

Chatting & Cuddling



**Helping Infants Learn Language ...
And So Much More**

Why is Talking to Infants So Important?

Infants are like little sponges. They soak up everything around them, especially when you talk and play with them.

Did you know ...?

When you talk to a infant, even if they don't understand all the words, their brain is working hard! It's like exercise for their brain, helping it grow strong. This helps them learn to talk and understand the world.

The more words babies hear, the more words they will learn. When you talk about what you're doing, what you see, or how you feel, you're giving them the building blocks for their own words.

When you look at an infant, smile, and talk to them in a kind voice, it makes them feel safe and loved. This helps them feel happy and ready to learn.

Infants learn about feelings by watching your face and hearing your voice. If you smile and use a happy voice, they learn about being happy. If you use a soft voice when they are sad, they learn about comfort.

Learning how to communicate when they are little helps children make friends and get along with others when they are older.



A Powerful Example

This video is a powerful example of why engaging with infants is so important! Watch the video and then answer the questions below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1Jw0-LExyc>

- 1) What happened with the mother responded to the infant's actions?
- 2) How is the infant learning about language during this "serve and return" exchange?
- 3) What happened when the mother did not respond to the infant?
- 4) Why do you think the infant had this reaction?
- 5) How can you incorporate "serve and return" into your daily activities with your infants?



How to “Talk” with an Infant...

(Even before they can talk back!)



You don't need special toys or lessons. You just need you!

Use Your Words

Talk About Your Day: As you change a diaper, feed an infant, or play on the floor, talk about what you are doing. "Okay, let's get a clean diaper on you! This diaper is blue." "Mmm, these yummy peas are so green. Do you like them?"

Name Things: Point to things and say their names. "Look, a red ball!" "That's a soft teddy bear." "Here is your bottle."

Sing Songs and Say Rhymes: Infants love music and the rhythm of rhymes! Simple songs like "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" or "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" are perfect.

Read Books: It's never too early to read to a infant. Choose colorful board books with simple pictures. Point to the pictures and name them. You don't even have to read all the words. Just talking about the pictures is great.

Copy Their Sounds: When a infant coos or babbles ("goo-goo," "ba-ba"), copy them! This shows them you are listening and that their sounds are important. It's like having a little conversation.

Ask Questions: Even if they can't answer, ask simple questions. "Are you sleepy?" "Do you want more milk?" Pause like you are waiting for an answer. This helps them learn how conversations work.

Use a Happy, Gentle Voice: Infants respond to the tone of your voice. A friendly, sing-song voice often gets their attention.

How to “Talk” with an Infant...

(Even before they can talk back!)

Use Your Body and Face (Nonverbal Communication)

Infants learn a lot by watching you, even when you are not talking.

Look at Them: When you talk to a infant, look into their eyes. This helps them feel connected to you.

Smile! A smile is a universal sign of kindness. When you smile at an infant, it helps them feel happy and safe.

Use Your Face: Make silly faces. Open your eyes wide in surprise, pretend to be sad for a moment, then smile big. This helps infants learn about different feelings.

Nod and Gesture: When you say "yes," nod your head. When you talk about a ball, you can make a round shape with your hands or pretend to throw it. Point to things you are talking about.

Get Down on Their Level: Sit or lie on the floor with infants. This helps you see the world from their view and makes it easier to connect.

Watch Their Cues: Infants will "tell" you things without words.

- If they turn their head away, they might need a break.
- If they are cooing and looking at you, they are probably enjoying the interaction.
- If they are fussy or crying, they might be hungry, tired, or need a diaper change. Respond to their needs.

Things to Remember:

Every Infant is Different: Some infants are chattier, and some are quieter. That's okay! Go at their pace.

It's Okay to Be Silly: Infants love it when you are playful and silly.

Repeat, Repeat, Repeat: Infants learn through repetition. Singing the same song or reading the same book many times is good for them.

You're Doing Great! The fact that you are reading this booklet shows you care. Every little bit of talking, singing, and playing you do makes a big difference.

What is "Serve & Return?"

Okay, let's talk about "serve and return" with babies in a way that's easy to understand!

Imagine you're playing a fun game of catch with a friend.

The Infant "Serves" (throws a ball):

A infant "serves" when they try to get your attention or show you something. It's like they are gently tossing a soft ball to you.

They might:

- Make a little sound, like "goo" or "ahh."
- Smile at you.
- Look at something interesting, like a bright toy.
- Reach out their hand.
- Wiggle or kick their legs.



You "Return" (Catch and Throw the Ball Back):

When you see the infant do one of these things, you "return the serve." This means you notice what they did and do something back. It's like you catch the ball and gently toss it back to them.

You can:

- Smile back if they smile.
- Make a soft sound back if they make a sound. "Oh, you said 'goo'! That's a nice sound!"
- Look at what they're looking at and talk about it. "Yes, that's a shiny red block!"
- Gently touch their hand if they reach out.
- Talk in a kind voice about what they are doing. "Are you wiggling your happy feet?"

Why is "Serve & Return" So Important?

Why is this "Game" So Important?

Playing this "serve and return" game is super important for babies. It's not just fun, it helps their brains grow strong.

Brain Building: Every time you "return a serve," it's like you're helping to build tiny roads and bridges in the infant's brain. These connections help them learn everything.

Learning to Talk: Infants learn about talking when you talk back to them. They learn that when they make a sound or a face, someone cares and listens.

Feeling Happy and Safe: When you pay attention and respond to a infant, it makes them feel loved and safe. They know you are there for them.

Learning About Feelings: When you smile, or use a soft voice, babies learn about different feelings.

Keep the Game Going!

After you "return the serve," wait a little bit. Give the infant a chance to "serve" again. Maybe they'll make another sound, or look at something else. Then you can return it again.

It's a simple game, but playing "serve and return" with a infant is one of the best ways you can help them learn and grow. You're being a brain-builder!



Routine Times Matter!

Routine times ... like diapering ... are excellent times to engage in "serve & return" with infants. Here is an example of what a "serve & return" during diapering might look like.

"Peek-a-Boo" with the Diaper

Provider says: "Where's [Infant's Name]? Is [Infant's Name] hiding?" (while briefly holding a clean diaper playfully near their face or in the infants' line of sight).

Pause and look expectantly at the infant.

Provider says (with a big smile when you "find" them): "Peek-a-BOO! There you are!"

Encourages: Eye contact, smiles, giggles, reaching, or wiggling in anticipation.

"All Done?" with a Lift:

Provider says: "Are we all done with this yucky diaper?"

Gently lift the infant's bottom slightly as if to remove the diaper, then pause and look at their face.

Encourages: The infant might kick their legs, arch their back slightly, look at the diaper, or make a sound in response to the question and the slight movement.

"Which Foot?" with a Gentle Touch:

Provider says: "Okay, time to get dressed. Hmm, which foot should go in first? This one?" (gently touch one foot, look at the infant).

Pause, look at the infant's face and then their foot.

Provider then says: "Or maybe this one?" (gently touch the other foot, again looking at the infant).

Encourages: The infant might wiggle one foot more than the other, look at the foot you touched, or even try to lift a leg. You can then "choose" the foot they seemed to indicate.

Routine Times Matter!



"Sooo Big!" Stretch:

Provider says (while gently stretching infant's arms up or legs out): "Wow, you are getting sooo BIIIIIG! Can you show me how big?"

Pause and smile, maintaining eye contact.

Encourages: The infant might stretch further, wave their arms, kick their legs, or widen their eyes in response to your enthusiastic tone and playful stretch.

Infant makes a little "ooh" face.

Provider says (copying the face in an exaggerated way): "Ooooooh! What was that interesting face? Did you see something amazing?"

Pause and maintain the exaggerated expression for a moment, then soften into a smile.

Encourages: The infant might make the face again, smile back, or make eye contact, realizing you've noticed and responded to their subtle expression.

"Cold Wipe!" with a Questioning Look:

Provider says (with a slightly empathetic, playful tone, just before using a wipe): "Ooh, this wipe might be a little cooold! Are you ready?"

Look at the infant with raised eyebrows and a questioning expression, pausing briefly.

Encourages: The infant might tense up, widen their eyes, or make a small sound in anticipation. This shows they are processing your words and tone.

Routine Times Matter!

Tips for Success:

Be Patient: Give the infant plenty of time to respond. Nonverbal communication isn't always instant.

Watch Closely: Pay attention to their subtle cues – a flicker of the eyes, a small mouth movement, a wiggle.

Respond to Their Efforts: When they do respond (even if it's tiny!), acknowledge it with a smile, a word ("Oh, you are looking at that foot!"), or continued playful interaction. This reinforces their attempts to communicate.

Use a Playful, Warm Tone: Your voice and facial expressions are key to inviting interaction.

Keep it Positive: Diapering can be a great time for connection and fun, not just a chore.

By using these techniques, you're not just changing a diaper; you're having a conversation and building a strong foundation for the infant's communication skills.



“Serve & Return” & Gee Whiz

So now that you are an expert of engaging with infants, how does the Gee Whiz curriculum help in this area?

All Gee Whiz infant experiences lend themselves to “serve & return.”

Within the Gee Whiz Teaching Guides, you will find experiences in purple boxes that are designed specifically for infants. During these experiences, you will be singing songs, reciting rhymes, describing objects as well as the infant’s actions and engaging with the infant one-on-one.

Because reading to children is so important, you will also find experiences in the units that guide you to read to infants. For instance, during an activity titled, “People in Pictures,” the infant is presented with 2-3 books. Using nonverbal communication, the infant will choose a book for you to read. You can describe the infant’s choice before reading and point to and describe the cover illustration as well. While reading, the text within the experience will promote you to stop frequently to talk about the illustrations within the book. This is another create time to engage in “serve & return” with the infant.

Because routine times are a big part of the infant’s day, we incorporate opportunities for “serve & return” during these times as well. Diapering, eating, preparing for nap and, of course, playing are all incorporated into the infant experiences within the Teaching Guides as well.

All of the information presented in this booklet should be utilized when engaging with infants every, single day. It is THAT important!



Because the Research is Important...

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