



Natural Learning Environment

Practices: Caregiver Responsiveness

Young children learn by having the opportunity to actively be part of typical everyday activities that happen in their home or classroom. How the important people in their lives interact with them during these activities is very important for learning and development. Learning happens not just when early childhood intervention practitioners are present, but also when they are not. Early intervention practitioners must rely on the people who are with the child most (parents, grandparents, teachers, childcare providers, etc.), a.k.a. their caregivers, to recognize and use everyday activities as learning opportunities.

Be sure caregivers know three important steps for learning to happen frequently and naturally:

1. **INVITE** the child into an activity (dressing, mealtime, car rides, bath time) by getting the child's attention and creating a reason for the child to want to participate (encouraging voice, gently taking them by the hand, being playful, including a favorite person or object).
2. **ENGAGE** the child by joining in the activity and letting the child know the caregiver hears and understands what the child wants and is doing ("You're hungry. Let me help you get in the highchair. Here's your Mickey spoon. Let's eat!").
3. **TEACH** by supporting the child to use current and learn new skills as part of the activity ("Tell me. Do you want milk or juice to drink?" "Let me show you how to scoop your cereal with your Mickey spoon. Your turn to try it.").

Caregiver responsiveness promotes child learning throughout the day.