

Caring Connections Podcast 6: Let's Talk About... Movement

[Music]

Laura Annunziata: Hi. My name is Laura Annunziata, and I'd like to welcome you to the sixth podcast in the Early Head Start Caring Connections series. We hope that you've been enjoying the series, that the podcasts are easy for you to access in both their video and audio formats, and that you'll share them with your colleagues or anyone else you think would find them helpful.

As we've mentioned in previous segments of the series, we've also created an information sheet to accompany each podcast that will direct you to resources that we refer to and Head Start Program Performance Standards that are relevant to the information we cover. This segment, segment six, explores movement.

In Head Start, Early Head Start, and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, we have three resources in particular that focus on movement: I am Moving, I am Learning, which explores movement, nutrition, and brain development for children and families in the preschool period; Head Start Body Start, a national center that looks at movement, indoor and outdoor play, and active learning; and Little Voices for Healthy Choices, an initiative that focused on music, movement, nutrition, brain development, and sleep with infants and very young children, their families, and communities.

While all use slightly different lenses in their approaches to working with young children and families, all share some important things in common. One is the recognition that strong relationships are essential for a child's social-emotional and physical health and well-being; that these relationships are the cornerstone of all that happens with children in the Early and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start environment; and really, that building those relationships with the children and families with whom we work is essential to providing high-quality care.

Akua Kouyate works with the Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts, one of the partners involved in the Little Voices for Healthy Choices initiative. Let's listen to her here for a moment as she reminds us that opportunities for movement with infants and young children are everywhere, and start from home.

[Video begins] Akua Femi Kouyate: Movement is a part of everyone's culture. It's a – it's a cultural experience. It's actually cultural transmission: music and movement. And so, quite often after – with parents who sometimes are concerned about what is it that they can do, well, we simply say, "Think about when you were a child. What were the songs that you sang? What were the games that you played? What were the dances that were important to you and your community?" And that kind of sharing can happen with a child; it doesn't necessarily have to be something specifically designed for a child, but being a part of that experience is a learning experience for the child. So whether it's in a community setting, when they're going to a social event – a birthday celebration, maybe a celebration

for a marriage, or whatever that is – if the child is a part of that experience, they get a chance to engage, and that's helping them to learn.

Children are moving from – from the point that they're in the womb. And that's a constant motion that happens, and some of that development is happening just there. So when they come out into the world, movement is still a constant for them, particularly as they are moving around with their mothers, that direct contact with the parents. Just by holding the children and moving around with the children, the children get to feel the parents in motion as well. So that – that – that idea of motion is a constant piece, whether it's in the arms of someone or is the child moving independently on their own. It's really important for them to engage their bodies. That's the only way, really, that their bodies learn how they need to function, is by doing. [Video ends]

Laura: I really like what Akua shares here, particularly because it reminds us that we can all get children moving throughout the routines of our days together, that everyone can do this in their own unique way, and that there's so many benefits for children of moving their bodies through physical activity and play.

Let's take a moment now to listen to Dr. Linda Carson, from her work with Little Voices for Healthy Choices, as she speaks to the benefits of infant movement opportunities vis-à-vis the infant and/or young child's developing brain.

[Video begins] Dr. Linda Carson: Sensory experiences, perceptual experiences, and movement experiences all help build connections in the early developing brain. And so if we know that from the research, then appropriate activities can be selected for classroom and home practice so that caregivers are actually building the brain of the child. As we build the brain, particularly in the motor domain, what we are anticipating is that as that becomes organized in the brain that this will help a child be able to tell his muscles what to do when the child wants to reach out and grab something and stack it and have intentional release – that that child is actually speaking directly to his muscles from an organized system in his brain that allows him to select movements that are necessary for the task at hand and to tell muscles what to do.

And so, it – it is the very foundation of self-regulation in the motor domain, being able to select appropriate movements that pair up with whatever the task might be. So just playing airplanes and horsey with a baby, and doing the up and down or side-to-side motion, or holding a baby in your arms and dancing to music, is providing motion stimulation that builds and connects networks in the brain. So, if you think about it, a lot of our intuitive parenting practices is actually brain-building. And so, part of what we'd like to share with teachers and parents is the very valuable job that they are doing in addition to just soothing their babies. Gentle and soothing touch on a child really establishes relationship of trust and love, and "This is soothing to me but it's also telling me where my body parts are. It's telling me what my body parts can do." [Video ends]

Laura: So, how do you move? Let's all work together to ensure that we're giving children in Early and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start settings individualized opportunities for movement as part of routines; when exploring their environments; together; alone; indoors; outdoors; and really, any way that they and the people around them do.

You can look us up at www.ehsnrc.org, or on Head Start's Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, or ECLKC, at eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov, for more resources designed to support you in your work. Thanks for joining us today. This is Laura Annunziata at the Early Head Start National Resource Center wishing you all the best in your work.