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Family Matters: Supporting your child's early development

By Chloe Learey

Mary Coogan, an Early Interventionist with Children's Integrated Services at The Winston Prouty Center, talked about the importance of supporting your child's early development on the third episode of "Family Matters," the talk show on Brattleboro Community Television where we discuss topics of interest to families with young children.

Babies come into the world ready to learn, and part of the work of parenting is figuring out how to best support that learning. Getting to know your individual child is one of the most important things families can do to support development. Understanding how your child is developing in his or her own unique way is critical to helping them grow.

Mary Coogan cautions that it is not necessarily what kids do when, but how they are doing it.

She looks for the quality and quantity of skills a child is developing, as well as the variety of what they are doing, in order to help paint a picture of who the child is. She reminds us that kids can "cheat." For instance, a child may be very social and interested in being up and playing, but the only way they can be up (i.e. locking their arms) leaves them in a position of not being able to move and play. Kids will solve their developmental agendas in creative ways, and it is up to caregivers to recognize when developing other skills will be a better way to meet those goals.

Helping families recognize and understand what they are seeing in their child's development is part of the work Mary and the other CIS Early Intervention staff do when a child is identified as being at-risk for or having a developmental delay. There is a lot that can happen within a family's every day routines to support a child's development, whether it is language stimulation, emotional regulation, strengthening muscles or learning how to eat. This is true for children in early care and education settings as well. If a child needs to work on a certain speech sound then families and other caregivers can focus on that while reading books or talking about lunch or giving a bath. Creating opportunities to build and practice skills during activities that are a functional, meaningful part of a child's life embed the practice in a way that is natural, more easily sustained than "special" learning, and more lasting. If you accept the premise that all people, including children, are motivated to participate and belong in the world around them then making the world around them be a place they can participate, and inviting them to join is the best way to support their development.

It is also important to remember that parenting and supporting a child's development is built on trial and error. There is no right or wrong, and creating space for forgiveness and repair is an important part of the process. "When a child is born, parents and families are born, too." Parents are their children's first and primary teacher, and helping families to feel competent and confident in their expertise about their child is an essential part of the work in early childhood.

Chloe Learey is the executive director of Winston Prouty Center for Childhood Development in Brattleboro. You can watch episodes of Family Matters by visiting <http://winstonprouty.org/>.

http://www.reformer.com/columnists/ci_29014896/family-matters-supporting-your-childs-early-development