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2005

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Hanna, Janet S.; Hinrichs, Kayla M.; Mahar, Carla J.; and DeFrain, John, "NF95-641 CAR – A Strategy for Learning" (2005). *Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension*. 1759.

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CAR — A Strategy for Learning

Adapted by Janet S. Hanna, Kayla Hinrichs and Carla Mahar, Extension Educators
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Fifth in a series of nine fact sheets developed through a national research project — StoryQUEST — through the California Institute on Human Services, Sonoma State University. The CAR Strategy was developed by the Washington Research Institute.

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.

Language and literacy development starts at the very beginning of a child’s life and is one of the main developmental events of early childhood. This process is facilitated by early adult-child interactions in which the adult guides and supports the child’s learning by building on what the child already knows. Following the child’s lead, a key strategy presented in *Language Is the Key* is one of the defining aspects of developmentally appropriate practice. It has been shown to successfully facilitate early language development for children with and without disabilities.

Young children who have lots of opportunities to “read” picture books with adults and/or older children have been shown to be more successful when they get to school. Picture book interactions provide rich opportunities for young children to learn language and early literacy skills. The setting in which children and adults share interactions around picture books encourages children to talk and facilitates learning as adults label pictures and provide feedback to the child.

Play — an Ideal Context for Learning

Young children spend a significant amount of time playing, and this play is an ideal context for learning. Play is recognized as a natural opportunity to facilitate language and early literacy acquisition in young children. In addition, play appears to facilitate a young child’s ability to see that a symbol represents something beyond itself. Understanding symbols is the foundation for language and literacy and opens the doors for children to learn about the various functions and uses of print and language.

Follow the Child’s Lead!

- C** — Comment and wait so the infant has time to respond.
An infant looks tired.
Adult: “I think you are sleepy.”
Wait 5 seconds.
- A** — Ask questions and wait so the infant has time to respond.
An infant reaches for a bottle.
Adult: “Do you want your bottle?”
Wait 5 seconds.
- R** — Respond by adding a little more.
An infant looks at picture of self and says “ba-ba.”
Adult says: “Ba-ba, you see baby Nate.”
Wait 5 seconds.

Waiting gives the infant time to respond.

Follow the Child’s Lead!

- C** — Comment and wait so the child has time to respond.
“This dog has a funny hat.”
Wait 5 seconds.
“The fish is swimming!”
Wait 5 seconds.
“I like bananas.”
Wait 5 seconds.
- A** — Ask questions and wait so the child has time to respond.
“What happened here?”
Wait 5 seconds.
“What’s going on in this picture?”
Wait 5 seconds
“What’s she doing?”
Wait 5 seconds.
- R** — Respond by adding a little more and wait.
Toddler says: “Boy eating.”
Adult says: “The boy is eating toast.”

Child says: "Owee."

Adult says: "The baby has an owee."

Waiting gives the child time to respond.

Why Follow the Child's Lead?

When an adult focuses on what a child is interested in, the child will engage more readily and successfully.

Follow the child's lead!

An infant looks excitedly at his sister across the room.

Adult: "Let's go over there and play with Maria."

C — Comment and wait so the child has time to respond.

An infant looks at a rattle that is out of her reach.

Adult: "You want that rattle? Here it is."

OR

An infant is holding up his arms and looking at an adult.

Adult: "OK, I'll pick you up!"

A — Ask questions and wait so the infant has time to respond.

An infant looks at her mother and makes sucking noises.

Mother: "Are you hungry?"

R — Respond by adding a little more and wait.

An infant says "Uh oh" as she drops something.

Adult: "Uh oh, you dropped that toy, didn't you?"

Waiting gives the infant time to respond.

Follow the child's lead!

A toddler pushes all the toys aside that the adult offers.

Adult: Show me which toy you want to play with."

C — Comment and wait so the toddler has time to respond.

A toddler throws a ball to the adult and says "Toe ball."

Adult: "Yes, you did throw the ball."

A — Ask questions and wait so the toddler has time to respond.

A toddler has a toy truck with no wheel and is trying to "make it go."

Adult: "Is your car broken?"

R — Respond by adding a little more and wait.

A toddler holds up her toy truck and says "Red truck mine."

Adult: "That is your big, red fire truck."

Waiting gives the child time to respond.

StoryQUEST

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Issued May 2005

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