

Infant Toddler-Coffee Break: Episode 2

Peter Pizzolongo: Welcome to Teacher Time Coffee Break. I'm Peter Pizzolongo.

Alissa Mwenelupembe: And I'm Alissa Mwenelupembe.

Peter: This Teacher Time Coffee Break gives us an opportunity to talk one on one with our Teacher Time expert and answer questions we received during the Infant/Toddler Teacher Time Episode, Creating a Responsive Environment for Young Children. If you haven't seen this episode, make sure you take a few minutes to watch it. We received some questions during the episode, so I'm ready to ask the questions now for Alissa to respond to.

So, during the episode Carol had said, "Be responsive to the children's interests." Well, Joy asked, "In my infant room how do I know what they're interested in? They're babies!"

Alissa: Gosh. That's a great question, and I think one that a lot of teachers have. How do you know what infants are interested in? Because they can't communicate with us in the same way that toddlers can, using words. I think that when teachers are paying very close attention and observing infants in their classroom, they're going to notice that the infant's gaze might follow certain materials in the classroom certain activities they're doing. They're going to see that infant's face light up when they're really excited about something that's happening, or they really maybe even dislike something. They're going to see that communication also.

So, I think just paying really close attention to the nonverbal cues that infants are offering is going to be a great way for teachers to know what their interests are. They also want to make sure that they're communicating with the families. Families really know a lot about their children, and we need to make sure that we're including their insight and their perspective into the things that we're observing in the classroom also.

Peter: And just like children's interests are going to differ from baby to baby, their ways of communicating what they're interested in is going to differ as well.

Alissa: Definitely.

Peter: So, you really have to get to know your babies to know that. Another question that we got, this came from Beth. She mentioned that we had seen on the video in the episode a baby pushing herself toward a book, and the teacher said, "You're almost there." And Beth wanted to know is it ever okay to help a child to crawl as she's starting to push herself up?

Alissa: I think as adults we want to help children so much, and we really want to see them be successful. But I think as a teacher you have to step back and say, "If I go in and I intervene in this situation, what learning might I get in the way of?" And so when that baby is pushing her body and trying to move, she's being able to get that great gross motor development. She's building her muscles. And if the teacher--if Beth went in there and got in the way of that development, then that baby could actually not be able to have some of the skills that she might have if she was able to do that herself.

Peter: Yeah, yeah. And we know that in so many domains it's sort of the marriage of maturation and the experiences that children have, which is where the learning happens. And with physical development in particular, you can't teach somebody to crawl. You can't teach them to stand up and walk. They do that when they're ready for it. So the next question that we got— you, Alissa, you had talked about things in the environment for babies and for older children.

So Sonya asked in her family child care home, "How do we keep the babies from putting the things in their mouths that are there for the older children?"

Alissa: That is a concern I hear a lot from family child care providers. You know, they have children of all different ages in their environment. And they want to offer materials that are complex enough for older children, but they also want to keep the infants safe and give them an environment that's a yes environment for them. I think that all really comes down to that close, careful supervision. When teachers are actively supervising the children in their care, they're going to be able to offer some things that maybe are appropriate for some children and not for others, because they're going to be right there next to those children making sure that they are safe and that they are able to engage in the materials that are appropriate for their age group.

Peter: Yeah, yeah. And it's really being able to notice, "I can see everything that is happening in my environment all the time," because you know the crawlers want to crawl right over the non-crawling--

Alissa: Oh, yes.

Peter: --immobile babies. Yeah, yeah. So here is our last question. Carrie, in the literacy segment, had talked about setting up libraries with books on shelves for babies.

So Emma asked, "Where can I find resources to help me know what to do with babies and books?"

Alissa: Yeah. That's great. There are so many resources available to help teachers, not only decide what sorts of books to offer in their classrooms but also how to interact with those books and the children that they care for.

Peter: Mmhmm. And so many of those resources are available to our audience. If they go to the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, the ECLKC, one of those resources—the Planned Language Approach, one of the Big 5, is about book knowledge and print. So, there are examples on that resource for babies and toddlers as well. Another good resource is Early Essentials, and there are two webisodes; in particular, one is on environments and the other is on language development. So those are very helpful. And we have other resources as well that are on the Viewer's Guide for this episode.

Alissa: Great.

Peter: So thank you very much, Alissa. It's been wonderful chatting with you again. And thank you for being our expert both on Teacher Time as well as on the Teacher Time Coffee Break. We love working with you to respond to the questions that teachers have. We hope that you all enjoyed hearing your questions from the field and the answers we provided.

Remember, when you watch a Teacher Time episode, you have an opportunity to ask questions, which we'll respond to on the next Coffee Break. It was great having you all with us, and I hope to see you on the next Teacher Time. In the meantime, we'll see you on the Teacher Time community, on MyPeers for more conversation.