

Tip Sheets

Infants: Strategies to Support the Development of Communication Skills

Relationships: The Foundation of Development



When an infant is born, the only organ that is not completely developed is the brain.

Parents and other caregivers play a primary role in the development of this complex and amazing part of the body. Infants learn best in the context of consistent and predictable daily experiences in the presence of caregivers whom they love and trust.

The development of communication skills is best promoted through daily routines and activities. It is estimated that the daily activities of feeding, diapering and dressing occur at least 2,000 times during the first year of a child's life. Each of these provides an opportunity for relationship-building which in turn supports the learning and development of communication skills.

The following are specific strategies and tips for supporting the development of communication skills in infants.

Responsive Interactions

- Use touch and voice to let infants know they are safe and their needs will be met.
- Exaggerate pitch and intonation.
- Use shorter sentences and decreased vocabulary.
- Use longer pauses between words and utterances.
- Frequently repeat words.
- Elongate vowels in words.

- Use diminutive words such as blankie, doggy, piggy, birdie, etc.
- Comfort and respond to cries and other communicative attempts as readily as possible. Assure infant that she is heard by saying something like "I hear you. I am coming."
- Readily return smiles to facilitate repeated and longer interactions.
- Repeat sounds baby makes.
- Encourage baby to imitate your sounds.
- Talk about what is immediately present.
 - Talk about what you see and what the baby is looking at wherever you go.
- Play peek-a-boo during daily routines such as dressing, diapering and feeding time (bibs make a great hiding tool)

Using the Environment and Routines

- Arrange the physical environment to promote opportunities to interact frequently.
- Position infants so they are able to observe and interact with one another.
- Post pictures in diapering area to provide a context for conversation.
- Rotate toys to provide interest and new experiences.
- Use words to describe sensory experiences. For example, during feeding time caregivers can talk about the taste, texture, color, sound and temperatures of foods.
- Encourage babies to explore objects and toys in a variety of ways (shaking, banging, etc.) and talk about what each child is doing.

Reading and Exploring Books

- Read a book or tell a story daily.
- Share books as you cuddle, even with newborns!
- Provide infants access to books that have simple and bright colored designs and pictures of people and things familiar to them.
- Make books using small photo albums and pictures of family members, infants in your program, infants involved in daily activities, etc. You are only limited by your creativity!
- Let infants explore books! (Provide chunky, board or soft bath books for chewing and gumming. There will be time to teach proper care and respect of books later!)
- Point to pictures and use words to label and describe the characters and what is happening in the story.
- Share “lift the flap” books with older infants.
- Follow the infant’s lead when sharing a book—even though this may mean staying on one page for an extended period of time or looking at the book upside down!

Songs, Rhymes, and Finger-Plays

- Infants love language play, which includes use of rhyming words, songs, and using character voices when reading aloud or telling stories.
- Sing a baby’s favorite song over and over again to promote a calmness and a sense of security. Remember, it is the sound of a familiar voice that an infant finds comforting and not the quality of your singing voice.
- Sing silly songs to catch baby’s attention.
- Sing songs during transitions.

Additional Resources

Talking is Teaching

<http://talkingisteaching.org>

Too Small to Fail

<http://toosmall.org/community/resources>

Zero to Three

<http://www.zerotothree.org>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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