



February 2018

The Why: Conversations with an Infant



As human beings we often ask the question "Why?" Understanding the why can help us make sense of behaviors and guide our actions. In this series of articles, we will examine the why behind one aspect of high quality early childhood interactions between children and the adults that care for them. This month we'll focus on "Conversations with an Infant."

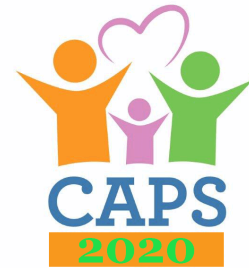
The Why: Conversations with an Infant

*by Bridget Ratajczak, Child Development Specialist,
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The developmental importance of having conversations with infants cannot be stressed enough. These conversations between a caregiver and an infant serve as the foundation of security and nurturing that helps infants thrive. Sometimes we think an infant just eats, sleeps, and soils their diaper; however, research shows that much more is happening.

Infants are growing and developing at a more rapid pace than they will at any other time in their lives. Their brains are making thousands of new neural connections every day. The

Quality Rated and CAPS 2020



In December 2016, the DECAL Advisory Committee adopted the following: Quality Rated eligible providers must be star rated by 12/31/2020 in order to continue to receive Child Care and Parent Services (CAPS) funding.

Quality Rated Bonus Package Deadline

Quality Rated Bonus Packages will not be awarded after December 31, 2020.

To be eligible for a bonus package, programs must meet all of the following guidelines:

development of language and communication skills may be overlooked as an infant begins to sit, crawl or walk, but language also develops rapidly during the first few years of life.

When an infant makes sounds and we respond back, making eye contact, asking a question, or speaking to them, we are building a foundation in their brain. We are teaching them the basic mechanics of conversation - they express happiness by cooing when we look at them; we respond to their cooing with a smile and "You're telling me you are happy," the infant coos again, maybe moving their arms and legs and the back-and-forth cycle continues. Having multiple exchanges in a row helps to reinforce that the sounds a child makes have meaning and conveys to the infant that they are important.

When we respect each other and show interest in the thoughts and ideas of the infant, these interactions become conversations.

A Personal Perspective

I (Margrett) remember a time when I was "talking" with a 4-month-old child being held in her mother's arms. First, the baby focused on my face, which required me to get close enough to make eye contact. You could just see that little brain making connections, the interest she showed in the sound of my voice, then the movement of her mouth attempting to imitate my mouth movements. Her whole body became engaged in our conversation with wiggling arms and feet, then eyes that lit up like stars. It was a memorable interaction for me, but also conveyed to that infant that she had something important to say. Young infants target the caregiver's face, focusing on the person that meets their needs and helps them feel secure. Many of us remember that first smile and our delight in realizing that a young infant responded to our attempt to communicate, but infants also benefit from these interactions.

Serve and Return

This back-and-forth cycle is called "serve and return." When we respond to an infant with a smile, laugh, or imitate her cooing, it encourages the baby to smile or coo in return.

According to The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, *"Serve and return interactions shape brain architecture. When an infant or young child babbles, gestures, or cries, and an adult responds appropriately with eye contact, words, or a hug, neural connections are built and strengthened in the child's brain that support the development of communication and social skills. Much like a lively game of tennis, volleyball, or Ping-Pong, this back-and-forth is both fun and capacity-building. When caregivers are sensitive and responsive to a young child's signals and needs, they provide an environment rich in serve and return experiences."*

Crying is also a method of communication for infants and signals a need that should be responded to quickly. By crying, they "serve" to the caregiver, and the "return" interaction from the caregiver tells them their needs matter.

We are also establishing social connections with infants when we engage them in conversations, teaching them that their voice is a powerful instrument, one that will help them express themselves and get their needs met.

1. Participate in Quality Rated by 6/30/18
2. Receive a one, two, or three star rating by 12/31/2020
3. Have received less than three bonus packages

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Another element of these simple interactions is teaching the cognitive concept of cause and effect, the basic foundation for a multitude of other more complex cognitive concepts.

When you talk to infants about what you are doing as you care for them and what is happening in their environment, you are actually helping them learn to read! Research shows that children who are exposed to more language during infancy learn to read earlier and more easily.

Literacy begins with the connections that are made through rich interactions that become conversations, the exchange of ideas and thoughts...even when you are an infant.

The Fred Rogers Institute has suggested that there are six techniques that we can put into practice when interacting with young infants. Here's [a video](#) detailing those techniques.



Talking With Babies

Continuing to Monitor Development

Understanding the developmentally appropriate practices that caregivers use when interacting with infants, or any child, creates an environment where children thrive and gives a foundation for success in life.

The tools we use to assess the quality of care in Georgia are based on sound developmental practices, helping a caregiver understand how to build quality in a classroom through interactions with the children in their care.

DECAL also provides early childhood professionals with free training and free materials on monitoring the development of children in their care.

For more information on monitoring the development of children, [click here](#).

Questions from the ERS: Classroom Schedules



Why Does Quality Rated Ask for Our Classroom Schedules?

For all ERS observations, classroom schedules are requested to be uploaded with the pre-observation information. Assessors use these schedules in a variety of ways.

For ITERS-R, SACERS-U, and FCCERS-R assessments, class schedules are used to help determine when activities occur on daily and/or weekly basis. There are several items within each of these scales that require specific frequency for activities to occur, and the provided schedule, along with what is observed during the observation and information shared during the teacher interview, is used to help score these items.

For ECERS-3 assessments, class schedules are utilized to schedule optimal times to conduct the morning observation to see as many of the assessed activities as possible, while staying within Quality Rated Program Manual requirements for ECERS-3 assessment start times being between 8:00 a.m. and 9:30 a.m.

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