

Handout 20: James and David

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**Instructions:** Read the following story about James and his son David. Use the questions after each step as a guide for your discussion.

**Step 1: Determine the family's interests, concerns, and goals.**

James and a Head Start family worker are talking in the kitchen while James's son, David, age four, plays in the next room. The home visitor tells James she is very interested in how he feels David is doing. They talk about David's progress at school and his life at home. Then James mentions that he has become concerned about his son's love of violence and his rude language. According to James, David turns everything into a weapon. When David can't find a stick to use as a weapon, he uses his fingers. He loves to pretend he is using karate to fight enemies. David is particularly aggressive when playing with his five-year-old cousin, but he acts rough with just about everybody. When he has a disagreement with family members, he will pretend to shoot or use karate on them. He will also call them names or say, "I'm going to kill you!"

- What are James's concerns? How do these concerns impact upon his relationship with David?
- How might the Head Start worker feel about these concerns as a topic for discussion on a home visit?

**Step 2: Focus on a learning goal.**

In talking with the staff person, James says he wants David to stop being bad. The Head Start worker and James discuss this and decide on the following goal: to help David find positive ways of playing with and relating to others.

- In this example, the Head Start worker stated the learning goal in positive terms (i.e., to increase certain behaviors) and not negative terms (i.e., to decrease behaviors.) Do you see any implications to the parent-Head Start worker relationship for the language used with parents? Think about other ways the goal could be stated and what messages the language conveys.
- Are there questions you might ask James to help him identify his goals?
- Are there other goals you might suggest?

## Handout 20: James and David (Continued)

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### Step 3: Select and try out an activity to support this goal.

The staff person and James decide that before they can influence David's behavior, they need to understand why he likes violent play and speech. They look through the Head Start publication, *Our Stories Keep Us Connected*. Together they select an activity to share together called *The Stories Found in Playtime* (Handout 21). The staff person offers to bring several small dolls and animals to the next home visit to stimulate pretend play. James says he will collect boxes during the week that could be used for buildings or blocks. At the following visit, they watch David and his five-year-old cousin play with these materials.

- What is the value in jointly selecting an activity rather than having the Head Start worker just bring one next week?

### Step 4: Review what was learned from the experience.

In talking over their observations, James and the staff person realize how much of David's violent behavior is directly modeled from television shows he watches. James hadn't made the connection before. He generally does not watch television with David but rather, uses that time to get things done.

- What questions could the Head Start worker ask to help James make sense of his observations?
- How could the Head Start worker help a parent use observation in ways that can benefit the child and the parent-child relationship over time?

### Step 5: Plan new activities to support the goal (or focus on a new goal).

With the help of the staff person, James makes a plan to monitor the shows David watches and to restrict viewing of shows with violent content. James also commits to watching with David whenever the TV is on, to mediate what his son is seeing. James is not sure how to talk with David about violence in ways that open up rather than close down communication. The staff person shares a tip from his experience as a parent. When David asks for something in a way James is uncomfortable with (for example, "hand it over, dummy head"), James can try saying, "Ask me in a way that makes me want to give it to you." If David can't come up with a response, James can offer one: "Try, I'd like the spoon please." James is pleased to have the suggestion. He and the staff person decide that at the next visit, they will look through some Head Start publications to find communication activities he can use with his son.

- How can you tell if the plan is working?
- What does the parent gain in co-planning visits?
- What does the Head Start worker gain in co-planning home visits?