

# Connections

FIRST CONNECTIONS — EARLY INTERVENTION IN ARKANSAS

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## Inside this issue:

- ✓ Rossi's Learn to Talk Around the Clock. . . [cover]
- ✓ TRANSITIONS: Working More Effectively with Your LEA. . . [cover]
- ✓ STEM & Language Skills in the Garden . . . 2
- ✓ Changing Perspectives. . . 3
- ✓ QA on EI in Natural Environment. . . 3
- ✓ Did YOU Know. . . ? . . . 4

## TRANSITIONS: Working More Effectively with Your LEA

When toddlers approach their 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday and their time in EI is nearing an end, the SC and the IFSP team:

- Educates families about 3-5 options and encourages parents to explore all of their options.
- Sends LEA Quarterly Notification for all toddlers with an active IFSP at least 90 days prior to the 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday.
- Sends referral packet to LEA (with parental consent) in a timely manner. If parent does not give consent, sends notice to LEA that parent has not given consent to forward the referral packet.
- Invites LEA to transition conference and sends meeting notice at least **2 weeks** in advance.

If a toddler is referred 45 days or less before his/her 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday, EI does not evaluate to determine eligibility but instead **gets parent permission to refer directly to the LEA** for consideration for 3-5 special education services under Part B. To assist the LEA, write on the notification: **"late referral to EI; not a transition."** This helps your LEA determine what steps they must take to ensure timely services for these rare cases.

## Talk Around the Clock, Web Site for Parents and EI/ECSE Professionals

Babies begin learning about language at birth from being surrounded by sounds and communication. **Learn to Talk Around the Clock** recognizes the importance of fostering a meaningful and language-rich environment for babies and toddlers and offers free newsletters and resources for both parents and EI/ECSE professionals.



The site, piloted by Karen K Rossi, provides unique resources—in print, online, and in person—that develop improved interactions between parents/caregivers and children. Rossi has worked as a School Administrator and an EI Specialist with families of children who are deaf or hard of hearing since graduating from Washington University in 1971. Her mission is for all children to begin school ready to learn. She has woven observations gathered from years of work directly with families into a unique program for professionals to use with parents, **Learn To Talk Around The Clock, A Professional's Early Intervention Toolbox®** and, for children in childcare and their childcare providers, **Learn To Talk Around The Clock at Childcare®**, provides practical, interactive solutions combining intensive language learning with the typical daily preschool/childcare routines. Rossi also hosts training workshops to train teams.

For parents, friends, and family, Rossi's book, **I Promise to Be A Good Parent®** teaches primary caregivers ten strategies for building better interactions with children, introduced as "promises" parents can make to their children. The promises are at the core of all meaningful interactions between parents and children and will optimize the young child's development of security, confidence, listening skills, and spoken language. A free newsletter offers tips and resources to help parents enrich their child's language development through age-appropriate, meaningful language interactions that fit the family's daily routines.

Pediatric professionals can incorporate the site's listening and spoken language handouts to supplement developmental handouts they already provide at 2 weeks, 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, etc. into well-child checkups to help families assess and enrich their child's language and vocabulary development.



Check it out: <http://www.learntotalkaroundtheclock.com/index.php>

# STEM and Language Skills: In the Garden with Children!

Article originally published at How Babies Learn 18 June 2012  
<http://www.howbabieslearn.com/blog/2012/06/stem-and-language-skills-in-the-garden-with-children/>

Gardening is a great way to foster children's STEM (Science, technology, Engineering and Math) and cognitive skills. Research shows that talking to children and using gestures when communicating enhances children's later language development<sup>1</sup>. Use gestures and language as point out different types of bugs, vegetables, and flowers in the garden. When children point to beautiful birds and flowers in the garden, share their enthusiasm! If your child points to a flower, try to expand upon his or her gesture with language. You might ask, "Do you like the flower?" "What color is the flower?" . . . "Yes! The flower is yellow. It's a yellow tulip!"

Integrating spatial language in conversations with children might even help to foster their later abstract thinking skills<sup>2</sup>? Words such as "above," "next to," and "tall" and are just some of the terms that may help young children to acquire abstract spatial skills such as mental rotation. How many flowers can a child locate *next to* the large tree? Talking about the array of trees, animals and flowers in the garden is a great way to help children build language, spatial relation, and categorical reasoning skills!



Children love to play in gardens and often learn through imitation. Preschoolers may even enjoy helping you find the weeds in the garden. They often like to get their hands dirty as they help you plant flowers! 3-5 year olds might even want their own watering bucket to water the flowers. Be sure to explain and demonstrate how much water each plant should receive! The preschooler may also enjoy researching different types of flowers with an adult. Bring some crayons and paper to the

garden; preschoolers may enjoy putting a piece of paper over a leaf and rubbing the crayon across it to magically reveal a leaf design drawing different types of flowers. Help preschoolers develop reading and writing skills by helping to make labels for the various flowers. Whether a child is interested in the various bugs, birds, or flowers in the garden, tuning into the child's natural interests is a great way to support developing cognitive and communicative skills.

If you're a teacher, make the effort to get parents involved. Chances are you may have to give them information about STEM – what the acronym means and why it's important for their toddler's future. Then give your parents some ideas for how they can help prepare their children for success in STEM-style thinking. (see sidebar, right)



## Tips to Help Children Become STEM Thinkers

- 1. Be alert for opportunities** to talk with your child about STEM-related topics. For example, discuss fractions or percent when you slice a pie.
- 2. Try not to brush aside questions**, even if they don't make sense or are not good questions. Turn the bad question into an interesting and relevant question and then engage in discussion. You don't necessarily need to know all of the answers. An important part of the process is helping your children learn how to find answers themselves through your guidance.
- 3. Encourage curiosity and questioning.** Rather than giving an answer, encourage your child to come up with several possible solutions for a problem.
- 4. View science and technology TV and videos;** talk together about the program you viewed afterward.
- 5. Promote cooperation and teamwork** as children work together; guide them to develop a list of ground rules they will follow.
- 6. Search out STEM-related recreational activities** such as a trip to a local science museum or a visit a robotics competition or high school science fair.
- 7. Use building blocks, puzzles, and games for family activities.** Leave these in obvious places so that view them as part of their everyday surroundings.
- 8. Ask your child to figure out "what comes next"** in class routines, stories, etc. this promotes critical thinking skills.
- 9. Display curiosity** about things you see and show your own interest in learning. This may be the most important tip of all. Your enthusiasm will be the greatest motivator for your child!

### RESOURCES:

<http://www.teachpreschool.org/2012/06/stem/>  
<http://www.middleweb.com/3569/10-stem-tips-for-parents/>  
<http://www.wikihow.com/Impart-STEM-Education-to-Your-Children>

1. Goldin-Meadow, S., Goodrich, W., Sauer, E., & Iverson, J. Young. "Children Use Their Hands to Tell their Mothers What to Say." *Developmental Science*, 10, 778-785.

2. Pruden, S., Levine, S. Huttenlocher, J. (2011). "Children's Spatial Thinking." Tricia Striano, Ph.D.



## Changing Perspectives . . .

***The purpose of early intervention is to promote parent competence and confidence in helping the child learn and grow.***

Our responsibility as practitioners and service coordinators is to use available evidence to refocus the lens through which we have traditionally viewed and interacted with children with disabilities and their families. We shift from telling and doing to listening and building the capacity of family members to support their child's development.

Our role clearly emerges as a *coach to the adults* in the child's life to maximize their confidence and abilities so that child learning and development of new skills occurs naturally as a part of everyday life (Dunst, Hamby, Trivette, Raab, & Bruder, 2000; Rush, Shelden, & Hanft, 2003).

Using the family's interests, routines, rituals, and priorities is the venue for promoting a child's existing abilities and learning new skills. By providing therapy to the child and giving homework for parents to perform or embedding activities and exercises into daily life, we were actually disrupting well-established, meaningful learning opportunities that all families have

Based on evidence about child learning and effective help-giving, when we change our mental models and practices, we learn to:

- Appreciate what children and *families can do* instead of what they can't
- Build on parent knowledge and skills instead of creating dependence on us as professionals
- Help parents identify and access desired resources instead of assuming the need for and benefit of professional services
- Recognize child and family strengths instead of emphasizing problems
- Support family priorities and interests instead of dispensing professionally-driven recommendations.

<http://www.coachinginearlychildhood.org/nlepractices.php>

## Q&A on NE

**Q** In states where intervention in the Natural Environment is working, how are they interpreting the definition of "NE?"

*All states must define NE according to the federal definition in IDEA, Part C. Natural environments are home and community locations in which children would typically be if they did not have a disability. If it is a place created for children with disabilities, it is not a natural environment.*

**Q** Even if services provided in a center or provider office are delivered in a way that supports family learning & involvement, doesn't the research point to these locations as inherently not a Natural Environment?

*Therapy clinics and practitioner offices provide decontextualized interventions. Research demonstrates that children learn best when they learn **in context** and have multiple opportunities to practice the skills and abilities throughout their day. The generalization research indicates that it is much easier to generalize newly learned skills when they are learned within the context of meaningful, functional activities as they happen naturally versus setting up contrived situations in a clinic or office.*

**Q** If a center-based program has a preschool open to the public and incorporates the NE learning philosophies into individualized treatment, would it be considered to be a natural environment?

*A center-based preschool where **the ratio** of children of typical development to children with disabilities is **similar to that ratio in the general community** could be a natural environment for a child with a disability. "Individualized treatment" must occur in the context of naturally occurring activities in the preschool classroom where the EI practitioner supports the preschool teacher in promoting the child's participation in classroom activities rather than using a pull-out model, which would be considered decontextualized intervention.*

**Q** If family involvement in embedding activities into their daily routines is the essential part of NE, is there a reason why the coaching sessions can't take place at the center as well as in the NE?

*We are not talking about having the parent embed therapy activities into their existing routines and activities. We are talking about recognizing and using their typical activities as opportunities for child participation in learning opportunities that have development-enhancing qualities, without limiting these activities to working on only one skill or area of development. The goal is to help parents increase the infant's/toddler's participation in the activity and interactions with the adults in the environment to promote multiple skills as they would happen and be learned naturally.*

**Q** How do we embed natural environment therapy practices into our therapy when children live in homes with virtually no toys or books?

*Start by getting an understanding of how the child spends his or her time. What does the child do? Who is the child with? Where does the child go? This is an assessment process to identify the child's existing (and desired) activity settings. The practitioner identifies what the child is currently using as play objects (i.e., pots, pans, empty containers, rocks, sticks, sand, etc.). The practitioner supports caregivers in maximizing the child's enjoyment of what play objects do exist. If the family is interested in obtaining other objects for the child to play with, then the practitioner assists the family in identifying resources to obtain them (i.e., toy lending resources, public libraries, garage sales, Goodwill, etc.). Our responsibility is to support the family with what they have, where they are, and sharing information that matches their priorities.*



# Did YOU Know?

The Arkansas Disability Coalition (ADC) recently provided parent education in Ft. Smith for Kids First, and they're prepared to share with families in your area as well! The ADC along with the PTI (Parent Training & Information Center of Arkansas) would love to assist in educating, equipping, and empowering parents of children transitioning from ECSE to kindergarten on what to expect while providing parents with the tools they need to make the transition to kindergarten less confusing and less complicated.

Parents whose children qualify for kindergarten special education leave with a basic understanding of:

- ❖ Special Education laws and Rights of the parent
- ❖ Confidence in their role as an IEP team member!
- ❖ High expectations for their child!

This free, informative parent presentation (and accompanying handouts) is available in English and in Spanish. Each parent will also leave with a copy of the Parents Guide to Civil Rights and Education Blue Book from the Disability Rights Center (also available in Spanish).

Interested in offering this training to parents in your community? Contact:

Frances Johnson, Minority Outreach Specialist  
Family-2-Family Health Information Center of Arkansas  
Office: (501) 614-7020

[frances.johnson@adcpti.org](mailto:frances.johnson@adcpti.org)



## Imitation in Children: *Do What I Say, Not What I Do!*

Children grow up in environments full of objects they'll need to learn how to use one day. Unlike other mammals, studies show that children copy all of an adult's actions, including ones that are clearly unnecessary for achieving the demonstrated goal. *Why might children behave in this way?* Dr. Mark Nielsen and Dr. Conny Blank of the University of Queensland in Australia hypothesized that children imitate adult actions either because they think all adults' actions have a purpose or because they want to connect socially. In the study, preschoolers watched two adults take turns opening a box in order to retrieve a toy. One adult used only relevant actions. The other adult incorporated redundant actions into her demonstration. After both adults had a turn, one left the test room and the remaining adult gave the box to the child. Children omitted redundant actions so long as the remaining adult had not used them to open the box. However, if the remaining adult had demonstrated the redundant actions, children persisted in imitating them – even though they had seen the alternate adult emphasize that such actions were irrelevant. This is the clearest demonstration to date that children imitate for social reasons. This study has profound implications for our understanding of the way children learn and for our understanding of the intergenerational transfer of cultural traditions. Of course this also means be careful of what you do when children are watching!

Nielsen, M., & Blank, C. (2011). "Imitation in young children: When who gets copied is more important than what gets copied." *Developmental Psychology*, 47, 1050-1053.

CDS (Computer Data System) Trainings are conducted quarterly. However, if your staff is having problems using CDS, call Carol or Terrell for technical assistance solutions; they will come to a provider's location by request. (501)682-8699 / (501)682-0238. E-mail [carol.l.parker@arkansas.gov](mailto:carol.l.parker@arkansas.gov)



## Online Courses for EI/EC Professional Development

Online trainings make it possible for EI and EC professionals to further their professional growth and development on their own time without travel arrangements that take time away from their work with infants and families. The following online courses are available through the ChildCare Education Institute and are listed on the TAPP Registry: <http://professionalregistry.astate.edu/train-register/train0a.asp>

9-5-2013

CCEI330P1

***Books & Beyond: Language Development in the Infant/Toddler Classroom***

CCEI1220P1

***Informal Assessment: Observations - Practical Application Course***

CCEI1200

***Assessing Young Children: Part 1 Introduction to Assessment***

9-6-2013

CCEI3010

***Birth to 5: Physical Development in Young Children***

CCEI3011

***Birth to 5: Emotional Development in Young Children***

CCEI3012

***Birth to 5: Cognitive Development in Young Children***

CCEI3013

***Birth to 5: Social Development in Young Children***

9-11-2013

CCEI670

***Bright Beginnings: Age Appropriate Activities for Infants and Toddlers***

9-12-2013

CCEI900

***Safety in the Infant/Toddler Classroom***

Call to register: 800-499-9907  
[www.cceionline.edu](http://www.cceionline.edu)

