

# REACH

RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT ATTACHMENT CAREGIVING HOME CONNECTION

These pages contain insight for those who work with infants. Download and print these pages for those in your church who work with children under the age of two. Perhaps schedule a quarterly meeting to discuss the material, to help ensure the infants in your care are properly nurtured.



## Findings from studies done on infant and toddler development

When the same teacher gives consistent primary care to an infant, research shows that a significant bonding relationship is formed. Rather than using a rotating schedule of potential caregivers, determine someone who considers infant care her primary ministry and put her in charge. This worker must be experienced, pastorally approved, trusted by the church,

and accountable to an outside monitor. When a specific teacher focuses on observing and caring for the same children, meaningful relationships will develop.

Every week, the Internet seems to report something new about how babies' brains develop and learn. So much occurs in the mind of an infant during this formative period, making your involvement critical in this stage of their life. How you care for each child—your manner and behavior—greatly affects how that child will mature. Pray for God's help and wisdom in effectively performing your duties

regarding God's precious jewels. No matter how technological our world becomes, nothing can ever take your important place!

Working with developmental delays can be challenging to even the most experienced infant teacher. Some good websites for working with exceptional children are

- [www.uniquelygifted.org](http://www.uniquelygifted.org)—Resources for Gifted Children with Special Needs has resources regarding ADD/ADHD, learning disabilities, Asperger and Tourette Syndrome, and much more.
- [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)—National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families.
- [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)—National Association for the Education of Young Children
- [orsaminore.dreamhosters.com/handy/links/uk\\_various.html](http://orsaminore.dreamhosters.com/handy/links/uk_various.html)—This site features great resources for special-needs children.

When exploring infant development on the Internet, one can easily become overwhelmed with available resources. Your most effective tools are prayer, fasting, and seeking God's guidance in dealing with each student, regardless of diagnosis or temperament.



## Dos and don'ts on creating appropriate environments

View your nursery as a classroom and arrange it to provide the best possible learning environment. As your infants' developmental levels change, you will need to adjust the arrangement of your room. Designate areas for mobile and non-mobile infants. Provide comfortable chairs for caregivers as they hold and interact

with infants. Is the area where children spend most of their time set up conveniently for a teacher to meet their needs? If space allows, designate areas for quiet and noisy activities.

Explore your room through the eyes of your infants. Sit on the floor and look around. Does the ceiling need a fresh coat of paint or the ceiling fan need dusted? Are there cobwebs? Some infants see the ceiling more than they see the floor.

Peace should be the prevailing atmosphere in a nursery. To avoid over stimulation, do not play loud, clanging, jiving sounds. Hang fabric banners or fabric wall covering to absorb sound. Music has a profound effect on children's moods. If possible, ask parents to provide a recording of them singing, reading, or talking with their baby. When the environment is conducive to relaxation, most children will naturally soothe themselves.

Babies love to focus on human faces, so consider displaying familiar faces around your nursery/classroom. If your congregation has limited ethnic diversity, search online and in magazines for faces from different races and cultures. That way, when visitors enter your nursery, they recognize the international mission of your church.

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## *The importance of providing proper nurturing behaviors*

When a baby cries, there is a reason. When a caregiver fails to acknowledge and console an infant's cries, that child's trust is lost. If this occurs often, it has detrimental outcomes for the child later in life. When none of your available resources brings comfort to a child's cries, call the parents

back into the room. Sometimes, the mere knowledge that "Mommy or Daddy will come when I cry" is the comfort a child is looking for.

Newborns naturally experience stranger anxiety—it is not a choice—so do not force a child to "cry it out." Instead, suggest that a parent remain until the child becomes familiar with the teacher(s). As a baby's confidence grows, that parent can quietly say goodbye and ease away.

Infants need to experience loving touches, consistent routines, and genuine love and nurturing if they are to develop feelings of trust, security, self-esteem, and eventually their own sense of identity. Infants who can rely on their caregivers to be consistently attentive and responsive to their needs are more likely to demonstrate behaviors of secure attachment.

Throw out the adage that warns against spoiling a baby. In contrast, show God's love by doting on a child the same way you wish to be doted on by Him. Babies crave a cuddling and nurturing touch, especially during the first three months of life (considered by many to be an additional trimester). Prior to birth, the baby eats, breathes, and sleeps inside the mother's body. At birth, a baby must immediately adjust to being detached from this life-source. A caregiver's intimate nurture allows the newborn to transition to this new reality. Do not hesitate to cuddle, coddle, and hold those babies, because they depend on your gentle touch to survive.



## *The issues involved in actual care, such as diapering and feeding*

Think of entering the nursery as "going to work" and dress appropriately. Wear clothing that will not hinder you from easily getting up and down. Wear comfortable shoes that allow you to move quickly when needed. You will be holding infants, so make sure you do not have buttons or accessories that

could scratch or cut a baby's skin. Last but not least, wear clothing that is washable! You never know what substance you might get doused with when working with infants. Consider providing nursing scrubs to nursery workers so they need not worry about ruining their clothes.

In caregiving, diapering reflects one of the most important times in an infant's day because it is a guaranteed one-on-one with the caregiver. When changing the baby, lovingly talk through the process and include a few tummy tickles and nose-to-nose rubs. Even though he does not have command of the spoken language, you are showing him the highest respect and attention. Never be so rushed that you cannot give individualized attention.

Also, keep a memo board to jot down any notes from parents as they drop off their children. This is especially helpful if there is more than one teacher; every teacher may not hear the instructions from the parents. A dry-erase board near the door allows a teacher to write a child's name and quickly notate any necessary specialized care.



## *Ideas to build the relationship between the classroom and the home/family*

Look for ways to compliment parents on their care. Too often, they only hear negative comments about their parenting skills. For example, commend their effort to get to church. After all, with young children involved, simply getting to church can be a very frustrating process, one many choose to forego.

When parents share a concern about their personal life, empathize, and let them know they are not the first to experience a certain parenting dilemma. Suggest helpful resources and make the home connection by following through with those resources later in the week. For example, if you recommended a website, send the link via Facebook with a friendly message telling them you are praying for them.

New parents sometimes experience anxiety because they fear missing part of their child's development by leaving their baby in another's care. To overcome this, use the "What I Did Today" and "Baby Observation" forms to detail their baby's activities.

Encourage parents to keep in touch through the week, noting that class time is not a good time to discuss things with parents. If they insist in sharing an immediate concern, set up a meeting after church (and ask another church representative to attend the meeting with you, in case any accusations arise). Always convey the sincere desire to listen, but more importantly, when children are present, the babies need your undivided attention.

When you notice a child's absence, send a postcard from the resource packet with a note of encouragement written on the back. Often the hardest-to-reach parents are the ones in most desperate need of your love and consideration. Frequently, parents of infants feel overwhelmed with the responsibilities of parenting. Your understanding and support will minister to them tremendously. When you know a child is ill, send a card or, better yet, make a house call. Let parents know how much you love caring for their child.