

## Session One: It's People Who Create High-Quality Care



### Participant Materials

#### List of Materials in This Packet:

- Agenda
- Video Clip Narration
- Activity Two Handouts:
  - ❖ Reflective Supervision
  - ❖ “Reflective Practice,” by Claire Lerner
- Training Evaluation

## New Perspectives on Infant/Toddler Learning, Development, and Care

### Session One: It's People Who Create High-Quality Infant/Toddler Care

#### **I. Introduction**

*Video Clip:* Introduction

Host Belva Davis introduces the topic and the evening's guests: Peter Mangione, Rebeca Valdivia, and Senta Greene.

#### **II. The Family**

Guests and host discuss working with families.

**Activity One:** Important Object Activity

#### **III. The Child**

Guests and host discuss the relationships between infant care teachers and infants and toddlers.

*Video Clip:* Four Insights into How Infants and Toddlers Engage the World

Questions and answers with guests.

#### **IV. The Infant Care Teacher**

*Video Clip:* Teaching and Caring

Guests and host discuss the complex role of the teacher.

#### **V. The Program Leader**

**Activity Two:** Reflective Supervision Activity

Questions and answers with guests.

#### **VI. Conclusion**

## Session One: Video Clip Narration

### **Video Clip: Introduction**

What is clear from the study of infant development is the important role infant care teachers play in the successful development of every child they serve. Caring for infants is serious work with significant consequences. Infants depend on their teachers for both emotional support and help with the construction of knowledge. Teachers influence how children come to view and participate in the learning process, and even have a hand in how children feel about themselves and others.

There is now emerging a dramatic new view of the infant care teacher—neither baby sitter nor trainer, but rather, a loving facilitator of emotional, cognitive, language, physical, and social competence. So if infants are to prosper, the work of the infant care teacher must be treated as the critical work it is. This important work of teachers is what we celebrate and present in this session.

### **Video Clip: Four Insights into How Infants and Toddlers Engage the World**

#### **Infants and Toddlers Develop and Learn within Relationships**

Infants and toddlers develop and learn within relationships. Relationships provide a foundation for all exploration and discovery. Within the child's first relationships he learns about himself, the give and take of social interactions, and discovers how to engage adults to meet his needs. He also uses relationships to learn language, construct knowledge, and test out ideas.

#### **Infants and Toddlers Are Competent**

The second insight is that infants and toddlers are competent. Infants come into the world as curious, active, self-motivated learners who are born ready to explore and eager to form social ties. All children are competent, including children with disabilities or other special needs. As with all children, a child with a special need engages passionately in learning and is clearly interested in exploration and interacting with others in the group. Young children are incredibly motivated to learn language, find the meaning of things, search for answers to problems and practice their physical skills.

Carlina Rinaldi (Executive Consultant, Reggio Children, Reggio Emilia, Italy):  
*“The child is not only full of needs, but is also rich, powerful and competent. Rich and powerful because they are full of curiosity, wonder, desire of living, to encounter life and all the things that life means. And competent because they are competent in learning.”*

### **Infants and Toddlers Are Vulnerable**

The third insight is that infants and toddlers are vulnerable. All infants are born dependent on adults. They need them for their very survival, emotional security and protection. They also depend on adults to help them get along with others and to provide a safe base for learning. Infants show their vulnerabilities in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. In any group there may be a child who isn't getting basic care at home, or there may be a child who has health issues.

Claudia Vestal (Family Child Care Provider):

*“There’s no ‘typical’—you know, every child is so unique. I think that they all have special needs at certain times. And often it’s the invisible special needs—the family disruption or things that happen—that don’t show on them.”*

Compared to older children, infants are particularly vulnerable. Everything from the brain, the nervous system and digestion to language, identity and trust is in an early and delicate stage of development. To cope with their vulnerability infants need adults who read their cues and are alert to areas in which they may require special assistance. The earlier needs are identified and a child receives support, the more beneficial it is. An image of the child that includes both their competence and vulnerability helps teachers to respond to children as active learners while also ensuring their safety and well-being.

### **Infants and Toddlers Are a Unique Blend of Nature and Nurture**

The final insight is that infants and toddlers are a unique blend of nature and nurture. We have known for a while that the experiences the child has at home, in the community, and in the child care environment combine with the child’s genetic makeup to shape the way the child develops.

Maisah Mason (Family Child Care Teacher):

*“I am learning that every baby is different. They have different temperaments. They respond differently when they have a need that needs to be met.”*

Brain development research shows us that the link between biology and experience is much more complex than we ever imagined. Scientists have demonstrated that experiences such as stress or feeling abandoned day after day can adversely affect the structure and functioning of the brain. So too can responsive nurturance have a positive effect. Everything—biology, culture, language and relationships—influences everything else. It is this dynamic mix that creates the totally unique individuals with whom we work.

### **Video Clip: Teaching and Caring**

We call people who work with infants *infant care teachers* because, for infants, teaching and caring are rolled into one. Every moment as infant care teachers provide nurturance and emotional support to infants and toddlers they are also facilitating learning and development.

Watch infants as they learn. They are often draped over their teacher's body, or in her lap. See what happens when an infant masters a skill. They look to those who care for them to say, "Did you just see what I did? Wasn't that great?" This teacher is supporting language development, self-esteem and problem solving all at the same time.

Support of learning also happens during mealtimes, naps and diapering. These routines are a huge part of an infant's day. Watch this teacher: his actions are a perfect example of our new definition of teaching—he acts as a researcher trying to figure out what the child wants and at the same time is respectful and caring. You can see that the child is responding to this kind of teaching with rapt attention.

Here is another example of what it means to be an infant care teacher. This teacher recognizes a learning opportunity. Rather than immediately proceeding with the diapering, she follows the child's lead with enthusiasm. Together they create an extended interaction from which the child learns not only about rhythm, rhyme and texture, but also that her interests are valued and her passion for learning is shared.

Teaching and caring go together because infants just will not have it any other way.

### **Reflective Supervision**

**A Definition:** Reflective supervision means that the teachers' supervisor—often the program leader—and teachers have regular conversations in which they explore together the many complex feelings, thoughts, and issues that arise in working with young children, families, and other staff members. In these conversations, the supervisor helps teachers find answers to their questions. The supervisor adapts the manner in which she works with staff based on a variety of factors. The supervisor's approach will depend on the experience staff members bring to the program, their style of interacting with others, and the particular situation in which they are providing services to infants, toddlers, and their families.

**Parallel Process:** Respectful interactions lead to respectful interactions. When the relationships between supervisors and staff or families and teachers are based on respectful two-way communication, this can lead to more respectful and genuine relationships between teachers and children, and children with each other, etc. Relationships affect other relationships. We refer to reflective supervision and reflective practice because they work hand in hand.

**Reflective Supervision and practice:** Supervisors should demonstrate some of the following characteristics in an interaction that exemplifies reflective supervision:

- Collaborative
- Open
- Non-judgmental
- Inclusive
- Supportive of risk-taking
- Safe and trustworthy
- Having mutual goals
- Committed to growth and change
- Committed to reflection
- Respectful
- Sensitive

#### **Here are some starter questions for supervisors to ask:**

- Want to talk more about it?
- Tell me more about your idea/concern.
- It sounds like this is an important issue to you.
- How did that make you feel?

### CONCEPT PAPER REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

By Claire Lerner, L.C.S.W., Child Development Specialist, Zero to Three

#### **What Is Reflective Practice?**

Reflective practice is the process of continuous learning through thoughtful examination of one's work. Donald Schon (1983) described three key components of reflective practice: *reflection for action* (planning ahead), *reflection on action* (thinking back on what happened), in order to enhance capacity for effective *reflection in action* (thinking *in the moment*, which is perhaps the most difficult). Using a reflective approach is especially important for teachers of infants and toddlers because of the intensely emotional and critical nature of their work—promoting the healthy development of young children. The more charged a situation, the more likely it is that one will be reactive (acting before thinking) which when working with young children and families can lead to unintended, negative consequences.

#### **What Reflective Practice Looks Like**

*Louisa arrives early one day, during lunchtime, to pick up her two-year-old son, Marco. Marco's teacher, Trish, notices that Louisa looks distressed. Louisa pulls Trish aside and angrily tells her that she had no idea the kids fed themselves and that she wants Marco fed directly by Trish.*

*Trish is shocked and quite angry herself. She believes two-year-olds should feed themselves and is beside herself that Louisa expects Trish to give Marco that kind of attention with seven other toddlers to supervise. Trish realizes that she is too angry to respond effectively to Louisa right now. She needs time to think this through. She tells Louisa that she is sorry Louisa is so unhappy and that they clearly need to discuss this further. Louisa agrees to come early the next day to allow them time to meet. After Louisa and Marco leave, Trish returns to the lunch table and her colleague, Jenna, leans over and gives Trish a warm squeeze.*

*During naptime, Trish tells Jenna what happened. Jenna shares Trish's surprise at Louisa's reaction and suggests she talk to the center director, Christi. Christi makes time to meet with Trish later in the day. When Trish recounts the incident to her, Christi empathizes with how surprised and dismayed Trish must have felt and gives her credit for taking the time to think things over and not reacting. Christi asks about Trish's own thoughts about feeding toddlers. To help Trish think about it from different perspectives, they brainstorm together possible reasons why Louisa would not want Marco to feed himself even though he is clearly able to do so. At the end of their meeting, Christi suggests Trish ask Louisa why she wants Marco fed by an adult and then for Trish to share her own philosophy about independent feeding and see if they can negotiate a solution. Christi offers to watch Trish's group while she meets with Louisa.*

*When they meet, Louisa tells Trish that in her family young children are fed because it is part of the caretaking ritual—it is a way children are shown love. While she knows Marco will eventually feed himself, right now she does not expect or want him to do this. Louisa also mentions that her family has been “on her back” about how skinny Marco is. She wants an adult to feed him to make sure he eats enough.*

*Trish tells Louisa how helpful it is to understand “where she is coming from” (and thinks to herself, “That was something we really missed when we met the family and asked about their beliefs and values!”). Trish then shares with Louisa why the children feed themselves at the center—because the adult-child ratio precludes one-to-one feeding of toddlers and because self-care skills are taught and valued. Trish acknowledges the conflict between the center’s and the family’s philosophy. She also validates Louisa’s concern about Marco’s food intake. Trish mentions that she has, in fact, noticed that Marco has been eating less, but she had assumed it was just a stage. They agree that it’s time to consult Marco’s pediatrician. Trish offers to sit next to Marco at lunchtime and to feed him when she can but explains why she doesn’t feel comfortable forcing him to eat. If it turns out that his intake is a problem, they will consult with a nutritionist to develop a plan they both can implement. Louisa thanks Trish for her time and apologizes for getting so angry the day before.*

Imagine how things might have turned out had Trish not used reflection as a key tool in her work. She could have reacted angrily, making Louisa feel discounted and even angrier than she was. Had Trish not been open to hearing about Louisa’s thoughts and feelings, Louisa might have been much less willing to consider Trish’s point of view, making negotiation and working together to develop a good solution for Marco almost impossible. Finally, consider the negative impact on Marco of ongoing conflict between his mother and teacher, or of Louisa’s pulling Marco from the program altogether, if the center would not care for him according to the family’s beliefs and values.

### **What It Takes**

You can see from this vignette that implementing reflective practice requires that a child care setting have:

1. An administration that values reflection as an essential tool for providing quality care and one that creates a structure that encourages the development of staff relationships based upon mutual respect, collaboration, consistency, and safety. Such relationships support reflective practice.
2. Reflective supervision—a model of supervision that provides a safe place for teachers to *look at and listen* to themselves in relationship to their work, to acknowledge and wonder about their own feelings and reactions, and to carefully observe what families and children are telling and showing them. Importantly, it allows teachers to *learn* from the situation—putting

- together what they understand about their own reactions and what they understand about the child and family to develop a sensitive and effective response.
3. Teachers who are a resource to each other for support and learning.

### **Ways to Incorporate Reflective Practice into Child Care Settings**

- Make time at staff meetings for teachers to bring up challenges and for supervisors to facilitate a reflective approach to problem solving so staff members can learn together.
- Make time for reflective supervision. Reflective supervision can be done one-to-one or in small groups. Ideally, it occurs weekly. When starting out, it might work best to provide monthly opportunities. It is most effective when it is regular and uninterrupted.
- Provide flexibility so that teachers have adequate time for meaningful discussions with families.

# Training Evaluation: New Perspectives on Infant/Toddler Learning, Development, and Care

FACILITATOR: \_\_\_\_\_ HOST ORGANIZATION: \_\_\_\_\_

## Training Topic—Session One: It's People Who Create High Quality Infant Toddler Care

	<b>Training Evaluation</b>	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4	N/A
1	The purpose & main concepts of this session were clear to me.					
2	The training session was interesting and enabled me to learn.					
3	The handouts, videos, & materials were useful to me.					
4	I will be able to use what I learned in my work.					
5	This form of training is good for me. I would like more.					

	<b>Trainer Evaluation</b>	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4	N/A
1	The facilitator appeared to be knowledgeable.					
2	The facilitator was responsive to the questions and needs of all participants.					

*Please feel free to use the back for additional writing space and/or additional comments.*

My favorite part of this session was:

The part I would most like to change was:

One thing I learned in this session that I would like to practice tomorrow is:

Questions this session brought up for me: