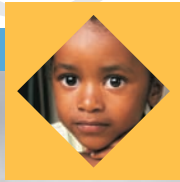


# Quality

## Responsive Caregiving for Babies and Toddlers



During the first three years babies learn about the world through their caregivers' responses to them. As dependent and vulnerable beings, they absorb their caregivers' reactions to them. Through daily routines and interactions with their caregivers, babies either learn to trust that the world is a safe place where their needs will be met, or they learn not to trust. They either develop self-esteem and security in their own abilities, or they develop distrust and insecurity. These earliest caregiver/infant interactions create the foundation for how the child interacts with the world. How can we assure the best possible foundation? The answer is responsive caregiving.

### What is responsive caregiving?

A three-step process for understanding, responding to and meeting the individual needs of each baby or toddler. Each baby has her own thoughts, feelings, needs and interests. Each comes with a unique temperament. Some babies are easy and flexible; some are feisty and can be difficult to calm; some are quiet or fearful. The responsive process - Watch, Ask, Adapt - provides a way to meet each child's needs for security, nurturing and stimulation

### Step 1 – Watch

Begin by watching and observing the baby to understand his style and temperament. Look for clues. What interests this child? What are his sleep patterns, his responses to change? When is he most alert? Does he scream when his nose is wiped, or does he gurgle and smile? Pay attention to each baby's rhythms and patterns, document them, and use the observations to think about and meet the needs of each individual child.

### Step 2 – Ask

Respond to the baby with respect and real questions. Ask the child with words and through trial and error if what you are doing is meeting his needs. Check to make sure you understand what he is trying to tell you. Ask, "Are you hungry? Let's try a bottle. Is that what you need?" During play times, try different toys and ask how the baby wants you to be a part of the play. (If you feel "silly" talking to a baby, remember that you are giving him the gift of words – he absorbs them with your smiles and hugs and takes them with her to school, where they will help him learn to read.)

### Step 3 – Adapt

Adapt to meet the needs of the baby. Be sensitive to what the baby is trying to communicate. Change the approach if he seems to be saying: "That's not what I meant". When something doesn't work, promptly try another way and watch to see if he responds positively. Relax and move back through the steps of the responsive process, checking and asking him what he needs. Select developmentally appropriate activities and strategies to soothe or stimulate the baby.

Child care programs using the responsive process follow the needs and interests of each individual child. The schedule is flexible, with meals and naps provided individually throughout the day. With a curriculum based on the interests and developmental readiness of each child, caregivers engage children in activities or experiences when they are ready. Caregivers spend time with children one-on-one or in small groups, offering materials, experiences and themselves as stimuli for learning, play and healthy emotional development.

*Adapted from Program for Infant and Toddler Caregivers – West Ed*



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This material was developed by the New York State Child Care Coordinating Council through a contract with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

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