

**Caring Connections Podcast 1:  
Let's Talk About... You**

[Music]

Laura Annunziata: Welcome to the first Early Head Start podcast. We'll be producing this series over the coming months on topics that are important in our field and EHS. We hope the podcasts will be easy for you to access and share with the teams at your programs, as well as families, community members, and anyone else you think might be interested. Look for us to post a new podcast towards the end of each month.

This series is called "Caring Connections," and this segment focuses on "You," the important role that all of you – particularly people working directly with families, babies, and young children – have on the growth and development of children in Early Head Start care. The relationships you build with those you reach through your EHS work are essential to building high quality care. And that's what we are all working on together: creating loving, safe, enriched Early, Migrant, and AI/AN Head Start environments. You build those relationships as you are going through the routines of your days or time with the children in your care, eating, exploring, changing diapers, talking, or sharing things in care environments, families' homes, or anywhere else in your communities that you're working.

Let's listen to Tammy Mann, formerly the deputy director of Zero to Three, as she reminds us of the central role those working in direct service -- that's you -- play in building a strong base for infants and young children.

[Video begins] Tammy Mann: Early relationships really provide the foundation for all of a child's learning and development. It's the give and take that happens between a caregiver and a child; and that back and forth process really fuels a young child's brain development in ways that helps connections to form, helps young children be able to make sense of their experiences. And so when young children have access to adults who are in tune, who are able to respond to a child's cues, who really can engage in that back and forth dance, we really find that -- that that's the foundation that really establishes the base for all of development to -- to unfold.

I think the idea of really trying to be observant... I mean, even though infants are not able to speak to us and help us verbally understand what their needs are and how they're reacting to experiences that are happening around them, when you have a caregiver who is able to really tune in and be attentive to, "Gee, this child seems to be turning away as I'm trying to engage them more. Maybe that turning away is telling me something about 'This might be too much for me right now.'"

I think the process of being able to really make sure that give and take, that dance, is really being responsive to the child's needs requires some real emotional engagement on the part of the adult to -- to -- to look for the way the child is relating through non-verbal cues, maybe through gaze aversion, maybe through smiling, suggesting that this is really enjoyable, you know, "Engage with me a little bit

more around this." It's -- it's really the idea of being available emotionally and physically to respond to what that child is experiencing in his -- in his or her environment. [Video ends]

Laura: You play a powerful role. Young children look to you as they're exploring and learning to trust the world around them. When we get on the floor with babies for tummy time or comfort a toddler when something is frustrating, or try hard to listen to exactly what a little one is trying to tell us before they have the words to share that way themselves, we're building those strong foundations.

Our work isn't always easy. People who haven't worked with infants and very young children don't always realize exactly how hard it is to do what we do: to respond to those little ones in the ways that we need to; to be available to everyone who needs us; to be that problem solver, the facilitator, the builder, the observer; and to take on all of the other important roles required of us in our work. Many things come together to help us to be as effective and productive as possible. Our work has challenges. Things don't always go as planned.

Louis Torrelli, a specialist in creating physical environments for infants and toddlers, recently shared this thought on some of his early challenges as a teacher, at the National Orientation Conference for newly funded Early Head Start programs.

[Video begins] Louis Torrelli: Again, so my interest in design came from those experiences as a teacher, because early on I recognized that something was affecting my ability to do the things that I was trained to do. And I had very good training when I went through my undergraduate work and then my graduate. But if I was honest with myself, a lot of the -- my behaviors and interactions were ones that were the opposite of what I was trained to do. So instead of being a facilitator, a supporter, an observer, I was becoming the policeman, manager, keeping the four-month-old safe from the 18-month-old who's interested in exploring space and things, and sometimes those things are four-month-olds that they want to be -- get on top of. [Laughter] So, really, that's... [Video ends]

Laura: The spaces we create, the things we do, the ways we interact, are so important in the services we provide in both center- and home-based environments. Sometimes we have to think and rethink our plans. We're constantly adapting and changing as children grow and develop, and the families and communities around us change and move forward in new and different ways. Lots of our work isn't just with the little ones, it's with the families and communities that are entrusting us with the care of their children. A strong EHS program is built on the foundation of the strength of those relationships.

Let's listen to Akua Kouyate from the Wolf Trap Center for Early Learning Through the Arts. She recently collaborated in the Office of Head Start initiative "Little Voices for Healthy Choices," which was designed to extend our work and understanding of the areas of music, movement, nutrition, brain development, and sleep in practical ways that we can apply to our everyday work.

[Video begins] Akua Kouyate: The primary source and the primary teacher, actually, for children are the parents, their families, their communities. So for caregivers, it's really important to connect with

parents, families, communities in that way by literally inviting them in, asking them to share their experiences. And recognize not only the differences but some of the similarities so that that can be addressed, and then everyone can be respected for what it is that they bring to that environment for the child. And I think... [Video ends]

Laura: The child: that little individual that brought us all together in this work. The relationships we build with children are intended to be reciprocal. That's to say, the relationships go two ways. Children share all kinds of things about themselves with us: what they like; how they feel; what they want; really, who they are. And we learn about them through our time with them so that we can provide responsive, individualized care that's respectful to each one of them. And then, importantly, they'll learn to interact with each other from that same strong foundation that grew from the relationships we shared with them.

When you return to your work, please take a moment consider you -- yourself; the things you feel you do well; the impact you have in the setting in which you do your work; or an interaction that you've recently had. What things do you do best, and what are some of the things you need to do your best work? You really are doing some of the most important work there is to do out there.

[Music] You can look us up at [www.ehsnrc.org](http://www.ehsnrc.org) or on the ECLKC, Head Start's Early Childhood Knowledge and Learning Center, at [eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov) for more resources that we hope will assist you. And please see the Info Sheet that accompanies this podcast for information regarding relevant Head Start Standards and resources that relate directly to today's topic. Signing off until next time, this is Laura Annunziata at the Early Head Start National Resource Center wishing you all the best in your work.