

Look at me!

Developed in collaboration with Yuka Kobayashi RECE

Charlotte, an RECE in licensed child care, noticed Raymund, one of the children, digging in an area of the playground behind a tree where she couldn't see him. She called Raymund over. He was so engaged in what he was doing that he didn't hear her call him the first time, so Charlotte marched over and knelt down to face him. "Look at me! I need to know you're listening to me so I need to see your eyes."

Raymund shrugged and continued to look down at where he was digging. His peers, who had also been digging nearby, started to gather around them. Charlotte told them to go play, adding, "Be careful and stay where I can see you!" Turning back to Raymund and still kneeling she said, frustrated, "You aren't supposed to be here and you know that. Do you understand? You need to be careful and be where I can see you at all times." Charlotte was becoming increasingly angry as Raymund refused to look at her. "Please look at me to show me you understand! I want to help you but I need to see your eyes. It's how I know you're paying attention."

Finally, Raymund looked up. He was uncomfortable and his gaze went over Charlotte's head. Raymund's face was flushed. "I understand," he said before running off towards the building.

When his dad arrived later that day, Charlotte approached him to talk about it. She explained that Raymund had trouble looking her in the eye today when she needed his attention. "I've noticed this before but it was very obvious to me today. Do you ever notice that problem at home?"

Mr. So smiled, softly. "What problem? In my family, it's disrespectful to lock eyes with an elder, especially a teacher. He was being respectful, and is probably very confused about what you were asking him to do."

"Oh ... that explains a lot ... thank you for telling me that," Charlotte said, after realizing what had happened. "I didn't know my request was so insensitive. What could I do next time I'm having a conversation with him one-on-one?"

Mr. So was glad she asked. "His previous educator would sit beside him – knee to knee," he explained. "They would talk while they were both looking forward. Sometimes they were focused on something like a picture in the learning room or a tree outside."

Charlotte thanked Mr. So. Later, she began thinking about steps she could take to be more inclusive to Raymund and his family. She spoke with her colleagues at their next team meeting and, through collaborative critical reflection, they realized if this was the preferred communication for Raymund and his family, there were likely other cultural and social groups that preferred this mode of communication as well.

You can add your thoughts and reflections in the space below.