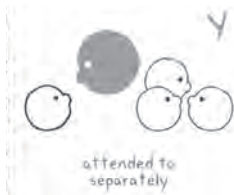
▶ play video

## Deep Dive into Inclusion

When you walk into any place with many people, you may notice that some appear to be participating at different levels than others, for any number of reasons ranging from ability to temperament to the social and emotional state of the person in the context of that moment. In the dimension of Inclusion, everyone, especially those who are the least likely to engage, are being invited and welcomed into the community.



Interaction "X" depicts a situation where someone is excluded (passively or actively) from the group. When this happens, we can reflect on the context around this type of interaction. We should also be aware that there may be shared understandings among group members of a "standing invitation" to (re)join the group.



In the interaction labeled "Y," a facilitator or group member may tend to one person separately. This dynamic is often seen in classrooms, where a teacher may need to turn to an individual student to give special instructions.



In the interaction labeled "Z," a facilitator is intentional about offering an invitation to everyone to be a part of the larger group, regardless of their ability, temperament, or other factors.

Think or write/draw about a time when you experienced at least one of these interactions. What was the context?



How did you or others communicate a sense of belonging (or an invitation to rejoin) to everyone?









## Exploring Opportunity to Grow

Take a minute to look closely at Opportunity to Grow.

How do you understand each of the different images shown on the Simple Interactions Tool? What questions do you have?

If it is helpful, you can scan the QR code beneath each depiction to see a moving version of the interaction.

OPPORTUNITY TO GROW: Presenting incremental challenge and matching with appropriate support

 <p>unrealistic or undemanding expectations</p>	 <p>incremental challenge with scaffolding</p>	 <p>scaffolding and fading</p>
 <p>▶ play video</p>	 <p>▶ play video</p>	 <p>▶ play video</p>



## Deep Dive into Opportunity to Grow

Human interactions help people see what they can accomplish through support and challenge. A person may not actually make progress in a matter of minutes or even days; what matters is that they are encouraged and challenged to make progress. As observers, it may be helpful to think about what can be “grown” in a particular interaction: content knowledge, procedural skill, social and emotional capacity, and so on. In the dimension of Opportunity to Grow, people are incrementally supported to stretch beyond the comfort zones of their current competence and confidence.



Interaction “X” shows tasks that may be unreachable without any support or expectations that require no stretching through undemanding tasks. Sometimes a facilitator might use unrealistic expectations intentionally to see where another person needs support. Undemanding tasks may serve other purposes, such as to establish rapport.



In the interaction labeled “Y,” a facilitator may provide incremental challenge and scaffolding that helps others progress with relative ease, within their comfort zone. Increasing levels of responsibility or complexity are added as more basic levels are mastered.



In the interaction labeled “Z,” a coach may provide a learner with a level of difficulty that requires them to stretch beyond their comfort zone, but the coach is available to provide support if needed.

Think or write/draw about a time when you experienced or witnessed one of these interactions.

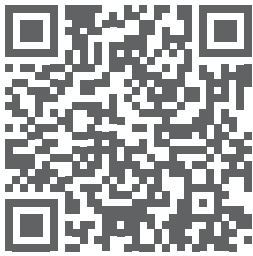


What was the context? How did it feel?



# THE DEPTH OF SIMPLE INTERACTIONS

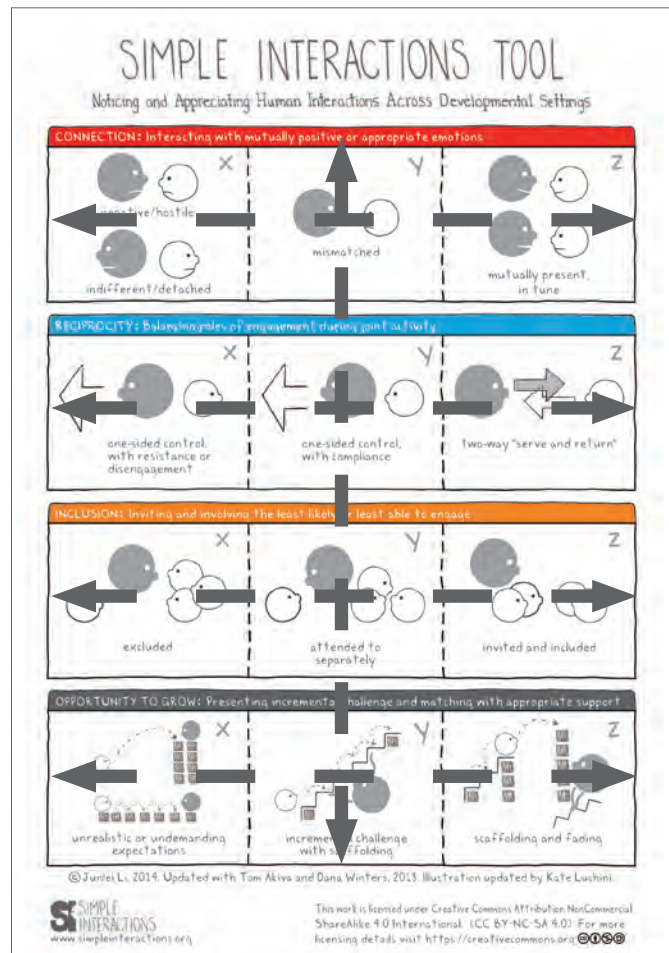
In looking deeply at the Simple Interactions Tool, it's easy to forget that the interactions you just studied can happen in seconds, quickly shifting from one to the next and back again – and that more than one dimension can be apparent at once.



To get an idea of this complexity, take a look the video at this QR code.

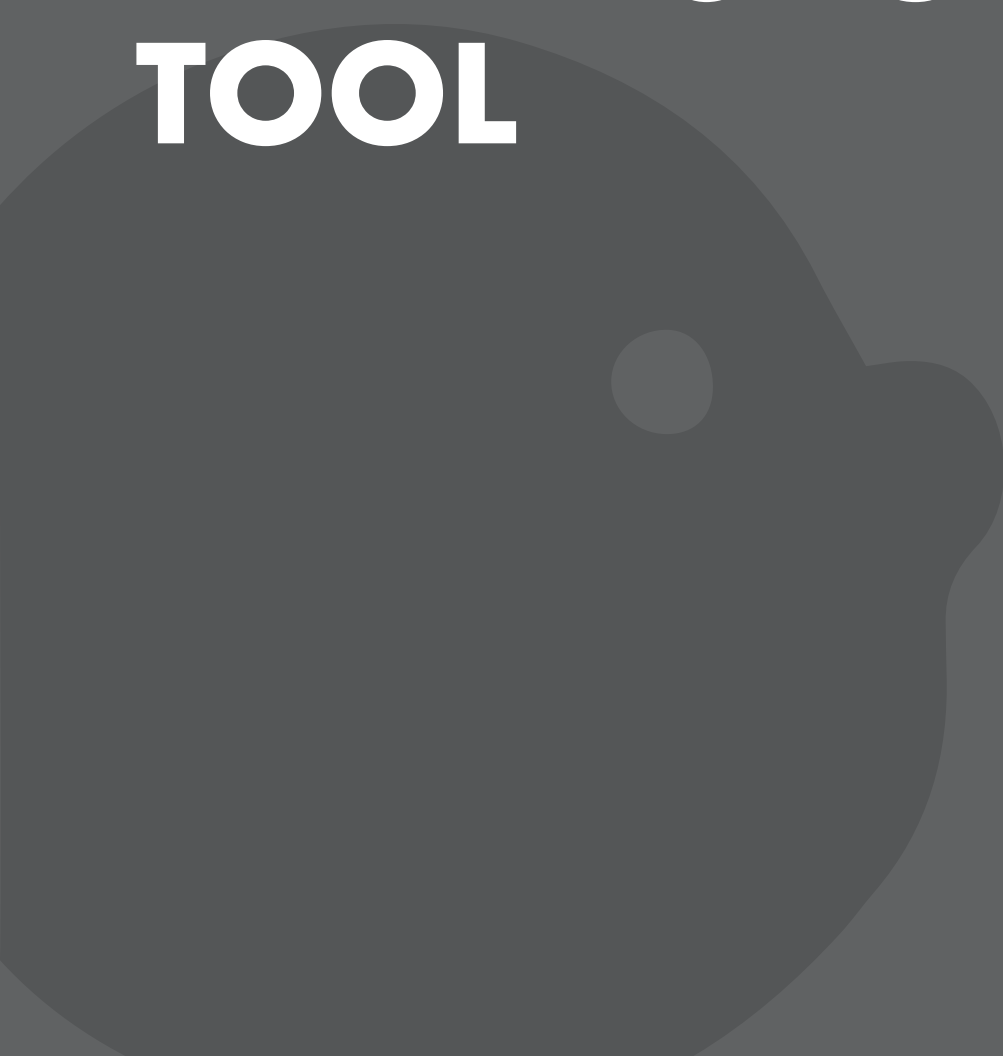
▶ play video

How many types of interactions do you see over the 90 seconds?



As we start to use the Tool, you will really start to see that simple interactions are really quite deep!

# USING THE SIMPLE INTERACTIONS TOOL



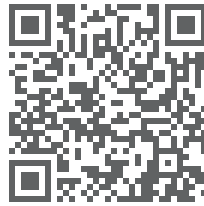
## Video Observation 1

Select the video that is closest to your context or interest area. Then, complete the chart below. You will watch the video TWICE.



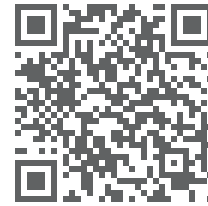
▶ play video

Preschool-Kindergarten  
Storytime at the Library



▶ play video

Kids Make Circuits at  
the Museum



▶ play video

Museum Educators Interact  
Behind the Scenes



What do you notice and wonder as you watch the video?

Notice



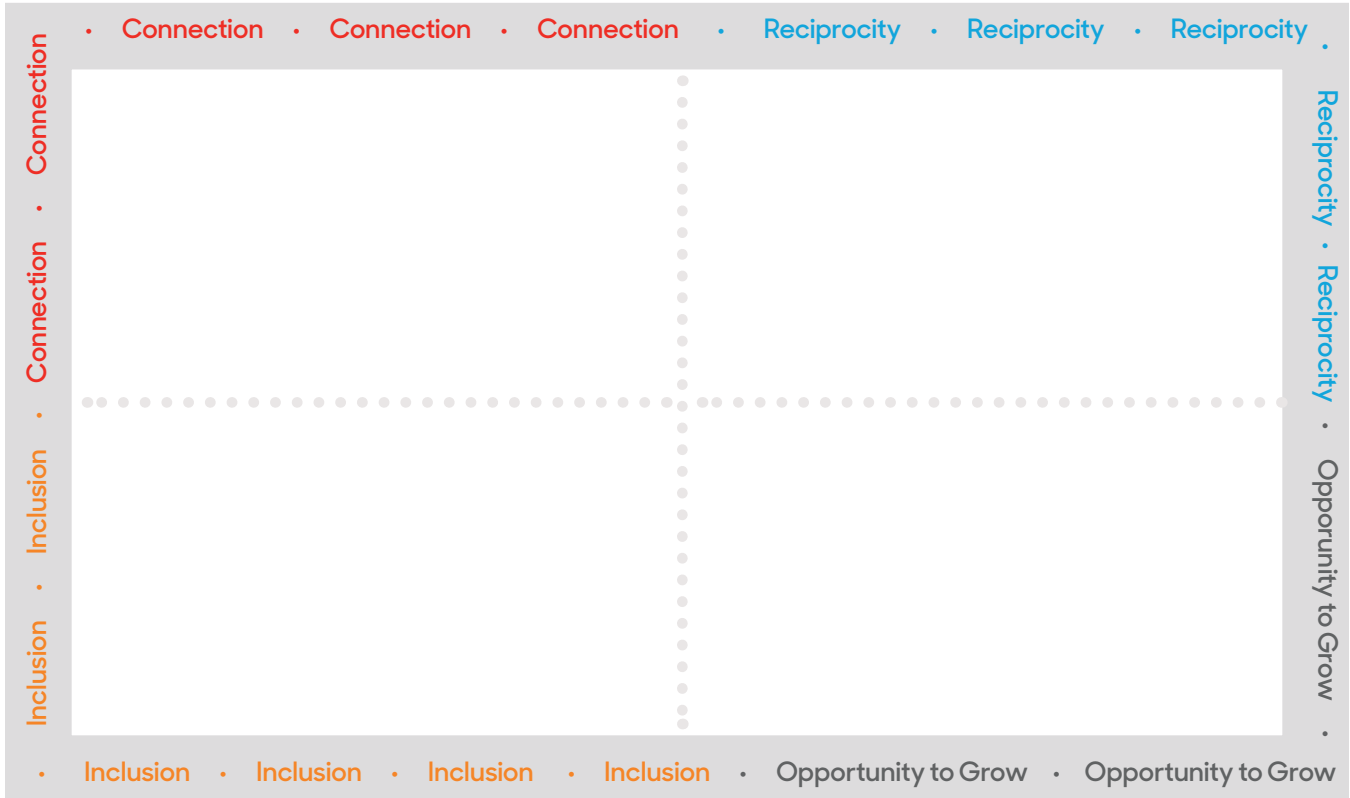
Wonder



## Now, watch the same video with the Simple Interactions Tool



What connections to the Tool do you see when you watch the video again?



Which dimension(s) resonated most for you?

Which type of interactions in that dimension did you see (X, Y, Z)?

What questions would you still ask?

What context might help you understand the interactions better?

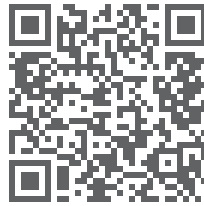
## Video Observation 2

Select the video that is closest to your context or interest area. Then, complete the chart below. You will watch the video TWICE.



▶ play video

Museum Educator &  
Child Visitor



▶ play video

Librarians Checking in  
on Daily Tasks



▶ play video

Librarian with  
Mother & Child



What do you notice and wonder as you watch the video?

Notice



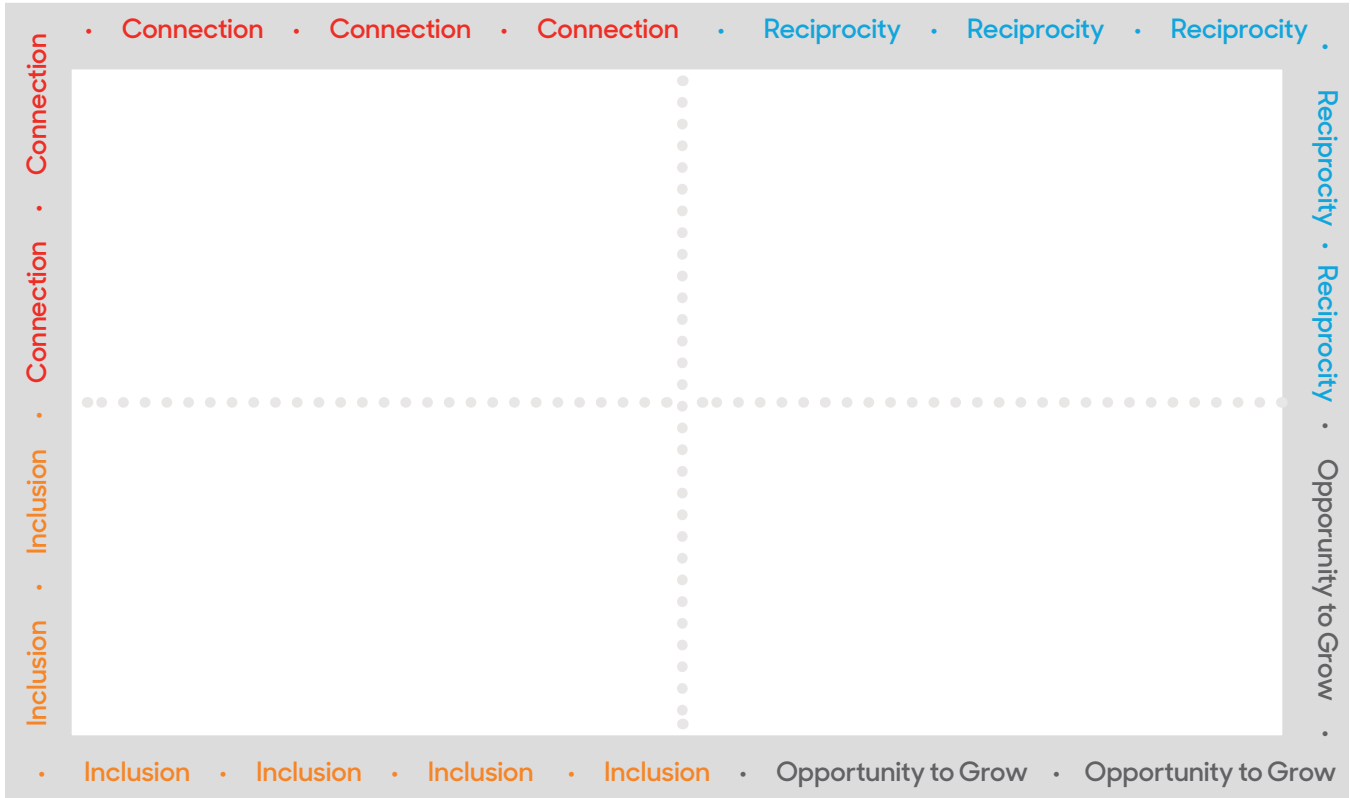
Wonder



## Now, watch the same video with the Simple Interactions Tool



What connections to the Tool do you see when you watch the video again?



Which dimension(s) resonated most for you?

Which type of interactions in that dimension did you see (X, Y, Z)?

What questions would you still ask?

What context might help you understand the interactions better?

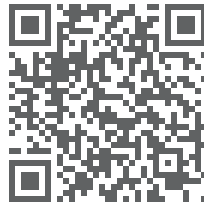
## Video Observation 3

Select the video that is closest to your context or interest area. Then, complete the chart below. You will watch the video TWICE.



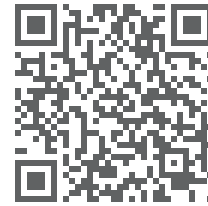
▶ play video

Museum Team Meeting



▶ play video

Program Planning Meeting



▶ play video

Museum Educator with Youth



What do you notice and wonder as you watch the video?

Notice



Wonder

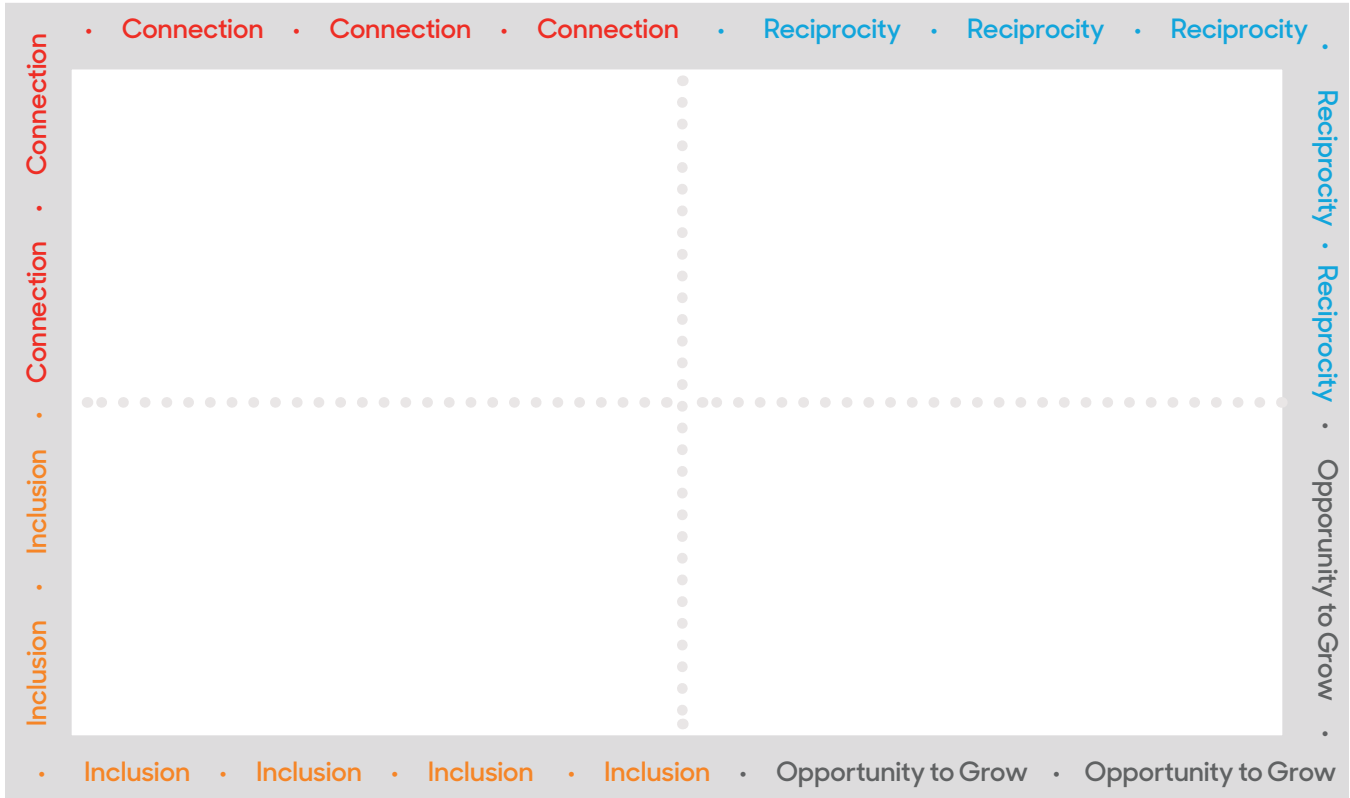




## Now, watch the same video with the Simple Interactions Tool



What connections to the Tool do you see when you watch the video again?



Which dimension(s) resonated most for you?

Which type of interactions in that dimension did you see (X, Y, Z)?

What questions would you still ask?

What context might help you understand the interactions better?

## Reflect & Connect

Think about the different settings in your environment. Which interactions do you tend to see in each? Which interactions would you like to see more? Use this page to capture some ideas.

The diagram is a 2x2 matrix with a dotted cross in the center. The vertical axis is labeled 'Inclusion' at the bottom and 'Connection' at the top. The horizontal axis is labeled 'Opportunity to Grow' on the left and 'Reciprocity' on the right. The four quadrants are defined by these labels: Top-Left (Connection, Inclusion), Top-Right (Connection, Reciprocity), Bottom-Left (Inclusion, Opportunity to Grow), and Bottom-Right (Reciprocity, Opportunity to Grow). The matrix is surrounded by a grey border containing the following text:

- Top border: • Connection • Connection • Connection • Reciprocity • Reciprocity • Reciprocity •
- Left border: Inclusion • Inclusion • Inclusion • Inclusion •
- Right border: Reciprocity • Reciprocity • Reciprocity • Opportunity to Grow •
- Bottom border: • Inclusion • Inclusion • Inclusion • Inclusion • Opportunity to Grow • Opportunity to Grow

# The Try It Out Project

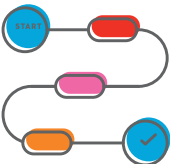
As its name implies, the Try It Out Project is a change that you make to achieve growth in your personal life, professional practice, or organizational environment.

While the idea of a “project” may seem big and daunting, challenge yourself instead to “think small.” Some of the best Try It Out Projects that we’ve seen were just small changes or tweaks to an existing program or practice. Here are a few:



**Create/  
tweak  
policy or  
rule**

In order to initiate more interactions with youth, a librarian moved the “password jar” from the top of the reception desk to a lower shelf. As a result, people had to ask for a password – and it gave her an opening to start conversations.



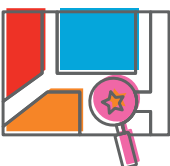
**Create  
process/  
program**

After watching a video of her story time, a librarian wanted to see more connection during the “awkward moments” while people were arriving and getting settled. She posted a question related to the book for caregivers and children to think about and post answers to.



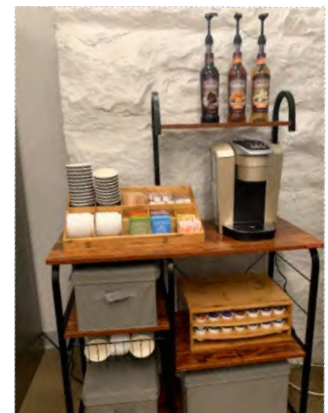
**Reshape  
thinking**

After reflecting on a video of her staff meetings, one participant saw that her colleagues needed more time to think and respond to questions, so she reframed her thinking about “silence” in her role as a leader.

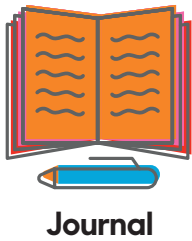


**Change the  
physical  
environment**

A coffee bar transformed a shared kitchen between four different organizations into a meeting place. People who once passed each other without saying a word started to interact more.



Desiring to see more interaction among caregivers and their children, a museum educator changed the furniture in the space. Now, instead of sitting on the benches while their children play, caregivers are part of the action!



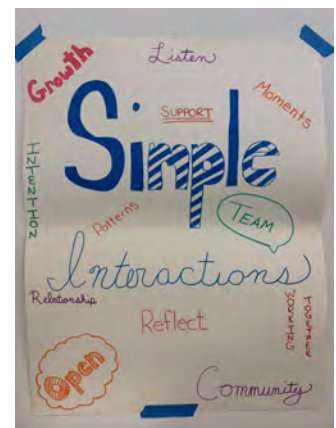
Through journaling, discussions, and reflections during small group sessions, one participant realized that more frequently checking in with his emotions would enhance his personal and professional interactions, so he created a "mood puppet" as a fun and safe way to acknowledge and share his feelings.



In order to encourage more developmental interactions between her staff and children, one manager used the Simple Interactions Tool to frame weekly staff meetings. Each week, the group focused on one dimension, thinking about what was happening, identifying areas for growth, and picking ideas to try out and reflect upon.



Hoping to create a developmental relationship with a new employee, a recently promoted manager used the Simple Interactions Tool as part of a weekly check-in. This simple move had a huge and immediate impact, making both people more comfortable in their new roles.



## Simple Interactions Dice Roll Game

Use dice to play this brainstorming game.

1. First, roll a die and then you choose a dimension to focus on for your brainstorming based on the number you roll:
  - 1: Connection
  - 2: Reciprocity
  - 3: Inclusion
  - 4: Opportunity to Grow
  - 5: Wild Card (you can pick any of the four dimensions)
  - 6: Roll Again" (you can re-roll the Dimension Die or both dice)
2. Second, roll a die to identify an activity that could be part of your Try It Out Project:
  - 1: Create or tweak a policy or rule
  - 2: Create or tweak a process or program
  - 3: Reshape thinking or rephrase language
  - 4: Change the physical environment (furniture, lighting, etc.)
  - 5: Journal or engage in self-reflection
  - 6: Facilitate with the Simple Interactions Tool

The rules of the game are simple:

1. Find a partner or small group (optional).
2. Roll the dice. You will have a dimension and an activity.
3. Think about your organization. Ask yourself:
  - How can the activity shown foster growth or change in the dimension shown?
  - Look back at pages 36–39 for ideas from past projects.
4. Discuss and/or reflect. If it is helpful, record the conversation or use the "gameboard" on the next page to take notes on your conversation.

## Dice Roll Round 1

Dimensions		Activities		
				
Connection	Reciprocity	Journal	Change the physical environment	Create process/program
				
Inclusion	Opportunity to Grow	Reshape thinking	Create/tweak policy or rule	Facilitate with the tool

Circle the Dimension and Activity rolled.  
Think: How can [activity] help me achieve the type of [dimension] that I want to see in my environment?

Look back to pages 36–39 for some examples of each activity, if needed. Record your discussion/reflection ideas below:

## Dice Roll Round 2

### Dimensions



Connection



Reciprocity



Inclusion



Opportunity to Grow

### Activities



Journal



Change the physical environment



Create process/program



Reshape thinking



Create/tweak policy or rule



Facilitate with the tool

Circle the Dimension and Activity rolled.  
Think: How can [activity] help me achieve the type of [dimension] that I want to see in my environment?

Look back to pages 36–39 for some examples of each activity, if needed. Record your discussion/reflection ideas below:

## Picking Your First Try It Out Project



Review previous examples & ideas.

Which ones resonated with you?



Consider new opportunities.

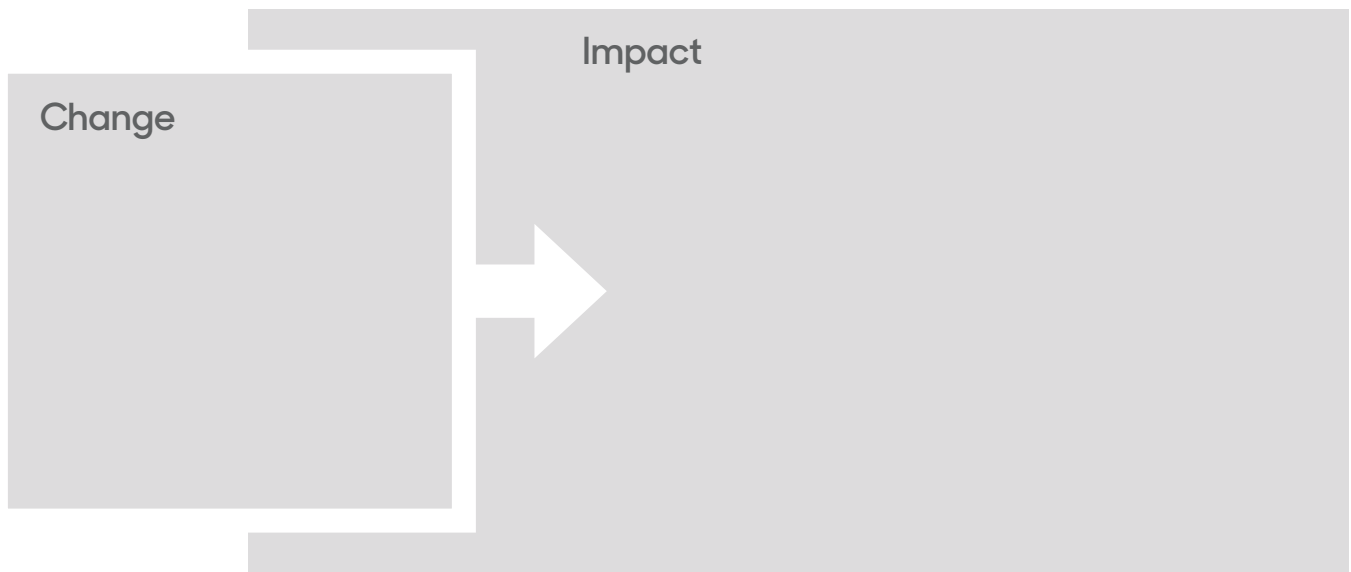
What opportunities do you see to use the tool to enhance your relational practice? Consider different goals you have, problems that arise in your work, etc. You can write different ideas below.





## The Try It Out Idea

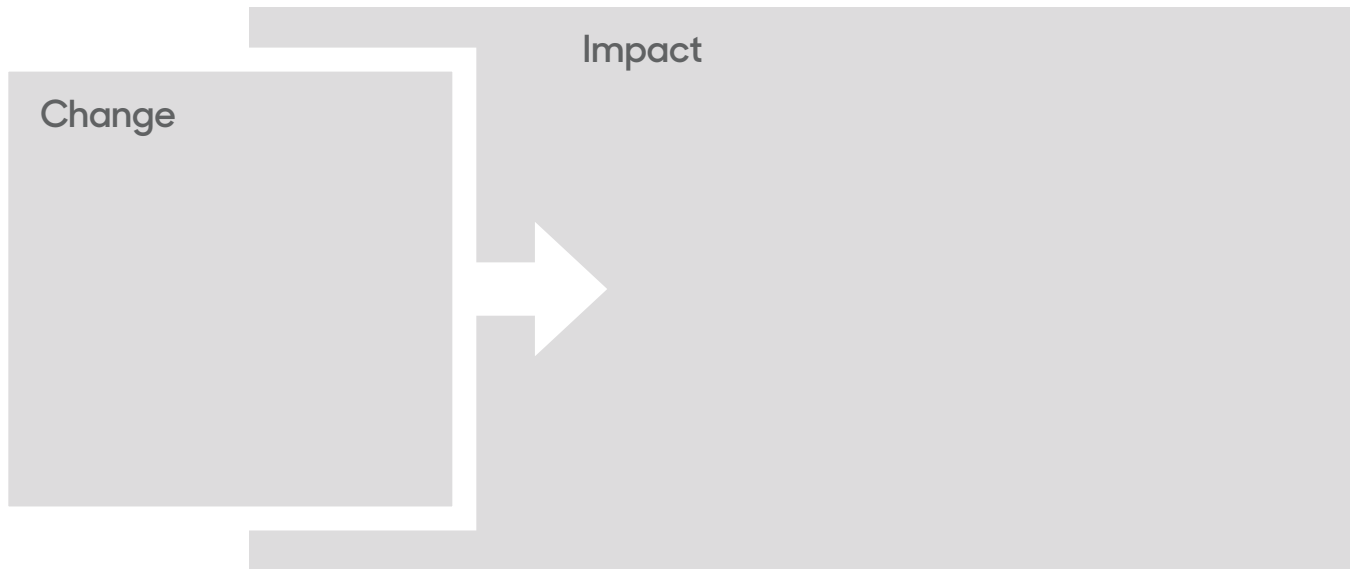
What is one small change you would like to try to be more intentional about your interactions at work? You might think of new routines, physical changes to your space, etc. What impact do you hope this change will have?



Or think about it this way:  
How does this change strengthen the interactions in my environment?



## Plan Your Try It Out Idea



How I will know my project works:

- Count certain behaviors, including:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Record observations
- Journal about the experience
- Collect a short survey
- Other:

## Reflecting on Your Try It Out Project

What went well or as expected?



What did not go as expected?



What did you learn?



What might you change?



## Plan Your Next Try It Out Idea

It can be a new version or tweak to your first idea – or something totally new!

Not sure what to do? Flip a coin on the “mat” below and let fate pick for you!

### **BEGIN AGAIN**

Try something totally different – goal and all.

### **BUILD A TEAM**

Find collaborator(s). Get their feedback on next steps and move from there.

### **SAME PLAN, NEW PEOPLE**

Try your idea with a different group/person.

### **REPLICATE**

Will you get the same result if you do it all again?

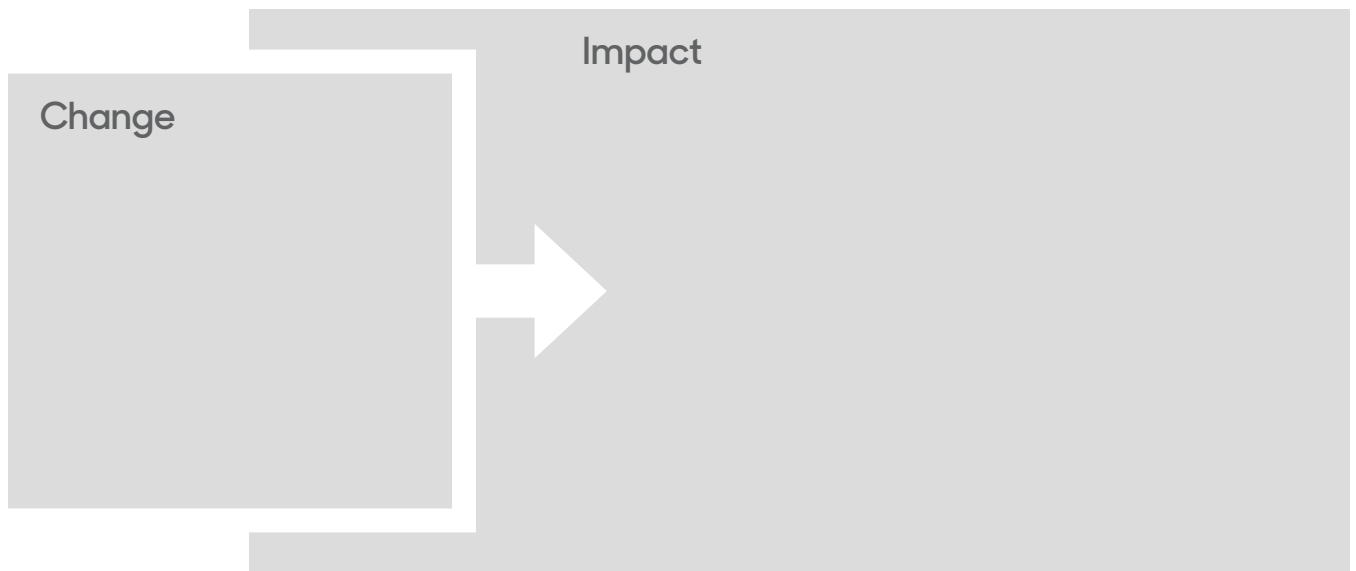
### **SWAP PLANS WITH SOMEONE**

How can you adapt their goal and plan to your context?

### **SAME GOAL, NEW PLAN**

Would another method or process be more effective?

## Plan Your Try It Out Idea



How I will know my project works:

- Count certain behaviors, including:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Record observations
- Journal about the experience
- Collect a short survey
- Other:

## Reflecting on Your Try It Out Project

What went well or as expected?



What did not go as expected?



What did you learn?



What might you change?



## Celebrate Your Learning!

At this point, you have reflected and learned about the depth of even the "simplest" human interactions, about your organization, about your colleagues, and about yourself. It's time to celebrate what you have learned!

Consider how you would like to share and who to share with (yourself, with the entire organization, with invited friends and family, etc.). Some ideas:

- **An informal breakfast, lunch, or happy hour**
- **A collage in a company newsletter**
- **A sharing circle**
- **A website, Padlet, or other "eCelebration"**
- **A collection of found poetry using your Toolkits, notes, etc.**
- **A collective artwork with those who worked with you**



Think out of the box – or stay well within it. It's your learning. Celebrate it your way. Just enjoy the moment and HAVE FUN!

