Early Intervention Every Day!

Embedding Activities in Daily Routines for Young Children and Their Families

by

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and

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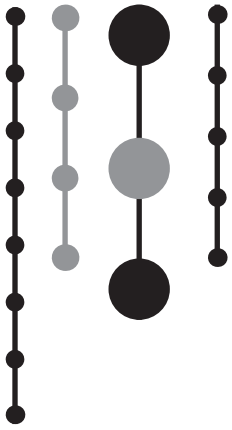
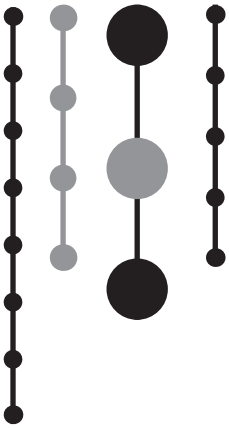


Contents



About the Authors

Merle J. Crawford, M.S., OTR/L, BCBA, CIMI, is an occupational therapist who has a private practice in central Pennsylvania. She has a bachelor of science degree in special education and elementary education and a master's degree in occupational therapy. In addition, Ms. Crawford has graduate certificates in applied behavior analysis and autism. She has extensive training in relationship-based interventions and is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst and a Certified Infant Massage Instructor. Ms. Crawford works primarily with infants and toddlers in early intervention, integrating strategies from her varied training when coaching families and working with young children.

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Tips and Hints

For children who love cause-and-effect toys but who struggle with social communication, it is beneficial for caregivers to become the cause-and-effect "toys" by using a great deal of affect, animation, and repetition so that the child will look for the response from the person rather than the toy. For example, if the child is pushing buttons to hear the alphabet or a repetitious phrase, say what the toy "says" in a tone and volume the child will likely attend to and find more motivating than the toy.

Use pause time and expectant looks to cue the child that a message is necessary.

When the child uses body movements to indicate more, use such phrases as "Oh, you want more _____."

At first, if the child does not use movements to request continuation of an activity, prompt the child with hand-over-hand assistance. Fade the full prompt to a partial prompt and then to no prompt over time.

OBJECT PERMANENCE

Object permanence was a term used by psychologist Jean Piaget in the 1950s, and much research has been done on the concept (Munakata, McClelland, Johnson, & Siegler, 1997). Object permanence refers to the understanding that when something is hidden or out of sight, it still exists. Preliminary research on this topic relied on reaching; however, later research has focused on looking and has found that very young infants do hold representations in their minds (Baillargeon, Spelke, & Wasserman, 1985). Children first search for partially hidden objects, and later they search for objects that are fully hidden. Searching for partially hidden objects requires that the child recognize that part of the object belongs to the whole object. Before children demonstrate this skill well, they often play with the material used to cover the object instead of searching for the object itself. The child's motivation is also a factor in object permanence, as a child typically will not search for an item he or she does not find interesting or useful at that particular time.

Importance: Object permanence relates to exploring and problem solving. In order to search for something that is hidden, a young child relies on his or her memory and must use a motor response to search, whether it be uncovering a toy hidden under a blanket or crawling to find a family member who is in another room. When children cry because Mom or Dad leaves the room, they are showing the ability to understand object permanence. Thus, object permanence is also related to social development.

How to Incorporate into Routines:

Mealtime/Snack Time: For children who have favorite snacks and foods, playfully hide the food in your hands, under a napkin, or under a bowl and have the child search for it. This works best when the child is not excessively hungry but hungry enough to want the item!

Playtime: To encourage the understanding that objects out of sight still exist, playfully hide a child's favorite toy under a blanket, in a box, or behind a book and see if the child looks for it. If not, try having a portion of it visible. Allow the child to see you hide the item at first and progress to having the child look for an item that he or she did not see hidden. Play hiding games where you hide under a blanket or behind a wall or furniture and have the child find you. At first you may need to be only partially hidden, and you may need to give the child a lot of auditory cues such as "Come find me" to help the child locate you.

Excerpted from Early Intervention Every Day! Embedding Activities in Daily Routines for Young Children and Their Families
by Merle J. Crawford & Barbara Weber
Brookes Publishing | www.brookespublishing.com | 1-800-638-3775

Tips and Hints

If the child does not like to have his or her face covered to play Peekaboo, hold a small towel or blanket in front of the child's or your face for the child to pull off or look around.

Hide objects that are highly motivating to the child to ensure the child has a reason to look for them.

TURNING TO NAME

When the child's name is called, the child turns toward the person who called the name.

Importance: A child's name is a specific reference to that child, and, therefore, is a key word to alert the child to attend, look, or prepare for an important message. The child demonstrates an important listening skill when he or she turns toward the sound of his or her name being called.

How to Incorporate into Routines:

Community Outings: When outside at a park or in the yard, call the child's name to alert him or her that you will be sharing items of interest.

Household Activities: When cooking, call the child over to see, smell, or help. When cleaning, call the child over to show him or her something of interest. When folding laundry, call the child's name to show him or her something of him or hers that you are folding.

Playtime: Finding games that involve calling the child's name, such as Peekaboo or Hide and Seek, helps the child practice listening for his or her name.

Tips and Hints

Call a child's name only when it is appropriate to do so, such as when giving him or her something or when being playful. Calling a child's name to gain attention with no functional reason teaches the child that turning to name is not always important and may result in a child turning to his or her name less frequently.

Some caregivers typically call a child's name only when the child is doing something wrong, and the child consequently hears his or her name followed by a reprimand. To prevent or remedy this, it is helpful to call the child's name and then present a preferred item or activity.

When a child has difficulty turning to his or her name, the child may need to hear the name several times, may need to be touched to gain attention, or may need an increase in volume. The child may need to learn first to attend to sounds that are less specific. These may include environmental sounds such as the doorbell, the telephone, the toilet flushing, birds singing, or a truck going by.

DEMONSTRATING UNDERSTANDING OF WORDS

Over time, the number and types of words that children understand increase.

Importance: Understanding words is necessary to follow spoken directions, to learn many new skills, and to participate in conversations.

How to Incorporate into Routines:

Book Time: Reading with the child gives the child access to words across categories, events, characters, and themes. Pointing to pictures and saying the names helps the child learn vocabulary words. Naming a word and asking the child to show what was named helps the child match the word to the representation and show knowledge of the word. Allowing the child to pick favorite books will incorporate motivation into learning.

Diapering and Dressing: Name the child's body parts, clothes, and actions being used (lay down, leg in, pull up, zip, button) to teach functional vocabulary related to diapering and dressing.

Mealtime/Snack Time: Label the foods the child is eating, the utensils, and the temperature of the food. Talk to the child while he or she eats, using words that describe the food or the child's actions (e.g., *cut*, *chew*, *yum*).

Tips and Hints

Label the child's actions and describe or present what he or she is paying attention to using nouns, verbs, adjectives, and other words.

Use words often to describe everyday events. Learning the words for objects, actions, and descriptions that seem ordinary to adults is important to the child's development of a core vocabulary. Simple, everyday words such as *sit, couch,* and *pillow* are as important to teach as *circle, square,* and *triangle*.

IMITATION OF ACTIONS WITH OBJECTS AND WITH THE BODY

Young children imitate actions with objects, such as banging a toy, and imitate actions with their bodies, such as clapping and blowing a kiss.

Importance: Imitation is an important foundation for learning; without it, a child has "little chance for the agile acquisition of behaviors" (Cooper, et al., 2007, p. 413). Young children learn by imitating both adults and peers to develop social, motor, problem-solving, communication, and self-help skills. According to Stone, Ousley, and Littleford (1997), children can first imitate actions with their bodies when they can see their imitative action. Ledford and Wolery (2011) advocate that teaching object imitation should occur before teaching gestural imitation for children who are not yet imitating. In addition, they recommend that targeted behaviors should be "familiar, frequently occurring in the natural environment, and functional" (p. 253).