

Parent Connections

FIRST CONNECTIONS – EARLY INTERVENTION IN ARKANSAS

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Inside this issue:

- Summer Fun Toddler Activities
- Parenting Groups through Project LAUNCH. . . front page [sidebar]
- Foundations of School Readiness Are Laid in Infancy and Toddlerhood. . . p. 2-3
- Parent Question of the Quarter . . . p.3-4

Summer Fun Toddler Activities

Too hot to play outside? Try making:

1. A masking tape race track for toy cars or plastic animals.
2. A tent or tee-pee with some sheets in the living room. Crawl inside with some good books, and maybe even take a nap in there!
3. Indoor bowling (pins made of empty plastic water or soda bottles and whatever ball you have).
4. A solar oven (inside) and take it outside to cook some s'mores. You'll need a box, marker, ruler, scissors, glue stick, black construction paper, aluminum foil, a bamboo skewer / stick or small dowel rod, and clear plastic (plastic wrap, plastic sheet protectors, or overhead transparency plastic).

First – Make a Flap & Window:

Measure 1 inch from each side of the box top, make a square. (An adult) cuts 3 sides of the square to make a flap. Fold the flap up along the uncut line (top of the box) to reveal the window.



Second – Make Your Oven: Use the shiny side of the foil. Glue foil to the underside of the flap. Glue foil on all sides of the inside of box. Smooth out as many wrinkles as possible. Tape the black piece of construction paper to the middle of the bottom (inside) of the box. Glue clear plastic to underside of the box lid (the “glass” of your window). Try to make the seal as airtight as possible.

Third – Cook! Place in direct sunlight: Open the flap towards the sun, choosing an angle that reflects the most light into the box. Use a bamboo skewer, stick, or dowel to prop the flap open. Check your food every 10 minutes.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS: The aluminum foil reflects sun light back into the box while black paper absorbs sun's heat and warms up the solar oven. Clear plastic allows the sun to shine in and keeps the heat from escaping.

Parenting Groups through Project LAUNCH

Project LAUNCH (Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children's Health) is offering Parent Training Classes.

Groups meet on Monday and Tuesday evenings at the H.O.P.E. agency in Mississippi County.

Transportation, childcare, and food are provided at no cost and door prizes are awarded. Even more valuable is the parent to parent peer support and the skills and tools to better balance home / life / family needs.

Incredible Years Parenting Group:

Tuesday nights from 5:30 - 7:30 pm

Legacy Parenting Group:

Monday nights from 5:30 - 7:30 pm

For more information contact:

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Foundations of School Readiness Are Laid in Infancy and Toddlerhood

Summarized from: Report # 2016-07, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE), Feb 2016. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/index.html>

A baby's brain makes more neural connections from birth to age 3 than at any other time. Babies are busy learning and growing through interactions with people and objects in their environment during their first years of life. Recent research shows that there is a direct link between school readiness at five and early development in the first three years of life, indicating that:

- Children are active participants in shaping their own development.
- Relationships and experiences are the primary ways development occurs.
- All areas of development are interrelated: Supporting school readiness during the infant/toddler period requires attention to developing the whole child (across developmental domains).
- Development is complex and transactional, meaning that the child affects the environment while the environment affects the child in ongoing and cyclical ways.
- Development and learning occur in many contexts: within family life, out and about in the community, within early care and education programs, and through interaction with the broader culture.
- Infant and toddler development is individual and embedded in family, culture, and other social influences. Programs and practices must acknowledge, respect, and respond to these multiple influences on infants' and toddlers' development.

Even though development is often divided into domains (categories), in reality, child development is not categorized. Milestones in one area influence other areas. There are five "school readiness" domains (or areas) of development recognized by the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (2015) as areas that develop to lay a foundation for early learning:

● **Physical, perceptual, and motor skills development**

Physical: involves growth and change in: weight and length; motor skills; perceptual development; brain development; and physical well-being and general health. **Perceptual:** (using the senses) vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch infants use to gather information about their world. **Motor skills:** gross and fine motor skills infants use to explore and engage with the world. Because exploration is a foundation for learning, early physical, perceptual, and motor development supports school readiness.

● **Social and emotional development**

the foundation for children's mental health and well-being, social-emotional development includes: temperament ("personality"); behavior; regulating emotions; attachment; and friendship. The ability to regulate one's emotions is a critical aspect of school readiness and is tied to children's ability to regulate their own behavior. Early social-emotional development lays the foundation for peer friendships and sociability at school age. The ability to get along well with others is a prerequisite to many activities in kindergarten and beyond.

● **Approaches to learning**

social and cognitive (thinking) skills as they relate specifically to learning experiences which include persistence, attention, memory, and "executive functioning." Executive functioning is a term used to describe many abilities, including the ability to think before reacting, to delay gratification, figure out where to direct attention in order to learn and be safe, and to remember things that have been learned before. These abilities allow children to learn by exploring their world, and be successful in school and relationships.



Language and communication

early communication efforts (looking, crying, and babbling) begin the developmental journey to later language. Toddlers with better joint attention skills have better receptive and expressive language at 30 months. Joint attention includes an adult and child working together on a shared interest. Adults are initially responsible for successful joint attention episodes, but as infants grow, they can point, can focus on both the object and the person involved, and can begin to take the lead to initiate play. Language development is greatly influenced by culture and the “language environment.” During these early years, professionals tend to be more concerned when delays occur in both understanding (receptive language) and speaking (expressive language).



Cognition (thinking, remembering)

The growth in children’s language abilities results, in part, from changes in cognitive abilities known as information-processing mechanisms. Information processing mechanisms (attention, memory, and categorization) provide the foundation for more sophisticated cognitive skills like executive functioning (see “approaches to learning” above).

Infancy is characterized by rapid growth and development of concepts, attitudes, skills, and abilities that are the foundation for development, later success in school, and lifelong learning (Early Head Start National Resource Center, 2012). Another characteristic of this age group is the reliance on parents and other adults: The infant/toddler period represents an opportunity for parents and non-parental caregivers to support young children’s optimal development and to set a positive path and direction for lifelong success. Positive interactions with caregivers and opportunities to explore their environment set the stage for brain development and can promote early learning and development.

Harmful environments and factors in a child’s early years can hinder positive physical and mental development, including: abuse or neglect; food insecurity; and environmental threats, such as lead, pesticides, household chemicals, asbestos, air pollution, and tobacco smoke.



Parent Question of the Quarter

Q: Are Time-Outs Helpful or Harmful to Young Children?

A: A number of recent articles have rejected the use of time-outs, and many parents are wondering what options they have to set limits.

Critics of the “time out” believe that instead of helping children calm down, time-outs have the opposite effect—causing children to become even more distressed and out of control because the separation from their caregiver is so overwhelming during time-out (and the shame a toddler may feel for being “bad”) that their emotional upset increases and their likelihood of learning from the experience decreases. When a time out is used as punishment and involves shaming or a long separation from the parent, it would not be helpful for the child.

Those opposed to “time out” suggest using “time-in,” which entails a parent physically comforting a child to calm him or her. Anyone who has been the parent or caregiver of a toddler knows, there are times when a child is so out of control—throwing objects, kicking, hitting, biting—that they can’t accept comfort – in fact, the more the parent tries to soothe the child, the more out of control she gets. She’s on system overload. At these times, parents are also pushed to their emotional limit, their last nerve worked. When emotions (and cortisol levels in the brain) are sky-high, a break for both parent and child can be a healthier solution than an ongoing battle. Sure, in a perfect world, parents would be able to manage their reactions, but parents are human, and there are times when the only way that is going to happen is when we can take a break from the intensity of the moment, call it a “time out” for mom or dad. In this situation, giving the child a break can actually be a positive parenting strategy.

Parent Question of the Quarter, continued from p. 3 The aluminum foil will help reflect the sun light back into the box.
The black paper absorbs the sun's heat and warms up your solar oven.
The clear plastic allows the sun to shine in and keeps the heat from escaping.

Confused? The difference is the WAY the time out break is handled. When done calmly and lovingly, it can be a way to prevent further escalation, to give both the child and the parent a chance to calm down and regain control. When both are calm, they can come back together in a kind, gentle way and focus on solving the problem. When a parent determines that a break is needed, it is done calmly and lovingly. Even if you're holding your child out at arm's length to avoid his kicks, as calmly as possible, take him to his break place and let him know that you can't wait until he can calm himself so that you can play again. Separations aren't inherently or automatically harmful to young children. When separations are framed and approached lovingly and supportively—not punitively—they can be caring, not callous. There are a range of ways to do this, including some ideas below that some families have used with success: .

Create a special, safe space. Whatever you call it, give it a “kinder, gentler” name like the “cozy corner” or the “peace place.” Talk with the child in advance about the purpose of this safe space—“this is where people in their family go when they are losing control and need a break (parents also use it to take a break themselves, which can serve as some very powerful role modeling.) Include your children in designing the space, giving them choices of acceptable items that can be included. One family put a small nylon teepee in their child's room, which provided a sense of boundary and comfort.

Keep expectations for what the break will accomplish in check. Children—especially those under 3 years old—do not yet have the ability to reflect on their own actions and behavior. This means that the goal of taking a break is not “learning a lesson” or self-reflection (“Gee, I wonder why I let my emotions get the best of me—I really shouldn't have thrown that train” is beyond most 2-year-olds), but to provide a quiet place where children can get it together and calm down. The break offers the space for both parent and child to regroup, and then come back together to talk about what the child could do the next time this situation arises. No learning takes place when children are in emotional overload.

Choose a reasonable time limit best suited to your child. One approach is to have the break end when the child is calm. Another option is to set a timer for—3 to 5 minutes—then go back to the child and check in. At this point, she may still be upset, but if she is no longer out of control and is willing to accept being comforted, you can help her move on. Remember, you're not giving in to whatever caused the original upset—you're just helping her learn to calm herself and to accept an alternative, for example, reading a book together instead of playing on the tablet that you had taken away, which caused the tantrum.

Using breaks as a tool to help young children learn to cope with their strong emotions, is all about the way it's done. Breakdowns are evidence that a child is having a hard time coping with one frustration or disappointment. They're immature – not purposefully misbehaving. Their intense emotions—and limited skill in self-control—sometimes cause them to lose the ability to regulate their feelings, their behaviors, and even their bodies. A short break from all interaction can help them cool down. In the context of a loving, strong parent-child relationship, giving children (and parents) this space to calm themselves can be helpful, not harmful.

source: Lerner, Claire. *Zero to Three*. Jan 2016. <<http://www.zerotothree.org>>

Zero to Three offers a variety of resources for families to help their children learn to control their own emotions. Check out this short video clip to learn about ways to help children manage their emotions: <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/30-from-feelings-to-friendships-nurturing-healthy-social-emotional-development-in-the-early-years>

