

GETTING IN TUNE

Characteristics of Being In Tune

When the caregiver is “in tune” and sensitive to the moods and signals of the child an observer will see:

- ☺ the caregiver showing respect for the child
- ☺ the child setting the pace for activity and interaction
- ☺ recognition by the caregiver of the child’s feelings
- ☺ the caregiver receiving from the child rather than taking
- ☺ the availability of choices for the child rather than the will of the caregiver being imposed upon the child
- ☺ a respect for the child’s developing sense of autonomy
- ☺ an acceptance and accommodation of the individual temperament of each child

When caregiver is responsive to the signals and unspoken communication of the child, trust and confidence are the result.

Consequences of Being Out of Tune

When the caregiver is out of tune with the child and ignores the child’s rhythm, the following can happen:

- ☺ The child may become confused.
- ☺ The child may become frustrated.
- ☺ The child may become fussy or “fall apart”.
- ☺ The caregiver may become tense.
- ☺ The caregiver does not know what will work with the child.
- ☺ Interaction between caregiver and child becomes awkward.
- ☺ The caregiver’s confidence in his/her own ability is diminished.
- ☺ The caregiver and the child become dissatisfied with their relationship.

Adapted, with permission, from *Getting In Tune: Creating nurturing relationships with infants and toddlers*, California State Department of Education, Sacramento, 1990.

GETTING IN TUNE

A caregiver gets in tune by responding to the child's messages in a way that meets that child's needs. It has been described as a dance between caregiver and child in which both obtain satisfaction from the relationship. The three components of the responsive process WATCH, ASK, and ADAPT are described below.

WATCH

This important first step requires that the caregiver take the time to discover what the baby is communicating. This will take time and cannot be rushed. The caregiver must give the baby her full attention and focus on the many non-verbal signals that are offered. In time, small movements of head, body, and eyes, facial expressions and different cries will be as clear to a responsive caregiver as the words that older children use to express their needs.

ASK

The caregiver, having watched the baby's communication, now must ask herself what do these actions (or lack of action) mean? Some clues may be received by asking the child to help. Words, facial expressions, gestures, voice tone, and physical contact are all means of communication with which the caregiver can ask for more information. Be aware that the child is constantly growing and changing and that many behaviors may have more than one meaning. The caregiver should be persistent until she is reasonably certain that the child's message has been correctly received and she has responded appropriately. As the caregiver learns more about each child, understanding the communication will become increasingly easier.

ADAPT

After watching and asking, the caregiver must decide upon the appropriate way in which to respond to the communication. Some adaptations that are useful for caregivers include:

- ▶ Invite a child to play by sharing a toy
- ▶ Look for ways to soothe or comfort a fussy or crying child. Perhaps the child is uncomfortable in the position in which s/he finds himself.
- ▶ Imitate the child's facial expressions, movements, or sounds, Engage in reciprocal play.
- ▶ Change the child's point of view; pick the child up, or put the child down. Add something that will capture the child's attention.
- ▶ Be aware of the signs of over-stimulation. The child who plays, then breaks eye-contact, or turns away is expressing a need to stop the activity for a moment. Watch for the signal to resume play or to start a new activity.
- ▶ Allow the child time to play alone, but be available and in sight when the child looks up to check on you. Be ready for a message that says "I need you to talk to me." or "Hold me."

When the caregiver masters the art of responsive caregiving, the relationship between adult and child is enriched. There is a rhythm that develops bringing with it a deeper relationship. As the Video magazine Getting in Tune concludes, "Children who experience such a relationship come to know and trust their feelings, learn to love themselves, and feel that they are worthy of being loved. Both the child and the caregiver experience the joy of being in tune with someone special, together in a lively,

Six Stages of Emotional Interactions

Stanley Greenspan

Level one:

First 3-4 months old
Making sense of sensations

Level two:

3-7 months old
Intimacy, trust empathy, compassion
Relationships can be comforting

Level three:

5-12 months old
Developing his will
Identifying what he wants

Level four:

12-18 months old
Learning limits
Beginning consequences: some responses bring delight and some bring different emotions

Level five:

18-30 months old
Imagination

Level six:

30-48 months old and beyond
Ideas to label feelings
Think, plan, and solve problems
Encouraging child to stop and think of what would happen.
Prevents impulse behavior
Encourages abstract thinking
Pause and reflect

Key is using what is emotionally important to the child so that he takes the initiative and masters particular milestone.

Time spent building on these emotional revelations are more important than time spent on computers, flash cards or rote learning.