Respectful Infant/Toddler Care –

Respect, Responsibility, Resourcefulness

MOMENTS MATTER!

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A relationship between caregiver and very young children does not just spring into being-they grow. They grow from a number of interactions, but not just any kind of interaction. They grow from interactions which are respectful, responsive and reciprocal.

1. Involve infants and toddlers in things that concern them.

2. Invest in quality time.

3. Learn each child’s unique ways of communication and teach them yours.

4. Invest time and energy to build a total person.

5. Respect infants and toddlers as worthy people.

6. Be honest about your feelings.

7. Model the behavior you want to teach.

8. Recognize problems as learning opportunities and let infants and toddlers try to solve their own.

9. Build security by teaching trust.

10. Be concerned about the quality of development in each stage.
Fostering Language Development in Infants and Toddlers through Respectful, Responsive and Reciprocal Interactions

1. **Engage in dialogue from day one**, during caregiving times and during play time (when appropriate).

2. **Create monologues also.** Discuss the present. Describe what is happening as it occurs. Your running commentary will contain the labels children need to learn – labels for people, feelings, actions, objects, and events.

3. **Discuss the past** – remark about what happened just now to infants; with toddlers, you can talk about what happened earlier in the day, yesterday, and last week. The older the child the further back you can go.

4. **Discuss the future.** Knowing what’s about to happen helps infants predict events as well as begin to understand labels for things, actions, events, and people. Toddlers can be involved in the discussions about the future, including what will happen this afternoon, tomorrow, and next week. The older the child the further into the future you can go.

5. **Tell stories, sing songs, and recite or create rhymes and poems.** Make room in your telling, singing, or reciting for the children’s participation. Don’t just entertain them; interact with them. They learn language from using it, from being involved, not just from listening.

6. **Be sure older toddlers have plenty of experiences to talk about.**

7. **Read books from infancy on.** Read individually or to small groups at the appropriate time when there is an interest. Allow children to “read” to you or to other children.

8. **Bring in pictures, novel objects and bits of science and nature, and carry on discussions when a child’s interest is sparked.** Again these should be dialogues, not lectures.

9. **Ask questions** - **questions requiring a choice.** “Do you want the square cracker or the round one? Do you want to go for a walk before snack or after snack?” Ask questions that have no right or wrong answer (called open-ended). “How did the bunny feel to you? What did you see on your walk?” Closed questions are fine too as long as the child enjoys them and does not feel interrogated. (They are often overused to teach language.)
10. **Encourage children to ask questions.** A favorite game of beginning talkers is “What’s that?” They like to ask questions as well as answer it, and in doing so they practice and collect labels for objects.

11. **Encourage children to clarify what they don’t understand.** Some people try to teach children through questioning them. If pressured for correct answers, children learn to act as if they understand things they don’t. If you practice an inquire attitude, they’ll ask about words they don’t know yet and practice on their own.

12. **Put language into gross motor activities.** The way children learn about spatial relations and the prepositions that go with them is through experiencing these concepts with their own bodies. When adults add a label, they help the child classify, store, and remember the concept. “Mario is **under** the box. See him hiding?” “Who is going to sit **beside** you at the table? Oh, Emily’s going to.” “I see you on **top** of the steps, Allen. Are you going to stay **up** there, or are you going **down**?”

13. **Really listen when toddlers talk to you.** Resist the temptation to rush children or interrupt them. Give them time to say what they want to say.

14. **Help children listen to each other.** Talk for them or interpret when necessary, but keep the focus off yourself and on the two children who are trying to communicate with each other. “She’s trying to tell you she doesn’t like you to push her.” “Ask her what she wants.” “Tell him you want some playdough too.”

**The power of this basic relationship between young children and their teachers cannot be underestimated. We are committed to the belief that the best way to provide each child with the highest quality care is through caring and responsive interaction.**

**Resources:**
- *Infants, Toddlers and Caregivers* – Janet Gonzalez-Mena
- *The Comprehensive Infant Curriculum* – Kay Albrecht
- *Infant/Toddler Care and Education* – Margaret Weiser