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Sharing Knowledge with Infant – Toddler Teachers and Home Visitors



Sharing Knowledge with Infant – Toddler Teachers and Home Visitors Series

This booklet describes development, security, and brain growth for infants from birth to 8 months, and may be used by Staff members who are working with teachers and home visitors. The document was developed by the Early Head Start National Resource Center (EHS NRC) @ ZERO TO THREE in collaboration with the Office of Head Start.

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Introduction

The Sharing Knowledge with Infant – Toddler Teachers and Home Visitors Series for Early Head Start for (EHS) and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) programs presents basic information on child development, working with families, and the comprehensive services offered by EHS and MSHS. These modules may be used during an orientation period to provide an overview of basic information on serving infants and toddlers and their families or as part of in-service training for more experienced teachers and home visitors to review and expand their knowledge.

Each module provides basic information in a series of short presentations. Accompanying each section, there is an activity designed to help the teacher or home visitor do the following:

- reflect on the qualities and beliefs he or she brings to the work,
- problem solve, explore possible alternatives, or
- practice skills such as observation.

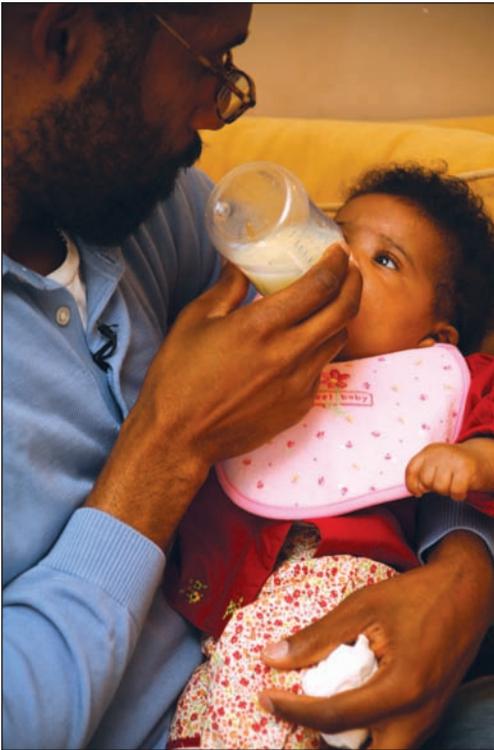
These activities should be reviewed with a director or supervisor to promote reflection and ensure understanding.

This module focuses on serving very young infants. It emphasizes the importance of relationships, child development, and how young infants need security and help in regulating their reactions.



How the Young Infant Grows and Develops

As a teacher or home visitor working with young infants and their families in infant-toddler programs, you will always be working with two new beginnings at a time. You will get to know and support not only the growth of each new baby but also the new family a birth creates.



You will share the development of special skills and information with families. In the first 8 months of life, you will enjoy with the family the many “firsts” of a baby’s life. You will see some of the first smiles, first successes at rolling over, first babbling, and first long, loving gazes.

As the infant-toddler teacher or home visitor, you should know how to work with families to make sure everyone is giving good care and healthy experiences to young babies. From this module, you should learn the following:

- How responsive care builds relationships
 - How families learn about their babies and grow and adapt to their new roles
 - How primary caregiving and continuity of care support relationships
 - How relationships are the base of learning
- How babies learn to manage their reactions to the world
 - What makes babies feel safe and secure
 - How relationships shape brain development
 - How to keep babies safe and healthy
 - How to support learning in all areas of development

Your understanding and ability to share knowledge of this very special time at the start of life will make a big difference for many families through EHS and MSHS.

Primary caregiving refers to one teacher being responsible for a small number of children.

Continuity of care refers to a context in which one teacher or home visitor works with the same children and families over time—ideally, 3 years.

Relationships as Foundation

Tamisa sits back and watches as Marcia holds her newborn close, murmuring to him. Tamisa would love to hold this soft, new life. Instead, she admires the relationship, “He looks so happy and safe with you. You just seem to know what he needs every minute!”

Tamisa is a home visitor for EHS. In this quiet visit, she is developing a relationship with a new mother. At the same time, she is helping the mother and baby become close.

Each experience we have is recorded in our brain. When Marcia responds to her baby’s cries, coos, and gestures, he learns to communicate. When she comforts him quickly, he learns he can make things happen. When she shows him love, he learns that he is lovable. This baby is learning, minute by minute, that his mom will keep him safe and feeling good.



Marcia is helping her baby to become calm and focused. She will help him to look and listen to what is important. He will not have to react to every sound and light around him. Over time, she will show him the world is orderly and predictable. He will be safe and secure even as he actively explores his world.

Each experience the baby has will actually become part of his brain. Bruce Perry, a brain researcher, says that the way adults interact with the baby actually helps to form the parts of the brain. Think of it in terms of nutrition. If a baby is not fed consistent, predictable messages of love and communication, then those related areas of the brain are shut down and the child’s capacities to function later in life are compromised.

Tamisa helps Marcia see how important she is to her son. Marcia learns that every response is building trust and communication. Tamisa’s approval helps her feel like a good mother, capable of taking care of her baby.

To help teachers or home visitors to establish meaningful relationships with babies and families, programs need to establish primary caregiving by giving one staff person overall responsibility for services and contact with that family. Continuity of caregiving ensures that those relationships can develop over time. The parents, however, are always the truly primary relationships in a child’s life.

The Developmental Domains, Birth to 3 Months

As an infant-toddler teacher or home visitor, you will help families see and understand their baby's growth and learning. The development of young infants is amazing! These charts show when skills usually appear in three periods while babies are young infants: Birth–3 months, 3–6 months, and 6–9 months. Some skills may appear earlier or later in different babies.

Birth–3 months. In these first months, families are getting to know their new baby. Parents may be getting used to being parents for the first time. Babies are becoming used to breathing, sucking, eating, and eliminating; maintaining their body temperature; and maybe, getting used to their family's day and night cycles. The chart shows what skills may emerge.

<p>Muscle/Motor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gains some neck and trunk control • Lifts head and shoulders when tummy is on floor • Brings hands to mouth 	<p>Learning/Cognitive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begins to calm by sucking, or through an adult's comforting • Gazes into eyes of adult • Looks toward a familiar voice
<p>Social-emotional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likes to look at faces • Imitates other people's facial expressions and sounds • Looks at other babies • Cries when hears others crying 	<p>Language/Communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listens to language, especially when directed to baby • Cries to express discomfort • Enjoys songs

As an infant-toddler teacher or home visitor, you will work with families to do the following:

- Help babies as they first learn to eat through breast feeding or bottles
- Provide activities that help babies to gain strength
- Help babies get used to being with only a few, important adults
- Calm babies when they cry
- Talk and sing to babies
- Help babies feel safe and secure



*Thinking About It...
The Developmental Domains 3 to 6 Months, and 7 to 9 Months*

Young infants want to do everything! They want to look, taste, move, and talk!
What do you see in this picture that suggests this little girl is between 3 and 6 months?



1. Describe the way this young infant is using her body.

2. How is she communicating with her teacher or family?

3. How might the teacher or family encourage the following kinds of development?

- Muscle/Motor
- Language/Communication
- Learning/Cognitive
- Social/Emotional

The Developmental Domains 3 to 6 Months and 7 to 9 Months

3–6 months. In this period, babies manage their bodies. They have back-and-forth communication. Most fun of all, babies are busy explorers if they have adults nearby to help them feel safe. The chart shows what skills may emerge during this period.

Muscle/Motor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rolls • Sits with assistance • Reaches, brings objects to mouth 	Learning/Cognitive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoys looking at hands and feet • Repeats movements with body, toys • Examines toys, objects
Social-Emotional: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watches, touches peers • Prefers familiar adults • Expresses feelings to familiar adults • Prefers to play near adults 	Language/Communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smiles with intention • Babbles • Shows interest in pictures in books

As an infant-toddler teacher or home visitor, you will work with families to do the following:

- Encourage babies as they roll and sit
- Provide safe, interesting toys—just within reach
- Use words to describe what baby is doing
- Show approval and interest in babies' curiosity
- Mirror and describe babies' feelings
- Respond to babies' sounds as conversation
- Stay close to babies as they practice their new skills

7–9 months. Babies move off to explore but want to keep contact with familiar adults. They use “babbling” as a way of talking to keep in touch. The chart shows what skills may emerge during this period.

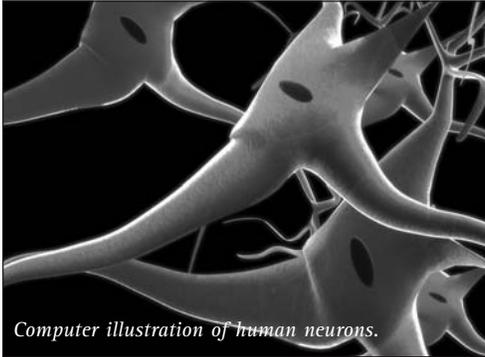
<p>Muscle/Motor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crawling, creeping • Fingers rake into a grasp • Uses hands to open and close books and doors as well as to pick up and drop objects 	<p>Learning/Cognitive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes toys do something • Looks for dropped toys • Puts objects “in and out” of containers
<p>Social-Emotional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May become anxious around strange adults • Crawls over peers; may treat them like objects • Uses facial expressions to express a variety of feelings 	<p>Language/Communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes turns in “conversations” • Points to pictures • Explores making sounds • May recognize own name, “mama,” “daddy,” “bottle”

As an infant-toddler teacher or home visitor, you will work with families to do the following:

- **Keep babies safe and encourage them as they crawl and creep**
- **Provide interesting toys to pick up, hold, throw, and drop**
- **Look at pictures in books with babies**
- **Play “conversation” games, imitating each other, talking about feelings**
- **Provide toys that have buttons to push, levers to move, things that fit inside each other**

Early Experiences and Brain Development

As an infant-toddler teacher or home visitor, you need to know what science and research are telling us about how babies grow and learn. Good information helps you keep babies healthy, safe, and able to learn well. Some of the most exciting information from science is about how early experiences affect the brain.



- The brain is made of cells called *neurons*.
- The center of the cell, like all cells, is the *nucleus*.
- Neurons each have one *axon* that carries information from that neuron to other neurons.
- Neurons have many *dendrites* that receive information from other neurons.
- An axon and dendrite connect and exchange information at a *synapse*.

Each experience a baby has is recorded in synapses in the brain. When a baby has repeated experiences such as sucking from a bottle or looking at his mother's smile, the synapses that hold that memory become very strong.

Babies need repeated experiences of feeling safe and loved to create a brain that is able to learn. When babies are comfortable, their bodies create a healthy bath of hormones for the brain. When babies are left on their own or in frightening situations, the body creates hormones that are harmful to the developing brain.

Neuron: One of the cells that makes up the brain.

Axon: Thin fiber that carries information from one cell to another.

Dendrite: A fiber in a brain cell that receives information.

Synapse: The point where axon and dendrite meet and store information.

Hormones: Chemical produced in the body to direct the activity of other cells

Security and Regulation: The Big Ideas in the Young Infant's Development

At the age of 2 weeks, Arielle reacts wildly to the sound of the family dog barking. Arielle screams with heaving sobs. Her arms and legs flap in the air. She hiccups and gasps for breath. Her mom tries to distract her, lifting her up and down in a swinging motion, but she cries harder. The home visitor wonders aloud whether helping her become quiet and calm might work better. She shows her mom how to swaddle Arielle tightly in a blanket and then hands her to her mom to hold against her heart. Arielle quiets as she listens to her mother's heart beat.

For Arielle and her mother, this moment is starting them on an important path in building a trusting relationship. Arielle's mom is learning to help her baby regulate her reactions to startling things in the environment and even to strong feelings within her own body. By helping Arielle to feel more in control, she is also helping her to feel secure.



Security and regulation are two big ideas in development for young infants. We often think of development as motor milestones such as crawling or walking or as language milestones such as babbling or using words. The ideas of security and regulation are so big, they cross all parts of development.

Babies react to all of the things that happen around them. Regulation is the word used to describe attempts to control those reactions. At first, families and teachers help babies to regulate their reactions by holding them, swaddling (wrapping snugly in a blanket), giving them pacifiers, rocking, singing quietly, or murmuring. As the baby matures, she begins to find ways to help herself control her reactions. This ability is called self-regulation.

Security refers to a baby's experience of having had adults keep her safe. She learns that they come and comfort her when she cries. They feed her, change wet diapers, keep her warm, as well as talk and play with her. As a baby learns that adults will keep her safe, she will begin to cry less and start to take more interest in exploring and learning.

Regulation describes the baby's ability to control her reactions to feelings or events.

Security refers to a baby's sense of ongoing safety—knowing adults will keep him safe.

Related Head Start Program Performance Standards

1304.20 (f)—Individualization of the program

1304.21(a)(1) (i) (ii) (iii) (iv)—Child development and education approach for all children

1304.21(a)(2)(i) (ii)—Parents

1304.21(a)(3)(i)(A) (B) (C) (D) (E)—Support social and emotional development

1304.21(a)(3)(ii)—Planning for routines and transitions

1304.21(a)(4)(i) (ii) (iii) (iv)—Each child’s cognitive and language skills

1304.21(a)(5)(i) (ii) (iii) (6)—Physical development

1304.21(b)(1)(i) (ii) (iii)—Child development and education approach for infants and toddlers

1304.21(b)(2)(i) (ii)—Social and emotional development of infants and toddlers

1304.21(b)(3)(i) (ii)—Physical development of infants and toddlers

1304.24(a)(1)(i) (ii) (iii) (iv)—Grantee and delegate agencies must work collaboratively with parents

1304.40(e)(1) (2) (3)—Parent involvement in child development and education

1306.23(a) (b)—Staff Training