



Responsive Care Giving for Infants

Carers play an important role in the development of children. Studies indicate that infants and toddlers flourish in care settings that meet their fundamental needs for close, caring relationships, health and safety, connection to family and culture, with knowledgeable, responsive caregivers.

Research has shown that the very young are both vulnerable and competent. They are dependent on adults for: physical survival; emotional support and security; providing a safe base for learning; regulating, modeling, and mentoring social behavior; and information exchange about the workings of the world and rules for living.

Yet infants and young children are also extremely skilled as: inventors; communication initiators; imitators, interpreters, integrators; meaning seekers; relationship builders; and they are curious, motivated, self-starting learners.

Carers who contribute most positively to a child's development are loving facilitators of emotional, cognitive, language, physical, and social competence. With infants, good teaching and good caring occur with emotional support and facilitation of learning and development happening simultaneously. This is characterized as 'responsive care', carefully orchestrated to meet each individual child's needs and relate to that child's unique thoughts and feelings.

- Responsive care means looking for cues and adapting. Infants have an inborn motivation to learn and explore; they are on a constant quest for knowledge, learning from what they see, hear, feel, taste and touch, often all at once. In fact, they experience life more holistically during this age period than at any other; social, emotional, intellectual, language and physical lessons are not differentiated by the infant. The carer must let the child's interests be the guide. She must understand how to read and respond to infant behavior and to delight in the types of learning in which the infant is engaged.
- Responsive care requires a carer to have respect for the infant. By 'respect' we mean an appreciation for what children are doing, at the time they are doing it. It means not superimposing the carer's interests and agenda on to the child, avoiding the temptation to teach children specific lessons.
- Responsive care requires acute powers of observation. A responsive carer observes the infant to see what kind of discovery they are engaged in. Through watching infants in the discovery process, caregivers find the best ways to relate to their play.
- Responsive care means slowing down. A responsive carer lets the child set the pace for learning. A responsive carer follows the child's lead, not offering guidance or assistance too early, lest an opportunity for a learning experience be eliminated.
- Responsive care means considering culture. In culturally responsive care, things are done in a manner that follows the form and style of what the child is familiar with at home. The child experiences similar patterns of care, senses the connection between child care and home, and, as a result feels secure.

This Parent Fact Sheet is available in different community languages and can be downloaded from the Early Childhood Connections website www.econnections.com.au

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