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## NF05-644 Relationships: The Heart of Language and Literacy

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## Relationships: The Heart of Language and Literacy

Adapted by Janet S. Hanna, Kayla Hinrichs and Carla Mahar, Extension Educators  
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*Fourth in a series of nine fact sheets developed through a national research project — StoryQUEST — through the California Institute on Human Services, Sonoma State University. Turn-taking strategies developed by J.D. MacDonald Communicating Partners, 2001.*

### 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.

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 with the baby — 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 pingpong, NOT pool. Young children and adults take turns, one then the other.

### Turn-Taking Involves

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

**I** — “I”  
**M** — must  
**R** — respond to  
**E** — every  
**N** — new  
**B** — behavior

### Turn-Taking Strategies

#### “I Must Respond to Every New Behavior”

**Imitation** — The adult does exactly what the child does.

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

**Match** — the adult matches what the child is doing or how the child is doing it:

- 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** — The adult follows the child’s lead:

- Using exaggerated facial expressions (raise eyebrows really high to show surprise, open mouth wide, poke out your lips for a kiss)
- Showing interest in the baby’s attempts to communicate (give words to your child’s actions or expressions: “Yes, I agree, this cereal tastes very good!”).
- Helping the child realize that his 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** — The adult’s body language, emotions, words and facial expressions show interest and care for the baby:

- Making frequent eye contact with the child
- Leaning your body toward the child
- Using gestures and touch to show care
- Showing interest in the child by your facial expressions

**Non-directiveness** — The adult follows the child’s lead to keep the interaction going:

- Allowing the child to explore an object or activity in her or his own way
- Letting the child show when he or she is finished and ready to move on to something else
- Following the child’s gaze, body language, gestures or words to choose an activity or book
- “Play pingpong, not pool”

**Balance** — The adult communicates and participates as much as the child — not more:

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

### *StoryQUEST*

The members for 2003-2004 StoryQUEST-CNCS team were:

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