SERVING MOBILE INFANTS

Sharing Knowledge with Infant –Toddler Teachers and Home Visitors

Sharing Knowledge with Infant – Toddler Teachers and Home Visitors Series

This booklet describes development, attachment, and exploration for infants from 8 to 18 months, and may be used by Staff members who are working with teachers and home visitors. The document was developed by the Early Head Start National Resource Center (EHS NRC) @ ZERO TO THREE in collaboration with the Office of Head Start.

Introduction

This *Trainer's Companion Manual* accompanies the Sharing Knowledge with Infant-Toddler Teachers and Home Visitors series. The *Trainer's Companion Manual* provides background material and suggested activities to be used by the education manager/supervisor or director in supporting the use of these modules by teaching and home visiting staff members, either individually or in groups. These modules may be used during an orientation period to provide an overview of basic information on serving infants and toddlers and their families, as part of in-service training, or for more experienced teachers to review and expand their knowledge.

Each module provides basic information in a series of short presentations. Accompanying each section, there is an activity designed to help the teacher or home visitor do the following:

- **Reflect on the qualities and beliefs he or she brings to the work**
- **Problem solve, explore possible alternatives**
- **Practice skills such as observation**

These activities should be reviewed with a director or supervisor to promote reflection and ensure understanding.

This module on serving mobile infants emphasizes the importance of relationships, child development, and how mobile infants build on their foundation of security to actively explore toys and objects as well as begin moving around with purpose in their environment.

Thinking About It...
How the Mobile Infant Grows and Develops

Very young infants require an extremely close, intimate relationship with their parents and teachers. As babies become secure in the knowledge that the adults in their life will keep them safe, they put their energies toward movement and exploration. Some adults love this growing independence; others miss the closeness of early infancy.

As a teacher or home visitor, how do you, personally, react to the increased movement of the mobile infant—particularly, their new ability to cover distance and "get into things"?

Parents, teachers, and home visitors who enjoyed the closeness and dependency of the first months of life may celebrate the baby's growing independence, or they may miss the sense that the baby needs them all the time. Infant-toddler care teachers and home visitors must know how to recognize and deal with their own feelings and those of the families. Directors and education coordinators should model self-awareness, sensitivity, responsiveness, and reflection as they teach these same skills to teachers and home visitors.

Issues that might arise for discussion include the following:

- **Missing the closeness of early infancy; breastfeeding mothers may miss being the only source of the baby's nutrition**
- **Joy in the baby's new motor accomplishments; use of words**
- **Confusion over the mix of independence and clinginess sometimes seen in mobile infants**
- **Possibly wanting the baby to become more independent if another pregnancy has started**
- **Concern over the baby using the word no and not being respectful**
- **Concern over biting; being aggressive or seen as "bad"**
- **Concern over the baby becoming "more attached" to the teacher than to the parents**

Babies in this age range can be a great deal of fun, but they do have new abilities to move around and get into things. It is a balancing act to continue to provide the security they still need while encouraging their desire for exploration. Mobile infants have new skills for feeling connected to adults without having to be beside them. They understand more language and use some words and babbling that sound like language. They read the facial expressions of trusted adults and use those cues to determine the emotional tone of the situation (social-referencing). Teachers and home visitors want to help families see these steps as good, healthy development and as a natural benefit of their good parenting.

How the Mobile Infant Grows and Develops

The period between 8 and 18 months is a time of dramatic change both in terms of development and in the nature of the baby's relationships. Some changes are easy to observe: The baby crawls, scoots, climbs, cruises and walks. She begins to use a mix of clearly understandable words and gibberish that sounds like words. She imitates the activities she has been watching adults do, including cooking, driving, or talking on the phone. Instead of mouthing, carrying, and tossing toys, she becomes interested in taking them apart and putting them back together.

Parents and other trusted adults are as important as ever; however, the actions they took to meet a young infant's needs may not always be what the mobile infant requires. Adults need to continue to be responsive by adapting as the baby's needs change. The close holding and carrying on which a young infant thrives may feel restrictive to the mobile infant who wants to move on his own.

This module describes the following:

- **Anticipated developmental milestones**
- **The growing visibility of attachment relationships**
- **Changes in the nature of responsiveness**
- **Creating an engaging and responsive learning environment**
- **Fostering relationships between peers**

Thinking About It...
The Attachment Relationship

As adults, we may bring lessons from our own early attachment relationships into our current relationships. For infants, attachment relationships develop in predictable patterns according to how adults respond to children's needs. Reflect on your own experience in relationships by answering the following questions:

- **Think about people who made you feel known and valued. How did they show you that they cared about you and wanted to understand you?**

- **Were there adults you were a little afraid of going to for help? What made you afraid?**

- **Were there adults who seemed to pay attention to you when they wanted to, but not necessarily when you needed them? How did that feel? How would you imagine that might feel for a young child?**

Attachment researchers such as John Bowlby and Inge Bretherington believe that, from their first relationships, babies form mental models of relationships. These models continue to influence how babies expect other people to act toward them and how they believe they should act toward others.

As adults, infant-toddler care teachers and home visitors also carry mental models of their own early relationships. Perhaps most people are drawn to this work from their own high valuing of children. Some are drawn to it because their own early relationships were not very satisfying and they hope to give and experience something better.

The attachment literature often resonates with adults when they hear about it and they may want to talk about their own experiences. They may find that a current relationship with a spouse or boyfriend reminds them of aspects of earlier relationships. They may be confused by their observations of parents and how they respond to their child's need for safety or comforting.

Suggested Learning Activities

1. Review the four patterns of attachment and how the patterns result from the adult's behavior.

2. Talk with staff members about whether the babies they serve prefer different ways of being comforted. Do these preferences relate at all to staff members' observations of the babies with parents?

3. Have staff members reflect on what feelings a baby's needs for comfort or attention bring up in them.

The Attachment Relationship

Attachment has become a commonly used term in infant development. Sometimes people use it to describe the shared love between an infant and an adult. The concept of attachment in child development literature has more to do with an infant's ability to feel safe and protected—safe enough to be able to venture out and explore the environment.

Through early interactions with parents, family members, and other trusted adults, the baby develops a few, ongoing relationships. Within these relationships, the baby learns whether he is capable of summoning help when he needs it, whether the adults in his life can understand him, and whether they will respond in helpful ways. *This basic template of relationships, sometimes called a mental model of relationships, may stay with the baby for a lifetime.*

Almost all babies are able to develop some kind of attachment relationship to achieve enough of a sense of safety to be able to learn. *In fact, babies develop different kinds of relationships with different adults.*

There are categories of attachment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Main & Hesse, 1990):

Secure attachment is the result of an early relationship in which the adult responds sensitively and accurately to the baby's needs. By age 1 year, babies are able to move away to explore but check back frequently. In long-term studies, children with secure attachments do well in later relationships and learning.

Anxious-ambivalent attachment occurs when the adult does not read the baby's cues but showers the baby with attention or ignores the baby according to the adults own needs of the moment. The baby cannot figure out how to get his own needs met and may struggle against the adult when being comforted.

Anxious-avoidant attachment most often occurs when the adult is severely depressed or has some other issue that causes them to be emotionally unavailable or, sometimes, very angry. Babies will find ways to stay close enough to the adult to feel safe without actually engaging in eye contact. These babies sometimes seem extremely emotionally controlled.

Disorganized-disoriented attachment occurs when the baby has been the victim or witness of extreme trauma such as violence or sexual abuse.

It is important that infant-toddler care staff members use the idea of attachment only as a way to encourage families to be responsive to their children's cues and encourage safe exploration. These classifications are not ways for home visitors and teachers to "diagnose" problems between families and their babies.

Thinking About It...
Developmental Domains, 8 to 12 Months

Babies feel effective and competent when someone they trust supports them in their exploration. That support is a foundation that gives children confidence to explore their environments, work to communicate their needs, and take on challenges of toys and learning materials.

Babies at this age are interested in toys that respond to their actions. They learn the most when they are able to make things happen. Many of today's toys do not encourage trial and error skill practice. Instead, the lights and music occur no matter what the baby does.

Look at the toys, books, and other materials in your classroom. Choose three toys and list three things a baby could do with each one. The example below serves as a guide.

Toy: Stacking Cups

     1. **Stack them inside each other**

     2. **Build a tower**

     3. **Put things in them**

     4. **Line them up**

     5. **Match them to items of the same color**

Mobile infants are learning many important concepts. It is easy to get carried away with excitement over their motor and language gains, but there is important cognitive development going on also. Through their new abilities to move and use their hands more efficiently, mobile infants will be making many discoveries about cause and effect, object permanence, how objects relate to each other in space, and the use of tools. They will explore how objects come apart and can be put back together.

Teachers and home visitors need to both model for and discuss with parents and families the importance of toys that actually respond *contingently* in response to the child's actions. Infant-toddler care staff members need to understand what potential information is contained within any particular toy. For example, a ball may teach a child the concepts of cause-and-effect as it rolls away when pushed or spatial relationships as it appears to grow bigger as it rolls closer. A mobile infant may use a ball alone or with others. Adults involved in ball play may use a variety of language within the game: "Are you ready?" "Can you push the ball?" "Go get it! Don't let that ball roll away from you!"

Questions to Consider

Are there learning opportunities in the materials your infant-toddler program uses? Can babies match colors, sizes, or shapes; categorize, stack or build; put items in or take them out of containers? Do the materials allow for exploration or are they designed only for one task?

Do your toys and materials allow for information about number or amount, for example, "Wow, we have many *more* cars than trucks"?

Do plastic toy animals match realistic photographs in books, helping children begin to get some ideas about the symbolic role of pictures and text?

Is there a balance of enough materials (plenty for each child) without being too many?

The Developmental Domains, 8 to 12 Months

8 months to 12 months. This period is truly a period of reaching out to the world. Most babies consider moving and exploring to be most interesting at this time. If you are serving babies who are unable to move because of a disabling condition, you will want to be sure that the staff members and parents are keeping them near the action and able to explore!

Mobile infants still need the security of an adult who will cuddle and hold them and keep them safe. They may follow an adult around, hold onto a pant leg, or reach up to be picked up.

Babies are nearly as interested in exploring language as movement, and they need adult partners who provide rich language experiences for them. Adults can do the following:

- **Repeat sounds the baby makes, especially sounds she consistently uses for words.**
- **Respond to baby using the correct words for what you believe he means. If he says, "Vuh, vuh" when looking at a picture of a dog, the adult might say, "The dog says, 'woof, woof.'"**
- **Describe what the baby is doing, "You're building with so many blocks! I see how you put that block on top."**
- **Name objects, pictures, or people when the baby points to them.**
- **Use words of affection and encouragement in the child's home language.**

Mobile infants are also using adult's facial expressions to determine the safety of a situation in a process called *social referencing.* If the adult smiles encouragingly, the baby is likely to continue with her play and exploration. If the adult looks fearful or angry, the baby is likely to scan the room to identify the danger or move back to the adult for safety.

In contrast to young infants, who are generally content to look at, mouth, and toss toys, mobile infants enjoy toys they can figure out (busy boxes, stacking rings, shape boxes), take apart and put back together (pop beads, locking rings), categorize (figures of animals and people, blocks, cars and trucks), and use for pretend play (telephones, cups and spoons, hats). The way that they play is changing. Although they may be very serious and focused on a toy or the work of climbing, they will frequently check back visually to make sure their teacher or parent is still nearby.

Thinking About It...
Developmental Domains, 12 to 18 Months

Babies are suddenly crawling, walking, pulling up, climbing, and exploring. It is definitely time to review your baby proofing! What procedures does your program use to check your classrooms, socialization spaces, or outdoor play areas? How do you share information with families on keeping their babies safe at home, in cars, or on outings?

Every EHS and MSHS program is required to perform regular safety checks of their space [**CFR 1304.53 (a) (10)**]. These safety checks are a good opportunity to introduce new staff members to (or review with experienced staff members) your program's protocols for classroom or socialization space safety reviews. Make sure your staff members are familiar with the location of the protocol, know what each item means, and use it to review safety in each room.

Safety checks are also an opportunity to support parents in ensuring that the home environment is safe. Baby proofing is an important aspect of parent education. Does your program have handouts for families on baby proofing their homes? Do teachers or home visitors go over this information with families at different times, especially as the baby becomes mobile?

If you don't have materials to share with parents, perhaps creating these materials could become a group project, educating the staff members as they prepare the materials.

The Developmental Domains, 12 to 18 Months

12 to 18 months. One of the great pleasures mobile infants take in these months is their ability to carry an object in each hand as they toddle along. Sometimes they carry the object in their mouths if they choose to crawl instead.

The increased motor abilities and control often occur with an interest in doing more things for themselves, for example, putting on shoes or a jacket, although expectations for when those skills emerge tend to be related to cultural norms. One Italian teacher, questioned about still dressing 4-year-olds in their outdoor jackets said, "But we get them dressed and then we hug them! Why would we give that up? They'll be off on their own soon enough." Still, our 1-year-olds often enjoy the independence and the struggle to dress themselves with only a little help, and adults need to be patient and supportive.

Riding and rocking toys and push and pull toys are very interesting to this age group. For this age group, the classroom or socialization space may need rearranging. When preparing the space, staff members should provide a balance of large gross-motor equipment that is safe, and they should allow for enough open space for movement. Because the home environment is the primary learning environment for the child in the home-based program, guide parents to seek out materials and space in the home environment that can be used to support gross-motor development. The family may choose to visit a nearby park.

These young 1-year-olds are definitely still babies and need both the physical and emotional closeness of trusted adults. They may demonstrate a variety of emotions that can be confusing to families. In the middle of a cuddle, the 1-year-old might suddenly bite. It may hurt and surprise the adult, but the baby is likely just checking out another way to "connect." Although this behavior is common for mobile infants, understanding and dealing with biting can be difficult. It is important that teachers and home visitors have plans for dealing with biting, if necessary.

Peers seem to motivate mobile infants to try out new skills. Spontaneous games of "follow the leader" may lead to climbing up steps, sliding down ramps, and riding low-to-the-ground rocking horses together. These new playmates also inspire the use of words such as "no" and "mine"—powerful tools for mobile infants as they negotiate new friendships.

Mobile infants use both movement and language to support their insatiable interest in people and the world. Time is well spent outside exploring budding branches, little insects, autumn leaves, and snow. Play is increasingly organized around imitating the activities of the adults in their lives: cooking meals and setting the table, using tools to fix things, driving, or talking on the telephone. Adults can help sustain and expand this play by helping negotiate disagreements and adding words and ideas to the play.

Thinking About It...
Exploration and Movement: The Big Ideas in the Mobile Infant's Development

As mobile infants move and explore, adults have new roles in supporting them and new kinds of decisions to make. When do we intervene to keep them safe and when do we allow them to explore? Babies use their mouths to explore. We want them to explore nature, but eating dirt and bugs is not safe. How do we provide safe and genuine experiences for movement and exploration?

Having rules about where to allow climbing or what babies can be allowed to mouth may seem obvious to each of us. However, we are actually likely to base our rules on opinions shaped by our own early experiences. Did the adults in your life communicate a casual acceptance or encouragement for exploration? Did they communicate fear and distress if you picked up a bug or a garden snake?

Mobile infants may also prompt questions about when to intervene indoors. It is pretty common, for example, for mobile infants to pull themselves up to standing and then be unable to sit down again. Some people believe it is OK to let them struggle and even be distressed until they figure it out. Others feel they should intervene and teach the baby how to get back down.

Suggested Learning Activities

Have a conversation with staff members and parents about how they perceive safety in relation to the mobile infant's push for movement and exploration.

Exploration and Movement: The Big Ideas in the Mobile Infant's Development

The Program for Infant and Toddler Care from WestEd Laboratory identifies three age groups in the first 3 years of life by the overriding motivational themes in each period:

- **Young Infants**   **Birth–9 months**   **Security**
- **Mobile Infants**   **8–18 months**   **Exploration**
- **Toddlers**   **18–36 months**   **Identity Formation**

Each of these motivational themes, or big ideas, cuts across all of the developmental domains and is a driving force in development. They are all in effect throughout the first 3 years of life, but each seems to dominate certain periods of development. Mobile infants are dominated by a desire to move and explore, but they also require the security of a trusted, responsive adult. At the same time, they are forming an identity in which they see themselves as explorers—and as people who can achieve a sense of security.

Teachers, parents, and home visitors can encourage exploration in direct face-to-face play with the mobile infant by asking questions such as "What can we do with that?" or "Where does that fit?" From short distances, adults can support exploration by making eye contact, smiling, talking, and gesturing. The same baby who moves confidently away may suddenly feel that the distance is too great and quickly return to the adult with the need for reassurance and physical contact.

Sometimes adults are confused by what seem like "mixed messages" as the mobile infant practices independence but relies on the adult to provide security.

If your infant-toddler center-based program practices primary caregiving and continuity of care by keeping the same teachers and children in the same space over 3 years, how do you reassess the environment and make sure that the following are achieved?

- **The space is safe.**
- **There are opportunities for climbing, walking, pushing, pulling, riding, and rocking.**
- **Toy replicas of adult tools are available for pretend play.**
- **Toys and materials are providing appropriate challenges.**
- **The schedule is paced to allow mobile infants to practice putting on their shoes or jackets and eating finger foods during meals and snacks.**

Home visitors may bring up these same issues with parents, adapting the existing home environment according to the child's development by possibly providing increasingly complex toys as part of a lending library. The rattles of early infancy are no longer that challenging to the mobile infant.

Thinking About It...
Beginning Friendships

The idea that such young children might develop friendships is surprising to some people. Some think babies aren't even aware of their peers. Some cultures raise groups of children together whereas others limit their children's contact to family members. Talk with some of the families you serve to learn how they feel about letting babies negotiate their relationships—even when those negotiations sometimes lead to tears. Mobile infants do not have the language or other communication skills for smooth negotiation, but they can do very well given some time and space to work things out on their own—with an adult nearby.

Suggested Learning Activities

1. If the infant-toddler care staff members have the opportunity to take pictures during group care or socializations, pictures of mobile infants together might be a wonderful way to talk among staff members and with families about early friendships.

2. Reviewing the nonverbal communication styles on the next page and using them to decipher the interaction between the mobile infants in your photos could be most enlightening. Use observation to identify moments of early friendship. For example, this photo in the teacher's module reveals interesting information.

The girl is quietly watching, tugging her ear and not reaching for the toy. She appears quite interested but very reserved. The boy looks gleeful as he pulls toys out of the basket. He seems confident that he can hold onto and explore the toys at his leisure, without concern that the girl might try to take them. This confidence is interesting because the girl appears to be a year or so older than the boy.

Beginning Friendships

We used to think that mobile infants were aware of their peers but engaged only in parallel play. Researchers are now demonstrating that babies as young as 9 to 12 months are communicating very clearly with each other through gestures and facial expressions. A French ethnologist, Hubert Montagner, describes five major styles of communication that babies this age use and seem to understand, even if they are not obvious to adults:

- Actions that pacify others or produce attachment
  - Offering toys
  - Lightly touching or caressing
  - Jumping in place
  - Leaning or rocking sideways
- Threatening actions that produce fear or tears
  - Loud vocalizations
  - Clenched teeth or open mouth showing teeth
  - Pointing an index finger or a fist
  - Leaning toward other child
- Aggressive actions
  - Hitting, scratching, biting, pulling hair or clothes
  - Shaking or knocking down the other child
  - Grabbing something from the child
  - Throwing something at the child
- Gestures of fear and retreat
  - Widened eyes
  - Protecting face
  - Moving backward, running away
  - Crying
- Actions that produce isolation
  - Finger sucking
  - Tugging at hair or ear
  - Fetal position
  - Crying alone

Related Head Start Program Performance Standards

1304.20(f)–Individualization of the program

1304.21(a)(1)(i) (ii) (iii) (iv)–Child development and education approach for all children

1304.21 (a)(2)(i) (ii)–Parents

1304.21(a)(3)(i)(A) (B) (C) (D) (E)–Support social and emotional development

1304.21(a)(3)(ii)–Planning for routines and transitions

1304.21(a)(4)(i) (ii) (iii) (iv)–Each child's cognitive and language skills

1304.21(a)(5)(i) (ii) (iii) (6)–Physical development

1304.21(b)(1)(i) (ii) (iii)–Child development and education approach for infants and toddlers

1304.21(b)(2)(i) (ii)–Social and emotional development of infants and toddlers

1304.21(b)(3)(i) (ii)–Physical development of infants and toddlers

1304.24(a)(1)(i) (ii) (iii) (iv)–Grantee and delegate agencies must work collaboratively with parents

1304.40(e)(1) (2) (3)–Parent involvement in child development and education

1306.23(a) (b)–Training

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