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Relationships: The Heart of Language and Literacy .G1987

Janet S. Hanna

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Kayla M. Hinrichs

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, khinrichs3@unl.edu

Carla J. Mahar

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, cmahar1@unl.edu

John Defrain

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, jdefrain1@unl.edu

Tonia Renee Durden

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, tdurden2@unl.edu

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Relationships: The Heart of Language and Literacy

Adapted by Janet S. Hanna, Kayla M. Hinrichs and Carla J. Mahar, Extension Educators
and John D. DeFrain and Tonia R. Durden, Family Life Specialists

StoryQUEST's Vision: High-quality early relationships and experiences throughout their daily routines provide each infant and toddler with the tools and skills to build a strong foundation for future school readiness. Families, caregivers, and communities as a whole collaborate to enable all children to become highly competent in language and literacy. This series was developed as part of a national research project — StoryQUEST — through the California Institute on Human Services, Sonoma State University.

Learn communication strategies that will help your infant and toddler develop language and literacy skills. This is the fourth publication in a series of nine.

Infants and toddlers learn early language and literacy skills in the context of their relationships with the adults around them, as if they are putting together a puzzle.

Most of the puzzle pieces involve taking turns — your turn, my turn, your turn, my turn.

The turns might be with actions or with talking. The turns might be very quick or rather slow.

The turns might be “peekaboo” or building with blocks or “giving five” or repeating an attempt at a word or an animal sound.

Remember: It is ping-pong, *not* pool. Young children and adults take turns, one then the other.

Turn-Taking Involves:

- Imitation
- Match
- Responsive
- Emotionally attached
- Non-directive
- Balance

An easy way to recall these strategies is to remember the phrase, “I Must Respond to Every New Behavior”

Turn-Taking Strategies

Imitation — Do exactly what the child does, such as:

- Saying “uh-oh”
- Coughing
- Nodding or shaking your head
- Pushing a car or ball

Match — Match what the child is doing or how the child is doing it by:

- Making the same kinds of actions (waving, swaying to music, picking up toys)
- Keeping the same pace (slow or fast)
- Using the same tone of voice (low, high, squeaky, whispers)
- Having the same use of sounds and words (Baby says “ooh”; adult says “aah.” Toddler pushes a car, adult says “VROOOMM.”)

Responsiveness — Follow the child’s lead:

- Use exaggerated facial expressions (raise eyebrows really high to show surprise, open mouth wide, poke out your lips for a kiss).
- Show interest in the baby’s attempts to communicate by giving words to the child’s actions or expressions: “Yes, I agree, this cereal tastes very good!”
- Help the child realize that his/her actions and words matter. When the baby pushes a toy away, say, “OK, maybe you’re tired of that toy,” and move it away.

Emotionally Attached — Body language, emotions, words, and facial expressions show interest and care for the baby:

- Make frequent eye contact with the child.
- Lean in toward the child.
- Use gestures and touch to show care.
- Show interest in the child with facial expressions.

Non-directiveness — Follow the child’s lead to keep the interaction going:

- Allow the child to explore an object or activity in his/her own way.
- Let the child show when he/she is finished and ready to move on to something else.

- Follow the child’s gaze, body language, gestures, or words to choose an activity or book.
- “Play ping-pong, not pool.”

Balance — Communicate and participate as much as the child — not more:

- Communicate mostly the way the child does — with actions, sounds or one to two words.
- Share the lead; nobody dominates the play or interactions.
- Match the child’s pace and energy level.

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