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Learning Outcomes

1. Foster parents increase their understanding of the critical role they play in their young foster child’s development and future school achievement.
2. Foster parents increase their capacity to create supportive and responsive relationships with their young foster child through language nutrition strategies.
3. Foster families use language nutrition strategies to help young foster children overcome challenges from exposure to trauma, toxic stress and traumatic separation.
4. Foster parents will develop the skills necessary to train birth and adoptive parents in “Talk With Me Baby” strategies.

Agenda

1. A Framework for Understanding
2. Lesson 1: The Science Behind Language Nutrition
3. Lesson 2: Becoming a “Talk With Me Baby” Foster Parent
4. Lesson 3: Becoming a “Talk With Me Baby Coach”
5. Post-Test & Evaluation
A Framework for Understanding

The brain undergoes its most dramatic development during the first three years of life. This makes early childhood a “period of great vulnerability, but also a period of great opportunity.” Research shows us that children's brains grow rapidly and form more neural connections before birth and in the first three years than any other period of life. When this early development is not nurtured, the brain’s architecture is adversely affected and young children fall behind in their developmental learning.40

We know that young children (aged 0-3) in foster care have often suffered from environments that do not nurture brain development and many of these children have experienced exposure to trauma, toxic stress and/or traumatic separation.

Trauma

It is easy to think that children under the age of five are too young to know what is happening around them and that traumatic situations or environments would be forgotten and not leave lasting impressions. However, recent studies have shown that traumatic experiences can affect the development of the brain, mind and behavior of very young children; causing similar reactions that are seen in older children and adults27.

Children are very sensitive to trauma in early childhood. Potential sources of trauma include:

- Challenges faced by their parents or main caregivers (depression, sadness, fear etc.)
- Separation from a caregiver (parent, grandparent, foster parent etc.)
- Household environment (noise, distress, inconsistent routine, neglect etc.)
- Disruption of a bond or relationship with a parent/caregiver

In early childhood, trauma can seriously disrupt important aspects of development that occur before the age of three years. This may include, bonding with parents, as well as foundational development in the areas of language, mobility, physical and social skills and managing emotions. Many of the young children entering into foster care will have experienced some sort of trauma either from their home environment or from being separated from a known parent or caregiver.

Toxic Stress

We also know that many of these young foster children can be impacted by toxic stress. Toxic stress greatly affects a child’s ability to cope with adversity, which directly and indirectly leads to problems regulating physiology and behavior. When we are threatened our bodies react by increasing our heart rate, blood pressure and stress hormones. Therefore when a young child is in an environment with supportive adult relationships, these physiological effects are buffered and brought back down to baseline. However, if a child’s stress response is extreme and long-lasting and no supportive adult relationships are available, the result can be damaged, weakened systems any brain architecture.

Toxic Stress Response occurs when a child experiences strong frequent and prolonged adversity with adequate support. This can include:

- Physical or emotional abuse
- Chronic neglect
- Caregiver substance abuse or mental illness
- Exposure to violence
- Accumulated burdens of family hardship
Toxic Stress and the Development of Regulatory Capabilities

In looking at the care of young children, caregivers play a vital role in helping children develop regulatory capacity. For example, an infant signals to a parent that they desires more or less stimulation, when that signal is heeded, the infant will develop a sense of being able to affect the world. Regulatory capabilities are built in infants by the parent helping to co-regulate adversity. With effective and smooth regulation, the infant can gradually take over regulatory functions independently.44,45

However, when a caregiver is unable to co-regulate adversity for a child, dysregulation can occur. For example, when an infant is under chronic stress, the response may be apathy, poor feeding, withdrawal and failure to thrive.50 Then there is acute stress, where the infant will experience the typical “fight” response to stress. If the child is not soothed when crying their behavior may change to temper tantrums, aggressive behaviors or withdrawal. Rather than running away (“flight” response) the young child may learn to become psychologically disengaged, leading to detachment, apathy, and excessive daydreaming. In some cases, children will learn to react to stressors in their environment with immediate cessation of motor activity (Freeze response).50 Repeated exposure to stress can lead to dysregulation.44

Dysregulation can be characterized as a breakdown in a system’s normal functioning, or a chronic failure of the system to function in normal ways.44 There are three types of dysregulation, these include:

- **Behavioral Dysregulation**: can be seen when a frightened child fails to go to his or her mother for protection, but instead moves into a corner.
- **Emotional Dysregulation**: cannot be observed, but may occur when a child experiences panic that is not relieved
- **Neuroendocrine Dysregulation**: may occur when the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) system does not maintain a typical diurnal pattern44

Children in foster care are often at high risk for a host of long-term problems related to the regulation of their behavior.44

The Impacts of a Toxic Stress Response on the Brain

Experiencing continuous toxic stress responses can take a toll on a young child’s physical and mental health for their entire lifetime. An increased number of adverse experiences in childhood greatly increase the likelihood of developmental delays and later health problems including heart disease, diabetes, substance abuse and depression.

When comparing the brain of a normal child vs. a child who has experienced extreme neglect you can see (Figure 1)38 the physical effect in the size of the child’s brain. Additionally, there are physiological changes that impact the brain’s memory and emotional centre as well as problems in learning and behavior.
Traumatic Separation

Children in foster care are often separated from their parents and/or siblings when they are removed by a professional to protect them from abusive or neglectful caregivers. The challenge with children who are very young is that they do not fully understand the perceived danger and may view the separation from the parent as a traumatic experience. Also, it is easy for parents, caregivers and professionals to believe that children under the age of one are not impacted by being removed from a caregiver because they lack the ability to verbalize what they are feeling, or appear passive or compliant.\textsuperscript{28}

The period from age six months to four years has been identified as a particularly vulnerable time for separation from caregivers; it is the time period when a child defines their sense of self, forms attachment relationships and develops expectations for the world.\textsuperscript{9} Additionally, maternal availability is particularly important within the first two years of life because of the infant’s limited understating of the reasons for maternal absence and the timing of her return.\textsuperscript{18}

Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) found that any separation from a primary caregiver (defined as hospitalizations lasting one week or more, or a change of caregiver between assessment waves) was negatively associated with a child’s reading achievement by age of 8. Furthermore, separations that occurred during the first year of life were particularly salient for later achievement.\textsuperscript{25}

It is important to note that traumatic separation is not limited to removal of the young child from the birth parents; it can occur when a young child is removed from the foster home and reunited with a birth parent or adoptive family.

Trauma, Toxic Stress and Traumatic Separation: What more can you do?

The development of a young child’s brain can be greatly hindered by exposure to trauma, toxic stress and traumatic separation. We know that many children in foster care have been exposed to trauma, toxic stress, and traumatic separation. Specifically, in Georgia, when looking at data from FY2015, researchers found that (numbers are not mutually exclusive:

- 1,980 Children removed because of neglect
  - 1,324 of those children were under the age of 4
- 1,558 Children removed because of drug abuse
  - 1,134 of those children were under the age of 4
- 955 Children removed because of inadequate housing
  - 482 of those children were under the age of 4

Foster parents are often tasked with creating environments that help children develop their regulator capacities overcome some of the trauma they might have already experienced.\textsuperscript{44} One way to create a healthy environment for young foster children is through open communication and speaking frequently with young foster children. For example, when fostering a child with exposure to trauma, toxic stress, and traumatic separation it is helpful to:

- **Trauma:**
  - Talk with your young foster child about the traumatic event \textsuperscript{43}
  - Avoid overreacting to details of the trauma - if a child senses that the traumatic event upsets a caretaker they may avoid talking about it \textsuperscript{43}
  - Listen to the child, answer questions and provide comfort and support \textsuperscript{43}
• Toxic Stress
  o Form a supportive, responsive relationship with the foster child as early in life as possible 4

• Traumatic Separation
  o Talk with your young foster child about the traumatic separation – even older infants and toddlers need a supportive, clear explanation of events 28
  o Begin by asking the child, what he or she believed happened with respect to the separation and explore what the child believes will help in the future 28
  o Listen to the foster child’s questions and correct any misinformation 28

Foster parents of young children have the opportunity to provide a living environment that nurtures brain development. A common response to the effects of trauma, toxic stress and traumatic separation is a child’s ability to have a caring conversation with adults, no matter the child’s age or their ability to verbalize thoughts. The more caring conversation exchanges a foster parent can have with their young foster child the more neural connections the young foster child’s brain will form.
Lesson One: The Science Behind Language Nutrition®

Early childhood is a critical period for brain development as children’s brains grow rapidly and forms more neural connections before birth and in the first three years of life. We know that eighty-five percent of neural connections are formed during this time and those neural connections form the foundation for all later learning. The quality of a child’s early environment and their experiences robustly determine the strength of the brain’s foundation. Children who miss opportunities to build a strong foundation in early childhood have detrimental effects on later brain development as it is much more challenging and less effective to build advanced social cognitive skills.

As Figure 2 illustrates, the brain is able to change throughout life, however the capacity decreases significantly after early childhood. Even if healthy a language/literacy rich environment is present later on in life, the foundational circuitry will never be as strong as it had the potential to be. Without consistent and persistent exposure to language between birth to age three, babies may experience diminished potential to develop a robust vocabulary, critical thinking skills, abstract thought, and a strong foundation for literacy.

The Meaning of “Language Nutrition”

Early language exposure is critical for the development of foundational brain circuitry required for higher learning. “Language Nutrition” is the use of language that is sufficiently rich in engagement, quality, quantity, and context that it nourishes the child neurologically, socially, and linguistically. Just as a child needs an adequate amount of food for physical growth, a child also needs adequate language for his or her brain development. In the same way that the quality of nutritious value of the food differs and matters for child’s growth, the quality of language is important. Language nutrition is received through language-rich adult-child interactions that are robust in both quantity and quality.

Relationships: The Foundation of Language, Literacy and Learning

The quality of relationships that young children form with the adults in their lives affects all aspects of their development (intellectual, social, emotional, and physical) and lays the foundation for critical developmental outcomes, including healthy mental development, conflict resolution, self-confidence, self-regulation, and the motives to learn. A major ingredient in this developmental process is the “serve and return” relationship between infants and their parents and other caregiver givers.
“Serve and Return” Communication

There is a back and forth communication between adults and babies. While adults can use language, babies initially communicate socially, through eye contact, facial expressions, crying, or laughing until they can eventually also babble and use result. The adult or baby responds to the initial engagement of the conversation through verbal or nonverbal communication. Both adults and babies can initiate a conversation. Being aware of how each person is communicating and responding to each other’s communication enables the caregiver and the child to share in social engagement and communication. Neural connections are built and strengthened to support the development of communication and social skills. In the absence of such responses - or if the responses are unreliable, inappropriate or insufficient - the brain’s architecture does not form as expected, leading to possible disparities in learning and behavior. It is through their repeated, responsive, language-rich interactions with their babies that caregivers have a lasting impact on their baby’s brain development. This early exposure to language-rich interactions is the foundation for the basis of language nutrition.

Effects of Early Language Exposure on Vocabulary and Literacy

Language is our most common means of interacting with others and enables us to share thoughts and ideas through a variety of communication methods. It is the vehicle by which families transmit culture from generation to generation. Culture and language are intimately intertwined, and language contains embedded cultural concepts that influence the way children learn about their world. Additionally, it allows us the ability to share our perspectives and emotions, our “internal state language.” Children who have not had a stable and responsive caregiver often have lower levels of emotional understanding that can persist through childhood (Bretherton & Beeghly, 1982). Several studies have found links between emotional understanding and behavior problems, indicating a need for caregivers to promote emotional understanding and development.

Language is at the core of everything a child does and learns in school.

- Early exposure to language sets the foundation for cognitive ability literacy, school readiness and, ultimately educational achievement. It is both the quantity and quality of words a baby hears that bring richness to the child’s vocabulary and has a profound impact on their school performance, IQ, and life trajectory.
- Communication takes many forms, including sounds, signs, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact and words.
- Infants brains serve as one-of-a-kind word processors that analyze words spoken by family members and caregivers and store information for use later. The brain’s “word processor” records information such as:
  - The beats and sounds within words
  - How a string of words fit together
  - How word sequence and intonation affect meaning
  - How words can be categorized by meaning
  - These language skills form the foundation and internal dictionary, or lexicon, that make learning to read possible
- A “conversation duet” (i.e. repeated serve and return interactions between caregivers and young children) is the most critical component of the language environment. Toddlers who engage in more “conversational duets” with their caretakers fare better in language measures later in life regardless of family income level.
• A child’s vocabulary at the age of three is a key predictor of the school readiness at kindergarten and third grade reading comprehension, which is a powerful predictor of subsequent academic success.\textsuperscript{40}

**Why Third Grade Reading Matters**

Exposure to environments rich in language nutrition are critical for a child’s developmental trajectory. Research shows us that a child’s vocabulary at age three, predicts third grade reading comprehension more strongly than parent income, ethnicity, and level of parent education.\textsuperscript{8} Therefore, a child’s vocabulary at age three is a key predictor of a child’s ability to read in third grade.

Being able to read by third grade is a key component to educational success as children shift form learning to read to reading to learn. Children who cannot read by the end of third grade cannot make the shift and it becomes more difficult to follow instructions, learn new concepts and complete homework.\textsuperscript{40} Often times, school stops being fun and as a result, children fall even further behind in school than children who can read. \textsuperscript{40} We also know that children who cannot read by the end of third grade are more likely to drop out of high school, and those students are more likely to experience poor health, lower wages, be unemployed and arrested.\textsuperscript{40}

Foster parents can greatly impact their young foster child’s educational success by aiding the child in creating quality relationships with adult caregivers and increasing the number of quality words a child hears.
Lesson Two: Becoming a Talk with Me Baby Foster Parent

Foster parents are tasked with providing a healthy and stable environment for foster children while they are in care – no matter how long the young child is in their home. Research shows us that foster parents can help their young foster child overcome trauma, toxic stress and traumatic separation as well as greatly increasing their educational success by talking with them.

We will focus on how to create language interactions with young foster child by learning to speak in “Parentese,” becoming your foster child’s “conversational partner” and ways to increase the number of loving words a child hears.

Then we will focus on ways to increase the quality and number of loving words a young foster child hears.

Speaking in “Parentese”

“Parentese”, or child-directed speech, is a unique approach that adults often use when talking with infants. It uses actual words and sentences and is meaningful as opposed to “baby talk,” which simply mimics sounds made by babies. For example, a “sweet baby” becomes a “sweeet baybeee”.

Parentese is often characterized by features, such as:

- Short, simple, and complete sentences, often repeated multiple times, with well-formed, elongated, consonants and vowels
- Melodic tone and higher pitch, which serves to get the baby’s attention. Certain words are stressed an intonation is varied by increasing pitch intensity and/or length (e.g., “How are Youuuuu?”).
- Use of exaggerated gestures and facial expressions.

Research shows that infants prefer parentese to adult conversations. Often times young children will turn their heads to hear it, even if it is in a different language. Babies enjoy the high-pitched sounds and enjoy watching our facial expressions. Speaking this way helps children learn helps infants to learn language, as their brains are “mapping the sounds they are hearing.”

Becoming a Child’s “Conversational Partner”

Another important way to engage with young foster children is to make them your “conversational partner”. This technique of “serve and return” can also help young foster children who have suffered from extreme neglect form supportive, responsive relationships with adult caregivers. Encouraging your young foster child to respond by asking questions and then pausing before continuing, to allow time for the baby to respond, either verbally or through social communication. Social communication can include: eye contact, smiles, laughs, gestures or a gaze.

It is important to note that a young foster child grieving from an exposure to trauma, toxic stress, traumatic separation or drug abuse - may be withdrawn and not appear to need special emotional care. In cases of drug exposure, a young foster child may have sensitivity to visual stimulus and subsequent gaze avoidance – making the need for “serve and return” communication even more necessary.

Becoming your young foster child’s “conversational partner” The “serve and return” allows you to provide direct attention to the young foster child, which will help to form new connections in his or her brain.
Pay Attention to Cues

When practicing speaking in parentese or being your young foster child’s conversational partner, it is important to pay attention and respond appropriately to their social cues. For example, when a young child puts his arms out to you, you pick them up. These immediate and attuned response tells your baby that their communications are important and effective.

Due to environmental stressors, such as toxic stress, trauma and separation from their birth families, it is vital for foster parents to pay attention to the child’s social cues. Recognizing that their social cues might differ from their birth child or their peers. Four of the social cues that foster parents should pay special attention to are:

- **Facial expressions**: Are one of the most obvious cues as it is used to show how we are feeling. Young children often smile when happy, cry or pout when sad or show us that they dislike a new type of food.
- **Body Language**: Often times an emotion is so strong that it affects the way we hold our body; this can be an involuntary function or sometimes it is done on purpose. For instance, when feeding a young child in a high chair the child will signal he or she is done, by leaning all the way to the left or right.
- **Voice Pitch and Tone**: Certain moods call for different tones and pitch, when children need to get something across they might speak in a high tone and very quickly. Changes in voices can sometimes change the meaning of what is being said.
- **Personal Space**: Is an important thing for children to understand. For example, if the child is comfortable with you they may want to sit in your lap and love on you or they might be afraid to get close to you and try avoid getting close to you.

Young foster children may have been exposed to an environment where no one paid attention to their social cues or violated their personal space. It is important for foster parents to be good role models.

Increase the Number of Loving Words

Research shows us that young children who have experienced trauma, exposure to toxic stress and traumatic separation are in need of environments and people that support healthy brain growth. One way to support healthy brain development and create an environment that encourages a supportive, responsive relationship with an adult caregiver is to increase the number of loving words a young foster child hears.

Foster parents can do this by:

- **Talking with your young foster child**
  - Greetings: Greet your young foster child with a smile, hug and high pitch tone
  - Narrate Actions: Tell the young foster child the steps being completed when you are cooking, washing, cleaning, bath time, driving, or on a walk etc.
  - Tell Stories: Young foster children are never too young to hear stories. These stories can be about your family or the child’s birth parents, siblings etc.
  - Ask Questions: Ask the young foster child questions and pause to allow time for the child to respond, either vocally or through social communication
Lesson Two: Becoming a Talk With Me Baby Foster Parent

- Talk about emotions: Discuss feelings and emotions as you observe the young foster child experiencing them. Help them to name their feelings by giving words to their emotions.

- Reading with your young foster child
  - Read every day and point out images and colors, make facial expressions and ask questions.
  - To build vocabulary it is important to not just read the words but talk about the pictures and let the young foster child tell the story based on the photos.
  - It is okay if the young foster children cannot sit through an entire story, it is important to let them turn the pages and become familiar with books.
  - You can also use photo books and/or photo albums to help tell stories to young foster children.
    - The use of photo albums can be used to help with children who suffer from traumatic separation and/or who are about to be reunified with a birth parent or moved to an adoptive family.
  - Tie in themes from the young foster child’s favorite book into their everyday life.
  - Ask the young foster child open ended questions about components of the book.

- Singing with your young foster child
  - Sing your favorite lullabies or songs you remember as a way to calm a crying foster child.
  - Use songs and books to help establish routines.
  - Calming the young foster child at night with a nursery rhyme and using that nursery rhyme to calm the child throughout the day when he/she is upset.

- Playing with your young foster child
  - Spend time throughout the day playing with your young foster child.
  - Use playtime to connect themes or objects from a young foster child’s favorite book.

You can choose to talk, read, sing and play with young foster child around the same topic. For example, if you read “Old MacDonald Had a Farm” with your young foster child, you can ask them questions about the animals and different sounds they make. Next you can teach the child the song and perhaps have barnyard animal toys. The next time you drive by a barn or see an animal from the book, you can talk about Old MacDonald, the animals and his farm.

How to Effectively Use Media and Technology

Existing research suggests that too much screen time hinders brain and language development but also acknowledges how families use technology in their daily lives. We know that kids learn most effectively from technology when a real, live adult is interacting with them alongside the technology. For example you can:

- Watch Together
  - Talk about what you are viewing.
  - For children older than two, ask questions to engage their thinking skills.
  - Get your child moving whenever possible, act out what you see the characters on the screen doing.

- Play Screen-Based Games Together
  - Make the experience interactive. Take turns to teach your child about sharing and cooperating.
○ Talk about what the child is doing as she plays the game to make it a more language-rich experience
○ Use games and apps as an opportunity to teach persistence. When your child loses, acknowledge that games can be challenging and then help them think through different approaches

• Make the Connections Between the Screen and Real World
  ○ After viewing a show about animals, take a walk in the neighborhood and talk about the animals you see
  ○ Help your child apply the concepts she is learning from games, apps, and TV shows – like letters, numbers and colors
  ○ Use the issues or challenges TV characters face to help your child when he faces similar situations

Finding ways to increase the number of loving words either through talking, reading, singing, playing or engaging around electronics you can increases a young foster child’s vocabulary. This not only sets the foundation for later learning it also helps them overcome effects of exposure to trauma, toxic stress and traumatic. It is vital for foster parents help the young foster children build positive relationships to adult caregivers and set routines that can help the youngest of foster children feel safe in their new environment.
Lesson Three: Becoming a Talking with Me Baby Coach

Families who need support from the foster care system are often a family in crisis. Sometimes the best way a foster family can help their young foster child is to help strengthen the birth family. This can be difficult in cases of abuse and neglect as it can be challenging for the foster family to have positive feelings about the young child’s birth parents. However, it is important to remember that these parents might not have known a better way of parenting or they might have had a mental health or substance abuse problem.

There are many benefits for a young foster child, when the foster family can build a relationship with the birth family. Some of these benefits include:

- Maintaining the birth parent/young foster child relationship
- Improving the self-esteem of the birth parents
- Helping the foster parent form a realistic picture of the birth parent’s strengths and deficits
- Giving birth and foster parents more information
- Helping birth parents develop an understanding of the young foster child’s needs
- Facilitating an eventual reunion
- Promoting ongoing support for the family after the child returns home
- Allowing the foster parent to model appropriate behavior parenting techniques

This allows for foster parents to become parenting mentors to birth families, which opens up opportunities for “teachable moments.” A teachable moment is a time when a person is disposed to learning something or particularly responsive to being taught or made aware of something. The thing learned in that instance is likely to make a deep impression.

Teachable moments can help to create a natural mentoring and collaborative parenting approach as it allows for the observation of positive parenting in action. This approach allows you to build a positive relationship with the birth family, teach them a better way of parenting, and help to smooth the transition for the child to and from care.

Role of a “Talk With Me Baby Coach”

As a “Talk With Me Baby Coach”, you will be able to use your mentoring relationship and teachable moments to model good language nutrition habits with the young foster child’s birth or adoptive family. You can share information on why language nutrition is important for healthy brain development and how it can help them bond with their young foster child. In short, your responsibility is to:

- Build a relationship with the birth or adoptive family to serve as their parenting mentor
- Believe that every adult, including respite parents and caseworkers, that comes into the life of a young foster child has the ability to help the child learn and can be the child’s conversational partner
- Share your knowledge and enthusiasm for language nutrition with the birth family or adoptive family, respite families and caseworkers
- Increase the verbal transactions between the young foster child and adults

Tips for Building a Relationship with the Birth Families

In your role as a foster parent you are tasked with developing a relationship with the child, helping to maintain the child’s relationship with his or her biological family and forming a mentoring relationship with the birth parents. There is no guidebook or direct path that foster parents can use to build the
relationship with the birth family but there are some tips and best practices that can help to aid in this process.

**Preparation for first meeting with birth families**

- Understand your feelings towards the birth parents, if you are struggling with negative feelings about the situation try and put yourself in their shoes.
- Know the information that you are willing to share with the birth family about yourself and your family (work schedule, how many biological children you have, family dynamics etc.).
- Establish the boundaries that you would like to have while communicating with the birth family (email/or phones).
- Have a list of questions prepared about the child’s routine, food preferences etc. that you can ask the birth parents.

**First Meeting with Birth Parents**

- Treat the birth parents with respect.
- Accept the heritage, culture and language of the child and the birth family.
- Answer the questions the birth parents ask to the best of your ability.
- Show the biological family that you are committed to helping the family reunify.
- Ask them your list of questions about the child’s routine and preferences.

**Throughout Care**

- Promote and support a positive non-judgmental relationship between the child and the birth family.
- Keep the biological parents up-to-date on what the child has been doing. Send photos or information about developmental milestones (walking, talking, foods the child likes etc.).
- Take opportunities to see birth parents (visitation, court, doctor’s appointments).
- If you need to give the birth parents instructions or address a concern do so out of the child’s presence.
- When appropriate, consult with the biological parent about some of the decisions about the child. Ask the parent’s opinion whenever necessary.
- If the child does not have a photo of the biological family, help the child get one.
- Birth parents may become critical of you when they observe you providing the level of parenting they would like to be providing. Do not overreact their criticism.

**Reunification & After Care**

- It is easier on the child if the relationship with the foster parent does not end after reunification.
- Foster Parents can continue to send birthday/Christmas cards.
- Make arrangements with the birth parents to see their former foster child.
- Provide ongoing support to the parent after reunification.

It is important to note that the court may have guidelines or restrictions on the birth parent’s ability to communicate with their young foster child based on the reason they are in care. As a foster parent, you must follow the court’s guidelines as you develop your relationship with the foster child.
Be a “Talk With Me Baby Coach”

One of the easiest ways to start sharing the “Talk With Me Baby” concepts is when the young foster child attends a visit with birth parents. Here you have the opportunity to share information about the child’s routine and activities. For example, a foster parent could share – when putting the young foster child down for a nap, we read two stories (share what the favorite stories are) and we sing one song. If it is an infant, a foster parent could share the song that they sing when putting the child to sleep or to calm the child.

As you progress in your ability to mentor the birth parent and have more access to teachable moments, you can share information about narrating activities, speaking in “Parentese” and discussing the importance of increasing the number of loving words a child hears throughout the day. At this point you might be able to model the strategy and then have the birth parent practice the strategy where you can provide encouragement and feedback. The “I do. We do. You do.” coaching model can help you as you try and transfer these skills to birth parents.

- Engage: I Do (Coach Model Skills)
  - Talk directly with the young foster child - describe what you are doing
  - Direct questions and comments to the baby - “Hi Baby, how are you feeling this morning?”
  - Use “Parentese” and “Serve and Return”

- Share: We Do (Coach and Birth Parent/Adoptive Parent) practice together
  - Invite the birth or adoptive parent to join you in talking with the baby: “See how I talked with your baby? Let’s try having you talk with him?
  - Present how to Talk, Read, Sing and Play with the young foster child
  - Practice together
  - Add educational interactions: “Have you heard that talking with your baby helps him/her learn?”

- Encourage: You Do (Birth/Adoptive Parent Practices alone)
  - Encourage the birth/adoptive parent to practice talking with the baby in your presence
  - Give Feedback, “You are doing great”
  - Highlight Accomplishments “See how your baby responded when he heard your voice?”
Post Test and Evaluation

This section is still under development.


