

Hand-out for Parents

THE PARENT-CHILD CONNECTION

YOUR RELATIONSHIP with your child is the foundation for all the positive things you might hope to accomplish as a parent. This relationship not only affects your child's emotional, social and mental health, it enhances your ability to help him learn. Building the relationship with your child begins with reading your baby's cues and responding in nurturing and supportive ways.

Your baby's first language is nonverbal. She's born with the ability to respond to your loving touch and to tune into the expressions on your face and the rhythm of your voice.

When your baby looks at you with adoring eyes, and you smile back and let her know how wonderful she is — that's a conversation!

Be a mirror

Respond to your baby's feelings with both facial expressions and words. If he's excited, give him a big smile and say, "Oh, you're so excited!" If he's upset, show him you understand with a sympathetic face and ask, "Did that noise scare you?"

Be a play partner

Parents often take on a teaching role during play with young children. But it's also important to support your child as she leads her own play. Wait to see what she is interested in, and then join in. Watch how she reacts to your ideas and let that guide your actions.

Toddler conversations

It's important to talk to babies long before they can talk back. Once children do start talking, language becomes a huge part of how we interact with them. But the basic principle of being attentive and responsive is still a key way to communicate.

The Make the Connection program teaches "WAWA" as a way to remember how to take turns in conversations with toddlers.



- **Wait** with undivided attention to hear what he has to say.
- **Ask** a question to find out more about what he's thinking or feeling.
- **Wait** to see what he has to say next.
- **Add** ideas to keep the conversation going.

Tune into temperament

Temperament refers to personality traits that we are born with. It can affect everything from how much comforting and support your child needs to her style of play. Understanding and adapting to your toddler's temperament can help you connect.

For example, is your child:

- slow to warm up to new situations, or very outgoing?
- very active and eager to explore, or more cautious / less active?
- easy-going or sensitive and intense?

Sometimes it's easy to feel connected to our little ones. Others times it seems hard. What's important is to keep working at it and to enjoy those wonderful moments of connection when they come.