

Caring Connections: Let's Talk About Following the Baby's Lead

Podcast Transcription

[Podcast Series Intro Video: Music plays in the background. Video lists each of the podcasts in the series with three pictures that correspond to each topic area. Topic areas include You, Nourishment, Routines, Environments, Following the Baby, Movement, Music and Empathy]

[Slide with photograph of Amanda Perez, Senior Writer/Training Specialist, Early Head Start National Resource Center]

Amanda Perez: “Hi! And welcome to the fifth podcast in the Early Head Start Caring Connections series. My name is Amanda Perez and I am a Senior Writer and Training Specialist with the Early Head Start National Resource Center. We hope that you are enjoying these podcasts and are sharing them with others who might find them useful. Don't forget to take a look at the information sheet that accompanies each podcast. It will direct you to the resources that we refer to . . . and Head Start Program Performance Standards that are relevant to the information covered.”

[An infant and caregiver play in a quiet corner, stretched out in front of a mirror.]

Amanda Perez: “In the last podcast, Jan Greenberg talked about the positive messages that you can build into young children's environments. It's amazing how much we can say with the physical environment! We learned that you can tell children: “You're safe. You can feel comfortable here. Give it a try! You can do it!”

[A mother reads with a mobile infant.]

Amanda Perez: “In this podcast, we will talk about one simple – but powerful – practice that echoes those messages, following a child's lead. This practice is helpful with infants and toddlers at all stages and ages, but particularly with mobile infants, between six and eighteen months.”



Amanda Perez: “Have you ever played follow the leader? I used to love playing with my older brother. This is a picture of us when we were small. I am really watching him here! I spent so much of my childhood admiring Malcolm, copying everything he did. So when we were older, and played Follow the Leader, following Malcolm felt familiar.”

[Slide with pictures of Amanda and Malcolm.]

Amanda Perez: “But leading him was special! When I interested him in something new, I felt powerful, confident and capable. I felt great!”

[A toddler clasps hands with his teacher and friend, and chases a mobile infant in a park.]

Amanda Perez: “You can play a modified version of follow the leader with even the youngest children in the lead. Here’s a short clip of a two-month old and his mother. She really observes her baby, and does what he does. As she follows her baby’s lead, consider: what messages is she communicating to her baby boy?”

[A mother plays follow the leader with her two-month old, copying his actions.]

Mother: “Hello!

Baby: “Grunt.”

Mother: “Yes! Yes! Can you say ma ma again? Ma Ma.”

[Infant forms his mouth into an “O” shape and the mother copies.]

Amanda Perez: “So, what messages did you hear? I heard: “I see you.” “You are so interesting!” “Look – you can nod your head and so can I! We are connected and alike!” and “You have great power to affect me!” Wow!”

[Caregiver and young infant waves hands in front of each other.]

Amanda Perez: “Over time, we hope this baby, and all two-month-olds will have lots of interactions and experiences - with their families and others - that are loaded with these important messages. If these messages build up to offer young infants a sense of security and confidence, then, between six and eighteen months, when they are mobile infants, they are ready to explore.”

[A mobile infant explores a tunnel.]

Amanda Perez: “Consider now this clip of a mobile infant exploring a tunnel. We might expect him to come right through, but he is eager to learn all he can.



He is learning with his whole body and mind, all his senses. This is true exploration.”

[A mobile infant crawls across the floor.]

Amanda Perez: “Like this little guy, young children are wired to explore and learn! This is where the environment meets interactions with nurturing parents and caregivers.

[A mobile infant uses blocks in different ways.]

Amanda Perez: When children are secure that the adults around them will protect them from harm, they are free to follow their curiosity, wherever their minds and bodies take them. Our role is to offer them safe activities, objects and interactions that interest them, and to follow their lead as they explore.”

[A baby responds to an infant massage from her caregiver.]

Amanda Perez: “When Magda Gerber, the early childhood thinker and educator, talked about the adult role with infants and toddlers, she used the term “respect.” She stressed that even the youngest babies communicate with us, tell us in a variety of ways what they want and need. Caring adults invite their opinions, and listen when they provide them.”

[Slide with photograph of Magda Gerber, Founding Director, Resources for Infant Educarers (RIE)]

Amanda Perez: “In the following clip from “Seeing Infants with New Eyes,” Magda offers a snack to a table of infants. More than twenty years after this video was produced, you might not offer infants juice at snack time. Focus here on Magda’s interactions with these babies. How does she follow each child’s lead?”

[Magda Gerber talks to the mobile infants and wait for responses.]

MAGDA CLIP: from **0:25 – 1:06, begin as the snack begins and cut before the banana.**

[A little boy examines a rain stick]

Amanda Perez: Did you notice how Magda carefully observed the children she was feeding, listened for even their most subtle cues, and followed their leads? When we show babies that their choices are important to us, we also teach them self-awareness and self-confidence. This has tremendous importance in learning – and also in self-regulation.



[Slide of the definition of “Self-regulation.”]

Amanda Perez: “Developing self-regulation is a major task of the early years. Self-regulation is the ability to manage one’s own emotions, behavior, attention and states, including hunger and a sense of fullness. Paula Mydlenski, a Registered Dietician and training specialist, talked about supporting self-regulation through following a child’s lead in a webinar called *Beyond Bottles and Baby Food*. Let’s listen in.”

[Slide with photograph of Paula Mydlenski, R.D., Training Specialist.]

[Slides from webinar *Beyond Bottles and Baby Food*.]

Paula Mydlenski: “Here we go back to the dance of nourishment. Who leads that dance? Uh huh, it’s not us, it is the child. It’s the child’s cue that tells us when she wants to eat, how much she wants to eat, and if she wants to eat at all. Some years ago, Dr. Sam Forman, and his group of researchers at Harvard did some wonderful research. He was a pediatrician and a nutrition investigator. They found that left to their own resources infants and young children can self-regulate how much they should eat. Think about it, have you ever tried to give, say, a seven month old baby that extra spoon full of mashed bananas? What happens? Yup, you got it! It comes right back out! That child knows how much he or she wants to eat. Something happens when the child gets to be about three years old or so. They learn the game. They learn that they can please the adult by not listening to that internal cue, by not leading the dance, but giving the lead over to the adult and that’s a mistake. When they do that they override the self-regulation of how much they should eat, when they should eat, and they start pleasing the adult. They do take that extra bite, even though they don’t want it. They’ve lost the connection with the feeling of fullness, feeling satisfied, feeling as we call it, satiated. I don’t know how many of you have it today, but if you have over-ride that internal mechanism, given up the dance young in life to the adult, now if you are having some issues with your weight, or sometimes eat and can’t connect with how full you are and overeat, it might be because years ago you overrode that beautiful self-regulation, that beautiful internal mechanism of your brain that said, ‘I’m full.’”

[A caregiver diapers a mobile infant.]

Amanda Perez: “Paula reminds us that from birth, children not only have a drive to learn, but they have a natural ability to regulate not only what they eat, but the sensory information they can control.

Caregiver: “Are you ready for a dry diaper, Kimmy? Yeah? You are? Good!”



Amanda Perez: When we follow young children’s lead, we honor their communication, and support a skill that they can build on in a lifetime of healthy eating, learning, and interactions with the world.”

[A mother and home visitor talk together, as they respond to a mobile infant’s cues.]

Amanda Perez: “So let’s review: When we follow a child’s lead, physically, they learn to use their bodies to explore and to trust the messages their bodies are sending them. Cognitively, they learn that learning is fun and interesting, their curiosity is valuable. Emotionally, they learn that their thoughts and feelings are important and worth expressing.”

[A toddler dances a celebration, followed by his home visitor and parents]

Amanda Perez: “Consider now your practice. How do you follow a child’s lead – or work with parents to follow their children? How do you do it during mealtimes, other routines, and in play, and maybe in dancing? How do you observe and listen for their cues, and then respond?”

[A caregiver gently guides a baby away from sitting on his friend’s toy.]

Amanda Perez: “One last point: of course, following a child’s lead doesn’t always mean saying yes. Sometimes, a toddler will choose to wear shorts on a day when it’s snowing, or a child will want to sit on a friend’s toy or hit, and we have to say no. Remember your role as an adult in that child’s life – you are nurturer, teacher, protector, provider.

[A caregiver plays peek a boo with a toddler.]

Amanda Perez: “And also remember the messages that you want to convey: You are safe. You are interesting and smart. You matter. Following a child’s lead is one technique that communicates all those important messages to the children you serve.”

[Slide/Banner for EHS NRC and ECLKC]

Amanda Perez: “Thanks so much for joining us! You can look us up at www.ehsnrc.org or on Head Start’s Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center at eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov for more resources designed to support you in your work. Stay tuned for the next “Caring Connections” Podcast on “Movement” hosted by Laura Annunziata . . . This is Amanda Perez at the Early Head Start National Resource Center wishing you all the best – as you follow AND lead – in your work.”

