

Caring Connections Podcast 2: Let's Talk About... Nourishment

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Laura Annunziata: Hi, my name is Laura Annunziata, and I'm a senior training specialist with the Early Head Start National Resource Center. I'd like to welcome you to the second podcast in the Early Head Start "Caring Connections" series. We hope that these 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. You can also take a look at the Information Sheet that accompanies each podcast. It will direct you to resources that we refer to and Head Start Program Performance Standards that are relevant to the information covered.

This segment will explore "Nourishment," the choices we make and ways we nourish infants and very young children. People have very strongly held beliefs related to feeding infants and young children. Feeding experiences with infants and toddlers are deeply rooted in relationships and all that those relationships bring with them.

Many different things come into play when we nourish our families and children, and the ways we do this reflect our own personal beliefs, our preferences, our cultural heritage, and our communities. We tend to think of nutrition information as objective information, facts. But really, many of our feelings about infant nutrition are very subjective -- our opinions.

What do I mean when I say that? Think about how a healthy baby looks to you. How big is that baby? Does everyone you know or come into contact with agree with you? What looks like a healthy and well fed baby to me may appear to be a small sized baby to someone else. A baby or child that looks well fed to me may look overly heavy to you.

This kind of subjectivity also holds in the way that we look at diets for infants and young children. What really makes a healthy diet for an infant or a small child? What I think of as healthy, nourishing food may be very different than the diet that someone else might choose to nourish their child with. What's key, though, in our Early and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start work is that the infant, child, or family is leading the way those choices are being made.

In a center-based environment, caregivers give lots of time and thought to providing individualized feeding experiences. These feeding interactions come to be part of the routines of our days, and are inherently rooted in the relationships we have with the children and families we work with.

In the webinar "Beyond Bottles and Baby Food: Setting the Nutritional Foundation for Lifelong Wellness" – developed as part of OHS's initiative "Little Voices for Healthy Choices," a year-long initiative designed to explore the areas of nutrition, brain and motor development, music, movement, and sleep – Paula Mydlenski, a registered dietician and training specialist, shared this slide and some thoughts with us

about nourishing infants and toddlers in a classroom setting. What she said was this:

"With infants and toddlers, let's talk a little bit about nourishing mealtime; what's going on? You know, in infant and toddler classrooms, routines, feeding, or mealtime, nourishing is one of the many routines that we do in addition to diapering, napping, oral care. Those routines take up 83 percent of the time that an infant or toddler is in our center, in our classroom. That's a lot. At the Program for Infant and Toddler Caregivers, one of their concepts is that routines in infant and toddler care are anything but routine; they are the height of the curriculum for infants and toddlers. So, think about mealtime. What are those routines?

So what's going on in that dance? Are we approaching it as a chore, something we have to do? Are we looking at the child as an object? Let's get that bottle in; we've got to get a couple of ounces in; we've got to get that spoon in their mouth. Are we on autopilot, just putting that food or the bottle in the child, or are we realizing that this is prime learning time? This is face-to-face time with that child; this is relationship-building time. This is where the child gets to know me and I get to know her, where we're face to face and we know that. Research says that the infant's most preferred object to look at in the world is the human face, and there's my face with that child building a relationship, talking. That child isn't an object. I'm not on autopilot. I'm nourishing and working with that child nourishing himself or herself. It's not just automatic feeding."

What really is the difference between nutrition and nourishment? How can we be sure that we're providing the means to both? Let's listen to Victoria Prieto, a senior training specialist with the Early Head Start National Resource Center, as she addresses the question.

[Video begins] Victoria Prieto: One concept which is key in the discussion about healthy habits from the start is the difference between nutrition and nourishment. Normally, we think of nutrition as the act of providing food, but feeding infants and toddlers is much more than food. It is important to recognize that feeding times provide an optimal opportunity to connect with young children in a variety of ways by providing learning experiences that support their overall growth and development.

For example, when a baby's ready to be fed and we pick him up and hold him close, make eye contact, and talk to him, and we ask him, "Are you ready to eat? Are you hungry?" the baby's going to feel loved, secure, and will look forward to each feeding time. That is nourishment, the sum total of feeding plus the dance of relationships that takes place at meal times.

The social interaction during mealtimes promotes not only physical and motor development, but also cognitive and social-emotional development. We understand the importance of individualization of feeding experiences. There's no specific amount of food infants and toddlers need to eat in order to grow healthy. Children come in all different sizes and weights, but they all know when they're hungry or full. This is part of the dance of nourishment, that young children can regulate how much they need to eat and when. Infants develop best when a responsive caregiver can read his signals, which means watching and listening to him to try to understand the behavior. Every cry does not mean that the

baby's hungry. It is important to recognize the cues when a baby is satisfied and respect his "I am full" signal. [Video ends]

Laura: As both Paula Mydlenski and Victoria Prieto have shared, it's essential to follow the children's and families' leads in feeding interactions, and to look to the families we work with for information and cues regarding the best way to individualize feeding experiences. How do you feel about nourishing children and families in the settings in which you work? Do you face any challenges in doing that the way you'd like? Have you ever been surprised by the different ways that people approach feeding infants and very young children? Is there any information or resources that would be helpful for you to be successful in being part of nourishing the children you come into contact with?

People all over the world and in different communities and families eat differently. Families that we work with eat differently from one another. There really is no one-size-fits-all approach. Each is doing what makes sense, is most comfortable, or is necessary for them. Remembering this seems essential as we take on the important business of helping to nourish the infants and toddlers that we're in contact with and care for through Early and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs.

[Music] 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. Stay tuned for the next "Caring Connections" podcast on routines, hosted by Amanda Perez from the Early Head Start National Resource Center.

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.