Social-Emotional Scenarios

Read through the following scenarios and then answer the questions below. Think about the unique ways the infants and toddlers are expressing emotions and interacting and how you might respond as an infant and toddler caregiver.

You were recently hired as an infant and toddler caregiver. As part of your orientation, your director asks that you spend time observing throughout the care setting and getting to know the other caregivers, families, infants, and toddlers. Below highlights some of your observations:

A. An older toddler, Cassie, and the caregiver are comforting Benjamin as he fell while playing outside. Cassie pats Benjamin on the head and attempts to give him a kiss on the cheek. Benjamin screams louder. Cassie then goes to the door for inside and yells, “Open! Open!”

B. While lying on their bellies, two infants smile at one another. One of the infants starts to coo and the caregiver responds with a coo and a smile. The infants look at one another again and smile. The caregiver begins to take photos of the infants.

C. A sobbing toddler is sitting next to the door. Her father just left. A caregiver is sitting next to her and says, “You seem very sad. Your daddy will be back right after nap.” The caregiver asks the toddler to sit on her lap. The toddler continues to cry and does not look at her caregiver.

1. What social-emotional skills do you see and hear?

A – Cassie displays social awareness and early empathy skill by observing Benjamin’s distress and attempting to comfort him. Cassie may also be displaying some problem-solving skills, thinking that items inside, or going inside, will help Benjamin feel better.

B – We see early relationship skills as the two infants share sounds and positive expressions back-and-forth. They are “reading” and responding to each other’s emotions and actions.

C – The toddler has a bond with her father and is able to express her sadness when he leaves. The caregiver shows social awareness by attempting to label the child’s emotion and offer comfort.

2. How are the infants’ and toddlers’ efforts being acknowledged and responded to by their caregivers?

A – The caregiver is also comforting Benjamin, displaying empathy to Benjamin and modeling it for the other children.
B – The caregiver sees this is a nice exchange between the infants and begins to take pictures documenting this communication exchange, perhaps to share with families and help document the infants social-emotional development.

C – The caregiver acknowledges and provides a label for the emotion she believe the toddler is displaying. She offers information that may help comfort the child, “Your dad will be back right after nap,” in a way that the toddler is more likely to understand, by using routines in the schedule as opposed to clock time. She offers closeness with the child.

3. Would you do anything differently? What experiences might you offer?

A – The caregiver could also attempt to label Benjamin’s feelings. He or she could work with Benjamin and Cassie to see what would make Benjamin feel better. When Benjamin cries louder after Cassie attempts to comfort him, the caregiver could explain what she sees, that Benjamin appears more upset. The caregiver can take this opportunity to both appreciate Cassie’s concern for Benjamin and her attempts to help, but also emphasize the importance of Benjamin’s consent to comfort. The caregiver could also acknowledge or ask questions about Cassie’s request to “Open” to door to inside.

B – The caregiver could find other materials that the infants might enjoy doing together, perhaps helping to pass a ball between them or providing some toys or sensory materials they can use together on their bellies. The caregiver could also consider providing language for what he or she sees, for example, “You like to look at (name of infant), don’t you?” The caregiver can also share the pictures in the classroom.

C – The caregiver could refer to a visual schedule to help the toddler know when her father will return. The caregiver could also ask the child if there are things that might help her feel better, or use her knowledge of the toddler to help, perhaps by gathering a favorite book, a security item, or a picture of her family to help comfort her. The caregiver could empathize, “It is sometimes hard to say goodbye. You love your Daddy very much and he loves you too.” The caregiver could help the toddler find a place to safely express her emotion and let the toddler know he or she is there to help when/if she wants.