

## Teacher Time for Infant and Toddler Teachers

Carol Bell: Hello, and welcome to another edition of Teacher Time for Infant and Toddler Teachers. I'm Carol Bellamy, and today I'm here with a special guest host, Judi Stevenson-Garcia. Judi is the co-host of the Teacher Time preschool episodes, and we're happy to have her here with us today.

Judi Stevenson-Garcia: Hi Carol. Thank you. I'm excited to be with you to talk about infants and toddlers. But first, we have just a little business. Remember, this is one of eight episodes this season. Each episode will have a follow up Coffee Break where we answer the questions you send in during today's show. We'll remind you throughout the show to send in questions, but you can send them in at any time.

Carol: And another reminder, when we use the term teacher, we really are referring to everyone who works with infants, toddlers, and their families in an educational environment. So, we are including family childcare providers, which are people who provide child care in centers who may not see themselves as teachers, but you are.

Judi: And for everyone watching, we invite you to join us on MyPeers where we are creating a community for teachers to talk to each other and share their stories, successes, and questions. Please be sure to check it out.

Carol: In the past two episodes, responsive approaches to curriculum and responsive environments, we have started the conversation about what infants and toddlers need from the adults who care for them. Today we are going dig a little deeper into how you can be the kind of adult that supports brain development. In fact, you probably already are.

Judi: Before we get started, we want to ask you a question. How much do you know about early brain development? You should see the response options in front of you. Please choose one and tell us what you know about early brain development. We'll come back to your responses in a bit.

Carol: Today's topic is responsive interactions. Responsive interactions are different from responsive curriculum. They are the moment-to-moment engagements that occur between adults and children.

Judi: So, what does that look like? Think about an infant who makes a noise or a gesture. Then the adult responds based on what she thinks the infant means. And they go back and forth in a responsive way. This is referred to as serve and return.

Carol: That's right. Why are responsive interactions so important? Because they build the architecture of the brain. These interactions cause connections to happen within the brain that literally create the structure of the brain. It seems so simple, but these interactions are the foundation for all later learning.

Judi: Right. Today we are coming back to the three R's. Respect. When you have a respectful, nurturing relationship with a young child, you are able to really observe what the child is doing; Reflect. After you observe, you take some time to reflect on what their interests are and what their learning goals might be; and then relate, choose how to respond to the child. Take into account temperament, learning interests, and family cultures as you plan based on your observations. We have a video where we can really see that serve and return happening with a young infant. Let's take a look.

Teacher: I understand it all, girl. I understand! [Baby Coos] Mm-hmm. You just are talking? You gonna sit up? Since you didn't want to eat your, drink your milk yet? Huh? You didn't want it. You know you didn't. Are you gonna grab my hand? Hi, Brooklyn. You see my watch? You see that? You see? Hmm? Look at that. There you go, Brooklyn. Yeah.

Judi: So, that was great! Carol, so, tell me what did you think about that video?

Carol: Yeah. So, she sat down—the teacher sat down to feed the baby, but Brooklyn wasn't ready.

Judi: Right.

Carol: So, there was some back and forth talking. She followed the child's interest in the watch and was talking about it. And, finally, when the baby was ready, she ate. The teacher was very patient. She was willing to do the things on Brooklyn's time.

Judi: Right. I think that's so important. Right? She waited until Brooklyn indicated that she was ready as opposed to saying, "It's time to eat. It's time to eat." She responded to Brooklyn's interest in her watch, which was perfect. And I think that's one of the things where we call it contingent responses. Right? So, my interaction with you is going to match your interaction with me. We're going share interests, and I'm going to respond to what you're showing me with the same level of interest. "Oh, wow. Oh, you like my watch?" Right? As opposed to, "That's great. It's my watch. It's time to eat."

Carol: Exactly.

Judi: I think this is especially important when we think about children who may have special needs and the opportunity we have to maybe engage with other adults, like an early intervention provider, parents, other specialists who might work with the child so that we can really learn how children express their interests.

Carol: Exactly.

Judi: And the same would be true for children who have maybe different cultures or different languages. Right? So, the interactions that they're used to or accustomed to on a daily basis might be different, and so communicating with their families about that would be really important so that we can respond in a way that's meaningful to each child

Carol: Exactly.

Judi: That's great. So, we're going to take a few minutes and look at the poll responses from our question. We asked you what you know about early brain development. It looks like there are a good number of you watching today who really do have some good understanding about brain development. And if you don't, we're going to have the opportunity today to talk a little bit more about responsive interactions and what it means for early brain development.

Carol: Now we're going to take a few minutes to think about how responsive interactions can support early mathematical thinking. Earlier this week, Emily Adams and Carrie Germeroth from the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning, had the chance to talk about supporting infants and toddlers in the development of mathematical thinking. Let's hear what they had to say.

Emily Adams: Carrie, thank you so much for having me here in your Denver office.

Carrie Germeroth: Well, it's great to have you here. And I'm excited to have you talking about how to support the foundations of early math and how we can do this through responsive interactions and conversations with teachers.

Emily: Thank you. So, tell me a little bit about what math is like for infants and toddlers.

Carrie: Well, we tend to underestimate what infants and toddlers can do, as adults, and so actually babies from very on are able to tell the difference just visually—just by looking at different sets of objects or different amounts and they can tell the difference in amounts very early on. And then as we progress and children hear more and more numbers words, you can have toddlers, two year olds who are probably pointing and they're reciting some numbers because they've heard you say them. They may not always be saying them in the correct order, or pointing and counting on each one, but they're chanting. They might be saying, "One-two-three-four-five-six-seven." And these are still the foundations of early math, and they're going to develop into this more complex concept of numbers that we think of with older children. And so it's really just our job to build on these foundations.

Emily: So, that's amazing. It sounds like infants and toddlers sort of naturally come with a sense of math and numbers. Can you tell us some things that teachers can do to support this?

Carrie: Right. So, it's not about setting up activities, like we might do with older children. It's really about kind of seamlessly integrating math talk into children's play and everyday routines and experiences. So, think about, for example, if you're playing peekaboo with a child. You might cover your eyes and say, "One, two, three peekaboo," and you do that repeatedly, and so the baby starts to anticipate that on the count of three you're going to say peekaboo. So, they're counting. Or what if you are setting the table for snack time and you're counting the number of chairs that you have to put

at the table, and then the number of plates and the number of cups. So, everything could be counted in the environment. Books are another great way to build these foundations of math. Everybody has books in their rooms. Think about *Goodnight Moon*, a common book. You can talk about numbers and just counting the different objects that are in the pictures. There are two mittens and two kittens, or three bears that are sitting on three chairs. You can talk about spatial relations. You can talk about measurement and shapes as well. So, really books are a great opportunity to build the foundations of math. And, again, it's just something that you naturally have probably in your environment already. Take a math walk, whether that's with your colleagues just to open your eyes to the math around you or take children on a math walk and count everything. Count the number of cars that go by. Count the doors. Talk about the shape of the doors or the shape of the windows. I think you can find the math in just about everything if you open your eyes to it. And I want to also mention that in the *Viewer's Guide* we have a nice list of math words that you can print out and you could hang up maybe on your desk or somewhere in your room as a reminder to, "Hey, I'm going to try to use five words from this list this week," and then a different five words the next week.

Emily: I love that idea. And I feel like the math walk sounds like a really fun way either to collaborate with colleagues and think about, "How do we think about math in our classrooms or in our work?" and then hanging up those words is such a great strategy to just remind yourself like there's more than just counting and up and down; there's just a whole series of words that you can use sort of within these day-to-day experiences. And that reminds me, you have a video here that shows how day-to-day experiences can be including math words.

Carrie: Yes. So I love this video. It's just another nice example of an everyday play experience. And the teacher just does a nice job of being really responsive and using math talk while children are engaging in this play. And so let's watch.

Emily: Okay.

Teacher: Here we go, Callie. Are you ready? Say one. Two-

Student: Go, Callie.

Teacher: All right. That'll work. Want to count Mason out? Ready. One, two, three go. Oh, we're going to four? Good job, Connor. I like that. Yay, Isabelle! Here comes Allison.

Student: Go!

Teacher: Go!

Student: Count one two three. Okay. One...

Student: Two...

Teacher: Two.

Student: Three...

Teacher: Three. Go! Good job, Connor. You want to count? Okay. One, two, three, four, five go. Yay! One, two—oh, she couldn't wait, could she? She just couldn't wait. That's fine. She went on two. That's good. You want to count? Hayley didn't want to wait either. That's fine.

Emily: Oh, that's such a great video. So, tell me some of the things that you see this teacher doing really well there.

Carrie: Yeah. So, first off, I love that children are having so much fun counting. And so the teacher is counting for them as they're waiting to go down the slide. Some children can wait as long as five and some can't wait at all or just to two. And that's okay. She's being really flexible. And she's also modeling counting with her fingers. She's going, "One, two, three," which is a great strategy to model, as a lot of children, as they move into adding and subtracting, will use their fingers as a strategy, which is a fine strategy for children to use if they choose. She's just doing a lot of great things and adding some nice math talk into this everyday play experience.

Emily: Yeah. So, I love that this clearly wasn't something that she set up as "We're going to have a

math experience.” Right? There was some play already happening. She was there with the children and she was able to be really responsive about what was happening in the moment and provide some math learning that was happening right there. So, I really like that. You also brought some pictures that have that same kind of thing happening where you can just use these everyday things that happen and build on them to make them more math experiences.

Carrie: Yes. So, both of these pictures, again, like you said, everyday experiences. So, if we look at this first picture. It’s a little boy who is building with blocks. So, the teacher in this picture, she might count the number of blocks or she might ask him to put one more on top and then one more and then one more. She might say, “Let’s see who can build a taller tower,” and then compare sizes. Or, “Who can build a longer road?” and, again, compare length. She might build a pattern using the different color blocks and see if he can duplicate or repeat the pattern with his blocks. And he may not be able to yet, but that’s fine; he’s still being exposed to that language and understanding of what is a pattern. And then in this second picture these two little boys are drumming. The music is just a nice way to support the foundations in general, whether it’s with an instrument or whether you’re singing and having children clap along.

Babies naturally pick up rhythm. They sway to the beat when music comes on. And so it’s great to be able to capitalize on this natural love and engagement with music. So, having children clap or pat or use an instrument while you’re singing or when music is playing helping them find the beat really, again, supports that one-to-one correspondence, which is just later on what we think of when children are counting one number for each object that they’re counting. This isn’t going to develop really until around age three or four maybe, but we can still lay the foundations now through these everyday experiences and play by the words we use.

Emily: That’s so wonderful. Thank you so much, Carrie. I love how these are things that probably you already have in the classroom, families may have in the home and certainly your family child care would have these items as well. You don’t have to go buy new things to create math learning in your classroom. So, thank you so much for coming. Definitely check out the Viewer’s Guide. We do have some more resources for you around math learning for infants and toddlers.

Judi: Thank you, Carrie and Emily. Now we’re happy to welcome our special guest expert, Sandy Petersen. Sandy is an infancy expert and early childhood education consultant from Denver Colorado. Hi, Sandy,

Sandy Petersen: Hi, Judi.

Judi: Thanks so much for being here today.

Sandy: I’m really glad to join you.

Judi: So, we’re going to talk a little bit today about responsive interactions, and I would love for you to help us understand why they’re so essential to early brain development.

Sandy: Well, those first interactions, when they are responsive, actually have chemical occasions in both brains, both the mom or dad and the child. So, in the first interactions, as the parent is looking lovingly at the child and feeling full of love, the hormone oxytocin is being released in the brain. And that’s called the love hormone. The interesting thing is that the same thing happens in the baby’s brain. So, the baby is having this hormonal experience of love during these interactions and the hormone is affecting the structure of the brain. The other thing that happens is that as the adult is cooing and smiling, their right hemisphere is lighting up with lots of activity. The baby’s right hemisphere is lighting up with exactly the same activity. They’re receiving the information, but they’re also experiencing it as though they were the ones who were cooing and smiling. So, we get what’s called a set of, a network of mirror neurons, brain cells that are mirroring each other. So, through interactions these quick little moments, the brain gets built.

Judi: Wow. That’s amazing. Just from an early interaction.

Sandy: Yes.

Judi: Wow. That’s amazing. We’re going to look at a classic research experiment conducted by Dr. Ed.

Tronick to understand how basic and important this connection is.

Dr. Ed Tronick: We record the baby's facial expressions and the mother's facial expressions. We want to understand the relationship between them. [Mom makes sounds] After a period of playing and engagement with the infant, we then signal to the mother to hold a still face, to not use your hands, to not talk and just look straight ahead. And the effects on the infant were really quite dramatic right away. Almost every infant picks up that the mother is no longer responding. Babies have all these ways of trying to get the mother's attention. When we saw Annaleah today, she does a fake cough with her mother. [Baby coughs] They may start self-comforting by sucking on a hand.

Judi: Well, that was great.

Sandy: And hard to watch!

Judi: It's so interesting just to watch how the baby responds to the interaction and then kind of the lack of engagement that the adult provides. So, tell us just a little bit about what that means for the baby and for the adult.

Sandy: So, clearly this mom and baby have a really connected relationship. You see that in the first moments. When mom does what's called the still face, this is called the still face experiment, she turns back to the baby and doesn't respond. The baby is trying really hard to engage her. But within minutes this healthy baby with a healthy relationship really falls apart. She cries. Her respiration changes. She loses her posture. And this happens in minutes.

Judi: So, what does this mean in terms of the importance of engaging responsive interactions, the adult's role and then what the infant or young child will do to make sure that those things happen?

Sandy: First of all, adults do not need to respond 100% of the time. In fact, if they did, babies would get a little bit bored. They like to be able to make some of that engagement happen. So, babies have all kinds of strategies, the simple ones of catching your gaze, of smiling, of making little sounds, when they're a little older they point, reaching up. They have so many ways of engaging. And this baby went into lots of other strategies; the coughing, the crying and finally the baby wasn't even trying. It's not entirely the adult's responsibility to initiate every interaction, but you can see how important it is to the baby that the adult is responding well.

Judi: Right. The adult's response is really what's important. Right?

Carol: Yes. Very, very important. Sandy, I wondered about the three Rs. Could you talk about the three Rs?

Sandy: Yes. Because that's exactly what this is about. The first R is respect. That means that the adult assumes that the baby has an intention in whatever she's doing. The adult observes that baby while they're interacting to try to understand what that intention is. Respect means that- Or, reflect rather, means that after you get that kind of glimmer of, "I think I know what's going on here," then you take a moment to wonder about the child's intentions and what might you do that would be the most responsive words or facial expressions or actions that you can take.

Judi: So, you have the three Rs, and—

Sandy: So, we still have relate.

Judi: Right. Ok.

Sandy: The relate then is what does the adult do or not do, because sometimes doing nothing might be the most responsive. You take actions that show you're really interested, that you appreciate what the child is doing and, best of all, you somehow expand that experience. So, being responsive requires being accurate about that intention, reading the child right and being timely. So, the three Rs actually happen in a moment. It sounds like this big intellectual thing, but it happens in a moment, and you will have many, many opportunities to return to them.

Judi: That's so interesting. Sometimes we're so focused on teaching that we don't take the time to be really responsive and we are often tempted to show children what to do instead of waiting for them and observing to see if they can figure it out first. For example, a teacher might stack blocks for a child

who is struggling to balance them, or ask the child to count the blocks instead of recognizing that stacking and balancing is the skill the child is focused on. So, I would like for you to tell us about a time where you were able to slow down and really be responsive to a child. What happened? Take a few minutes to answer in the chat box. And while you do that let's take a look at this video of a diaper change. Pay attention to the responsive interaction.

Teacher: I'll help you. I'll get you on the first step. There you go. I'll get our bag out. Yeah, but keep going—you're almost there. Almost there. You're going the opposite way. No. Keep going up. I know. The doorknob looks so fascinating, but we have to get our diaper changed so we can eat breakfast. Let's keep climbing up. There you go. Push yourself up. [Background noise] You hear? They're doing the song. Can I help you the rest of the way? I'm gonna stand you up. There you go. We made it. I'm gonna lay you down. Here's you. There's Alu.

Carol: Sandy, could you tell us what you noticed about the video?

Sandy: Yes. Here this little boy is supposed to be climbing up the steps to the diaper change, and he's clearly capable of doing it, but he's really unfocused, because everything is drawing his attention away. So, the teacher keeps bringing him back to the task. She's patient. She gives him a moment to look, but she keeps bringing him back to the task. She's able to respect, reflect and relate and support him through this routine in a very connected way. So, I can give you a few more examples of what that might look like. Say you have a seven-week-old baby who's staring into her mother's eyes and suddenly a little smile appears on her face. Her mom immediately smiles back. We all would.

This response is natural. It's those mirror neurons kicking in on the mother's side, and then the baby's, but it is exactly the right response. It matches the baby's intention of warm social connection. So, then the baby's smile becomes a little larger, because she likes it. The mom's eyes get larger, her smile gets bigger and they go through this back and forth and back and forth in a moment. In terms of respect, the mom knows the baby intends something with that smile. For reflect she understands that intention and she knows how to respond. In this case it's almost instinctual. The response is timely, it's accurate and it expands the experience. So, you might say, "Well, everyone would respond like that to a young, smiling baby," but some adults are depressed. They might be preoccupied. Some are just not interested in a baby's experience, because they don't get that there's intention and learning at that age, so some children miss out on hundreds of responsive interactions every day.

Judi: I think it's interesting when you talk about these happy, loving interactions, and sometimes it would seem simple to respond to a smiling baby with a smile. But there are times maybe when there are attempts to communicate or things that happen in the classroom where it's not happy and joyful, but the response still needs to be the same. Right? So, maybe you could give us an example of using these three Rs when it's not necessarily about a happy, joyful experience.

Sandy: I have one that is really simple. I would take one that I got to see in an Early Head Start program. There was about an eighteen-month-old girl, who was standing next to and kind of leaning on their teacher's leg, and her friend came into the classroom and toddled over and gave her a big bear hug, and they both dropped. And the teacher, much to my pleasure, looked at them and said, "What a big hug! But you both fell over. We'll have to be a little more careful." But she tuned into the intention. It would have been so easy to say, "Don't be so rough," and feel as though the intention had been to knock the child over. But instead here's this warm, acknowledging responsive interaction.

Judi: That's great.

Carol: So, I was thinking how are responsive interactions the foundation for every domain in the Early Learning Outcomes Framework.

Sandy: Okay. And so the thing that is marvelous about infants and toddlers is that almost every moment with them actually affects every domain. So, let's look at a toddler who left a toy on the sofa, and now he's trying over and over again to climb up and get it, but he just can't quite make it. His family child care provider is watching, but she really respects his concentration and his persistence, so she sits back and watches. And then he looks at her and he says, "Dat," and he points to the toy.

Now, she could have just grabbed the toy and handed it to him at that point, and that would have

been responsive, but she had time to reflect and she understands that in terms of learning he was really trying a lot of motor strategies, so she wants to support that. She says, “You want that. You’re really working hard. How about if I just steady your leg here so you don’t slip?” And then that interaction supports motor learning. But it also supports approaches to learning, because her ability to wait and watch supported his persistence and mastery. She understood “dat” as language use, and responded to him using “that” and using it in a sentence, so expanding the language meaning. And she supported his social and emotional learning, because his efforts were respected and because he had a really positive interaction with an adult.

Judi: This is fantastic. It’s so interesting and I think it’s so powerful to hear about how everyday daily interactions that we have with young children can build their knowledge and skills in so many areas just from a simple interaction when the adult is really intentional about their response to the child. I think that’s really exciting to hear about, so thank you for sharing those examples with us. And thank you for being here today. It’s been so great to have you here with us

Sandy: Thank you. It’s been a pleasure.

Judi: Thanks, Sandy.

Carol: Now it’s time for you to try this approach in your program. Take a moment and watch an infant or toddler playing. Are you tempted to put your hand in and show her how to use the toy? Stop yourself. Respect. Look for her intentions. Then Reflect. What would be most supportive? A small hint? A word of encouragement? A smile? Or just staying nearby? And Relate.

Judi: Once you’ve tried the three Rs with your children, please take time to let us know what happened. We’d love to hear from you in our MyPeers online community. You can post there about your experiences and hear from others about theirs.

Carol: Remember, if you have any questions about responsive interactions, please send them in and Sandy will respond to your questions during our Coffee Break. The Coffee Break episode will be posted and available on the MyPeers group in two weeks.

Judi: Now we’re going to take a moment and connect this thinking about responsive interactions to the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. Peter Pizzolongo is here to tell us about that.

Peter Pizzolongo: I’m Peter Pizzolongo, Director of Training & Technical Assistance Services at the National Center for Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning. For this portion of Teacher Time we’ll focus on ELOF, the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five. ELOF is a framework that represents the continuum of learning for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers what children should know and be able to do during their formative years from birth through age five. ELOF outlines and describes the skills, behaviors, and concepts that Head Start and Head Start programs must foster in all children, including children who are dual language learners and children with disabilities. ELOF is organized in a way that can help teachers and families understand child development and guide the ways in which we help children learn. You can learn more about ELOF by going to the ELOF pages on the ECLKC website, the Office of Head Start’s Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. Today’s topic is responsive relationships. This ELOF segment will address the domain social and emotional development. This domain includes goals for relationships with adults, relationships with other children, emotional functioning, and infants and toddlers having a sense of identity and belonging. As you might guess from the information shared during this Teacher Time episode I’m going to focus on the domain relationships with adults. This domain has three goals.

The first goal is child develops expectations of consistent, positive interactions through secure relationships with familiar adults. We saw in a video you viewed earlier an infant, Brooklyn, was communicating to her teacher that she wasn’t ready to be fed. There was back-and-forth communication. Brooklyn became interested in the teacher’s watch, and when she was ready to have her bottle, the teacher was there to feed her. This video shows an excellent example of the developmental progression for the goal regarding children’s expectations of consistent, positive interactions. You can see the warm, loving relationship between Brooklyn and her caregiver. You see how she knows that her actions will be responded to by her caregiver. From birth through nine months

typically a child will interact in predictable ways with familiar adults.

This is a behavior that children demonstrate that leads to the goal regarding the development of expectations a child has for consistent, positive relationships, which might lead you to wonder what does the ELOF developmental progression reveal regarding skills and behaviors infants and toddlers typically demonstrate leading toward the goal later in their development. What we often see next in children eight to eighteen months of age, is a child looking to familiar adults for emotional support and encouragement. A child might react or may become distressed when separated from familiar adults. From 16 to 36 months, most children engage in positive interactions in a wide variety of situations with familiar adults. They often look to or seek familiar adults for comfort when distressed or tired. During the preschool years, children continue to engage in positive interactions with adults and their ability to communicate allows them to talk with adults about their ideas, wants, and dislikes. Following respectful, responsive experiences with trusted adults, three-year-olds typically are able to separate from trusted adults when in familiar settings. By four and five years of age, children can initiate interactions with adults and participate in longer and more reciprocal interactions with both trusted and new adults. How do adults promote social-emotional development in young children, beginning with their interactions with infants and toddlers? Well, everything we've heard from Judi, Carol, Sandy and Carrie during this episode. As we've heard, adults working with very young children need to demonstrate respect looking for the intention in the young child's actions and observing while interacting, and reflect, taking a moment to wonder about the child's intentions and considering what might be the most responsive words or facial expressions or actions you can take, and relate, taking the action that best expresses you are interested and you are appreciative of what the child is doing.

As with all domains, one of my mantras in these ELOF segments is you make decisions about the experiences you provide for children, and how you will interact with each child, based on appropriate expectations of what children should know and do at various stages of their development, information you can access through the ELOF and your program's curriculum. And you know each child in your care her individual strengths and interests, and the social and cultural context in which she lives. You use that information to plan your interactions to know when you should respond with a smile, or a coo back and forth with a baby, or help a toddler who is in distress. The words you use depend on each child's temperament and home language, as well as your understanding of the child's family's styles of interactions with their children. It all begins with an understanding of appropriate goals for children's learning and the developmental progressions that lead to these goals. The ELOF is a tool for teachers to use to help with that understanding. I hope that this segment has helped you to better understand the Early Learning Outcomes Framework and you recognize how the ELOF can help you to be a better teacher.

Carol: Thank you, Peter.

Judi: We are so happy that we heard from some of you about responsive interactions with children. We're going to tell you a little bit about what we heard from your chat responses.

Carol: Yeah. We got a few. One chat response says, "My toddler group was outside during the fall and one little girl stopped and picked up a leaf, and I crouched down, and after watching her I realized she was so intently studying the leaf that I gave her time to explore it and held my questions until later in the day so we could talk about it."

Judi: That's great. I love that. I'm going to hold my questions and let you explore.

Carol: Yes. And let her explore.

Judi: Yeah. We'll talk about that later.

Carol: And no interruptions.

Judi: That's great.

Carol: Another chat response, "A ten-month-old in my family child care program was playing with a plastic shape starter and kept banging the blocks together. After watching her I realized that instead of dropping them in, she really wanted to hear the sound of the blocks banging together or on the

side of the bucket. I sat with her and mimicked what she was doing rather than showing her how to make the shapes fit through the holes in the lid. Taking that extra time to really watch what she was doing changed how I approached my time with her.

Judi: Wow.

Carol: Perfect.

Judi: That's powerful. I love that.

Carol: Yes. Me too.

Judi: And we also heard from Janelle. She said this story, "When Noah was touching Kelly's face I started to take his hand away, but I saw he was using soft touches, so I sat nearby and watched and then said, 'Noah, you were using soft touches. I know that you and Kelly are friends.'"

Carol: That's wonderful.

Judi: That's beautiful.

Carol: I love it.

Judi: I love that.

Carol: Wow. We're going to transition now to talk a little bit about the importance of early relationships and responsive interactions. Earlier this week, Emily Adams had the chance to talk to Amy Hunter from the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness. Let's watch.

Emily: Hi, Amy. Thank you so much for stopping by today.

Amy Hunter: Great to see you.

Emily: Can you tell me more about what babies are learning about these important responsive interactions?

Amy: The early responsive interactions are probably the most important thing for young children to develop, grow and learn.

Emily: Wow. That's big.

Amy: The early relationships and early responsive, nurturing care they receive really helps them develop a sense of themselves and of the world around them.

Emily: Wow. So, tell me a little bit more about that.

Amy: Right. So, the first aspect of what they learn from these early responsive relationships is a sense of self. Right? A sense of, "Am I worthy?" So, when they receive that nurturing and responsive care, they get a sense of, "Wow. I can help people pay attention to me. When I talk, people listen. I'm worthy of being cared for and being paid attention to."

Emily: So, they feel all that love and they realize they're worthy of being loved.

Amy: They're worthy of being loved, of being paid attention to, of being listened to, of being respected and being part of a relationship and a community.

Emily: That's a lot of learning for a very small baby.

Amy: Right. And there's more. And the other thing they learn from these early responsive relationships is what does it feel like to be in a relationship, and when these responsive relationships are caring and nurturing and they have that serve and return, that give and take. When the caregiver is listening to the child and the child is listening to the caregiver and they're going back and forth, children learn that's how relationships go. Right?

Emily: Yeah.

Amy: In relationships people listen. In relationships people are respectful. Relationships feel good, and that will be the model for their relationships throughout their life.

Emily: So, they really carry that expectation forward that this is how people will always be with me.

Amy: This is what relationships feel like. "This is what I should look for in relationships. I should look for someone to be caring, someone to be responsive, someone to listen, someone to respect me."

Emily: That's pretty important.

Amy: Yeah. And the third piece of that really is infants and toddlers learn from relationships what the world is like. So, beyond just what a relationship feels like, what is the world like? So, their world is small right now with just a few people around them- their family, the caregivers in the program, extended family. And they extend that out to what the whole world is like. And so if those relationships are safe and secure and nurturing and responsive, as they develop, their world view is that people in the world are caring, will help them. The world is safe, and if the world is safe, I can go and I can explore and I can discover.

Emily: That's so wonderful.

Amy: So, that's a lot of learning.

Emily: That's A LOT! They're taking so much in.

Amy: From positive early relationships.

Emily: Of course we know these relationships aren't always perfect. What happens when there is a disconnect?

Amy: So, there are times where we will always have a short disconnect when in that moment you're not able to meet that child's needs- you have to meet another child's needs, or it takes a minute to get the food or all of those things. And that's all normal. That's how children learn how relationships go. There is a connection, there is a disconnection and you repair that. That's part of human interactions. There are also times when caregivers are unreliable more than just some of the time, or are in appropriate in their responses to children. Again, this is more than just a short period of time or sometimes. But when those kinds of interactions happen chronically, children really can learn the opposite of the lessons that we talked about. Right? They can learn that they're not worthy of being listened to, or they're not worthy of someone paying attention to them, or that relationships are not comfortable. Relationships might be scary. People in relationships are harsh, are short tempered, are quick or that the world is not a safe place and that people in the world don't care.

Emily: And I just want to reiterate, this is when it's consistently disconnecting. So, it's okay. We all have bad days. We all have times where it's really hard to give all of ourselves, but we know that sometimes it's sort of more significantly difficult. So, what are some of the things that might cause adults' inability to really be that other half of the relationship with babies?

Amy: To be able to provide that nurturing, responsive, positive interaction. It's hard. Right? We all have a lot going on for ourselves, and so how do you do that, and what can get in the way? I think one of the biggest things that can get in the way is stress. So, when we, as parents or as caregivers, are stressed, it can be very hard to be present for children and to be able to provide that nurturing, that give and take, that back and forth. The other piece is sometimes caregivers, parents and teachers don't realize how important those interactions are. And so it can be a combination of both.

Emily: Yeah. That's really difficult. I think too sometimes with young children who maybe have some special needs or difficulties, that they may not send cues in the same way as an adult might be used to. So, an infant might misinterpret as their cues aren't being met, or maybe on the baby's end there can be some real difficulty in that interaction.

Amy: That is such an important point. We are talking about a relationship. Right? And in this case a caregiver/teacher relationship or a parent/caregiver/teacher relationship with the child, or a parent relationship with the child. And so it's two people in that relationship, and what does each person bring to be able to be present in that relationship, and how does each member of that relationship influence the other. When a child might have difficulty sending cues that a parent can read and respond to, that can make it much more difficult. Or when a child's temperament is really different than a caregiver's temperament, that can also be challenging and make it hard to have positive

nurturing interactions.

Emily: Yeah. That can be really tough if you're a really sort of a boisterous and excited-to-do-everything kind of person and then here's this baby who just would like everything to be calm and quiet and a little bit dark and all of the time really calm.

Amy: Right. And another great example of that is temperament where the caregiver is on the go, moving from one thing to the next and really is high energy and seeks novelty and, "Let's go, move, do," and that child needs a really regular routine. It needs that calmness, needs more slow pace.

Emily: Lots and lots of warning before a transition.

Amy: Right.

Emily: Sure. Yeah. That can be really tough. So, we have talked a lot about staff wellness. We're sort of venturing here into talking both about teachers and parents, because both of those relationships are so critical, but really especially parents. I think for this time in our Resiliency and Wellness Minute we wanted to talk a little bit more about what we can be doing as programs or teachers to support parents.

Amy: That's critical. It's such a critical piece to think about. How are we helping parents be well? As you said, we have talked about staff being well, but whether it's staff or whether it's parents thinking about their own wellbeing and the connection to their own wellbeing to how they're able to support children and families.

Emily: So, what are some ways that teachers can really- they're right there. They're seeing parents probably a couple times a day almost every day of the week. Teachers have the amazing opportunity to be somebody for parents that can really support and hold this relationship with them.

Amy: I think that's critical. I think the number-one strategy that I'd like to talk about here today is noticing. Right? So, whether it's a supervisor noticing a staff or whether it's a staff person noticing a parent, when this interaction is going well, paying attention and talking about it, because what we know is that when someone notices something and comments on it, acknowledges it, we're more likely to see more of it. Sometimes parents may not even be aware of the impact of that responsive interaction. So, when you say something like, "Did you notice when you smiled and when you talked and said hello to your child when you came in, he just brightened up," that learning takes place and that paying attention and then more likely the parent is to do that again.

Emily: Yeah. Boy, that really helps a parent see the impact of their connecting and their reaching out on that relationship. I can see that being really helpful, and I appreciate what a concrete strategy that is. It's really sort of that catch them being good, but catch them being connecting and amazing. That sounds really supportive as someone who is a parent and someone who wants to help teachers think about ways that we can support parents.

Amy: I know when I've been in the grocery store as a parent or when I've been out with my children, when someone notices something that I'm doing, I just feel that lift in myself and I'm more likely to be able to keep on trying. Try it again. Keep on going.

Emily: Right. Even those really difficult moments when somebody says, "You're being a great mom," can really help out.

Amy: Right.

Emily: Yeah.

Amy: It goes a long way.

Emily: It does. Yeah. Amy, thank you so much for coming back. I really enjoyed being able to focus a little bit on this piece around how we're supporting parents. So, I appreciate your coming, again.

Amy: It's so nice to be here. It's all about relationships and taking care of ourselves.

Emily: Thank you.

Judi: Thank you, Emily and Amy. Well, what a great and informative episode of Teacher Time. We revisited the three R's: respect, reflect, and relate. And we learned about how using those three Rs in responsive interactions supports early brain development.

Carol: That's true. Carrie showed us how we can embed math in all of our interactions and learning opportunities. Peter shared a great segment on how responsive interactions support development in the ELOF domains. And Amy gave us some strategies for building relationships and taking care of ourselves.

Judi: And Sandy shared so much helpful information. It is so interesting to learn just how much humans are wired for relationships. She gave us some really solid examples of using respect, reflect, and relate as a way to support brain development. Don't forget to try it out. And, remember, all of this information is summarized in your Viewer's Guide.

Carol: Finally, please don't forget to send your questions for the upcoming Coffee Break. Sandy and Peter will be back in two weeks to answer those questions for you. Thank you so much for being here with us today. We are going to leave you with this beautiful video of an everyday routine, feeding, happening with such care and respect for this little one. Enjoy, and we'll see you again soon!

Teacher: I am all ready for Mr. Raylan. Okay. We're gonna sit down. Okay? Get some napkin. Get your cereal. Let me hold your hand. Do you want to hold my hand? Good job. Ready to eat rice cereal? Mmm. Yummy, yummy rice cereal. Yeah. You're hungry, huh? You're hungry. Small bite. Eat it slowly. Is it good? Good job. Rice cereal is good, huh? It's good. Rice cereal, hmm? You want to feed yourself, huh? You want to hold your spoon? Huh? You wanna hold your spoon? You want to hold my hand to feed yourself or, let's go do it. Let's go do it. Mmm. You hold my hand. Good job. Okay. You have to let it go so I can get you more. You have to let it go, let my hand go so I can get you...

[End video]