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Getting in Step with Responsive Teaching

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The ways in which parents and other persons interact with a young child matters a great deal for the child to learn to communicate and talk. This *Center on Everyday Child Language Learning Tool* includes four simple steps for using a practice called **responsive teaching** that a parent can use while interacting with his or her child during everyday activities like meal times, dressing, and parent-child play (Dunst, Valentine, Raab, & Hamby, 2013). Parental responsiveness to a child's behavior while the child is involved in everyday activities is an easy but powerful way to enhance a child's language development (Dunst, Raab, & Trivette, 2011; Raab, Dunst, Johnson, & Hamby, 2013).

Responsive teaching is a particular way of interacting with a child that starts with a parent following a child's lead while the child is doing something he or she likes to do or is involved in an activity the child finds interesting or entertaining. Responsiveness simply involves a parent making positive comments about what a child is doing, providing feedback, or joining the child's play. Being responsive to what a child is doing or trying to communicate while involved in interesting activities is how a parent gets his or her child to continue to do what the child is already doing. When a child is involved in an activity, there are many more opportunities for a child to interact with and learn to communicate and talk to a parent. Responsive teaching also includes those things a parent can do to support and encourage child language learning like asking questions or describing in

more detail what his or her child is doing. The Appendix includes a one page reminder sheet that highlights some of the most important things a parent can do at each of the four steps or the responsive teaching procedure.

Four Easy Steps to Responsive Teaching

1. Involve your child in interesting learning activities. Start by thinking about all of the things your child likes to do and finds interesting. Or you can use our *Child Interests Activity Checklist Tool* (Number 3) to identify your child's interests. Once you have identified your child's interests, involve your child in as many of these activities as you can as you go about your day, during evenings, and on weekends and as often as you can.

2. Pay attention to what your child is doing in the activities. Pay particular attention to what is the focus of your child's attention and how your child is trying to get your attention or is trying to talk or communicate with you during the activities. Follow your child's lead by concentrating what is the focus of your child's play or activity.

3. Respond positively to your child's attempts to communicate or talk. Acknowledge your child's attempts to interact with you by responding to or commenting on what your child is doing (e.g., "By giving your child a drum that she is pointing at"). Praise your child for talking or even trying to talk by describing what he or she is doing (e.g., "You really like to bang on that drum!"). (Don't overdo it!

Too much responsiveness to your child's behavior may distract him or her from what your child is doing.) Join in the activities with your child by taking turns or imitating what your child is doing (e.g., Taking turns banging on a drum). Show your child that you are excited about what he or she is doing by smiling while responding to your child's attempts to talk or communicate.

4. Encourage your child to communicate or talk in new or different ways. Respond in ways that are different from how you have been interacting with your child. Introduce new information about what your child is doing (e.g., by saying "That is a big drum" in response to your child is saying or trying to say "drum"). Introduce new words (e.g., "The drum makes a loud noise"). Ask simple questions in response to what your child is trying to do or say (e.g., "What noise does the drum make?"). Arrange things in different ways (e.g., add new materials or place an interesting toy within view but slightly out of reach) so your child tries to say something different.

Implications for Practice

The four easy steps to responsive teaching can be used by a practitioner as part of his or her work with a parent to encourage a parent's use of the teaching practice. The reminder sheet can be used as a handout so that a parent can remember to do the most important parts of responsive teaching while interacting with his or her child during everyday activities. A practitioner and parent can use the four steps and reminder sheet to review the ways in which the different things a parent

did while interacting with his or her child had positive effects on a child's language learning. One of our responsive teaching checklists can be used by a practitioner together with the reminder list to have a parent determine how well she or he understands the steps in the teaching practice (see Dunst, Trivette, & Raab, 2013).

References

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Appendix

Responsive Teaching Reminders

Responsive Teaching Reminders

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- 1 **Involve** your child in **everyday activities** that are **interesting** and that offer many good opportunities for language learning.
- 2 **Pay attention** to how your child tries to communicate or use language during these everyday activities.
 - See your child's behavior as his/her way of saying, "I want to interact with you" or "I want to interact with other people during this activity."
- 3 **Respond** positively to your child's communication or attempts to communicate in the activities to get him or her to keep interacting with you:
 - Acknowledge your child's attempts to interact with you.
 - Comment on or praise your child for trying to communicate or use language in the activities.
 - Join in interactions or play with your child.
 - Imitate your child to encourage him or her to keep an interaction going or keep playing.
- 4 **Encourage** your child to communicate in **new or different ways**:
 - Respond in ways that are slightly more complex than your child's attempts to communicate.
 - Give new information or use a new word with your child.
 - Ask simple questions in response to your child's attempts to communicate.
 - Arrange things so your child needs to communicate or use language in different ways in order to make things happen.



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