



## Topic:

### **Responsive home environments have a positive effect on the social-emotional development of infants and toddlers**

#### Research tells us:

Research findings offer guidance to parents and caregivers about how to help very young children achieve healthy social and emotional development. By arranging infants' and toddlers' home environments in ways that provide frequent opportunities to interact both with responsive adults and with varied play materials, parents and caregivers can create the best conditions for their children to learn to enjoy and seek out social interactions.

## Set the Scene for Social Ease

We all appreciate a sociable soul—someone who's open, friendly, and who brings a sense of confidence and ease to every interaction.

Studies of the home environments of young children have identified the characteristics of a home scene that are most likely to promote strong early social and emotional development. Together they comprise a “responsive” home environment—one where infants' and toddlers' positive feelings and healthy social behavior can flourish.

Carol M. Trivette, Ph.D., Co-Principal Investigator at the Research and Training Center on Early Childhood Development, analyzed 19 research studies that assessed one or more of the six characteristics of a responsive home environment for children under age 3 as defined by the Infant-Toddler Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (IT-HOME) assessment tool. Findings from the studies, that included a total of 3,322 child participants, indicate that three aspects of home environment have a positive influence on the social-emotional development of young children. They are:

- The presence and regular accessibility of toys and play materials that the child experiences as challenging and engaging;
- Parents and caregivers who practice a responsive interaction style, in which they are physically and emotionally responsive and sensitive to their children; and



#### Acting on the evidence:

Research suggests three important actions parents can take to promote their infant or toddler's healthy social and emotional development:

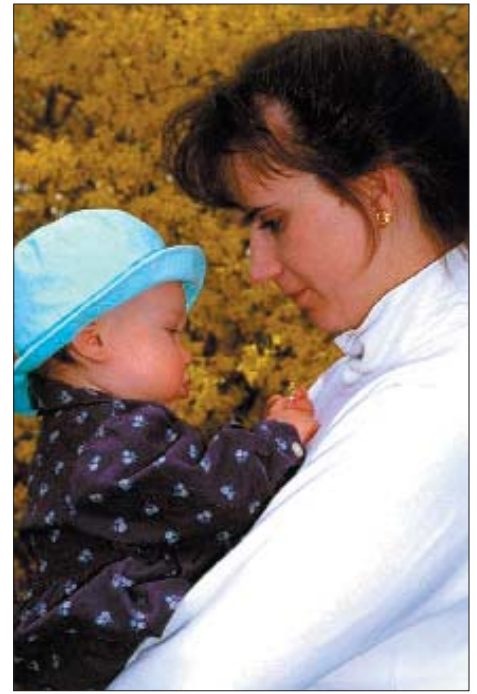
- Provide a physical home environment that contains a variety of learning materials and toys that are designed

to challenge children and that contain a variety of different experiences and activities that occur with some regularity.

- Cultivate a responsive adult-child interaction style.
- Encourage the child to explore and interact with the people and objects he or she encounters in everyday settings.

- Parents and caregivers who take it upon themselves to encourage young children to engage and interact frequently with a variety of people and objects in the course of the everyday activities of family life.

When taken together, the 19 research studies point to important recommendations for parents and caregivers about how to arrange their home environments to best promote positive social-emotional development. The key is to build in as many opportunities for responsive, sensitive, and challenging interactions with people and things as possible. Happily, parents can design just such a responsive home environment with very little in the way of financial resources. With creativity and energy, they can make enriching opportunities to interact with different people and things a natural part of their infants' and toddlers' everyday lives.



Young children are most likely to experience healthy social and emotional development in a responsive home environment with lots of opportunities to interact successfully with interesting people and things.

## Let's take a look ...

The “nest” into which 17-year-old Toni Davis welcomed her baby son, Thomas, eleven months ago is the same two-bedroom apartment her grandma has made a home for Toni and her younger brother since they were both still in elementary school. Being a single mom while working part-time stocking supermarket shelves and studying to earn a high-school-equivalency diploma isn't the easiest way of life for a first-time parent, and it's not the one Toni planned for herself, but she's managing in her characteristically upbeat style.

“This is simply what I do for Thomas,” Toni explains.

Toni took to heart information Thomas' childcare teacher shared with her about what makes a home environment a good setting for helping little ones develop socially and emotionally.

“It may not look like much to some folks,” Toni told a recent visitor, “but there are a lot of really great things going on for Thomas here!”

With Thomas seated by an open kitchen drawer where he's happily sorting through plastic food containers and lids, Toni offers a tour of what she describes as the “responsive home,” she's created for her baby. “Well, as you can see, we've set things

up so that Thomas can handle all sorts of stuff that's interesting and safe for him to have. Not just here, but in the living room and bedroom, too. When he pats on certain low drawers and doors and babbles at me, he knows I'll open 'em up and he can play with what's inside. His toy shelves in our room are just cardboard boxes I brought from the market and covered with adhesive paper, just like the building blocks I made, but he loves them.”

Toni keeps the row of brightly colored shelves filled with toys she borrows every month from a toy-lending library or discovers in “under-a-dollar” bins at yard sales. Her major baby equipment purchases were a folding stroller and a second-hand backpack carrier. “These make it easier for Thomas to come along with me everywhere, and I always have him interact in some way with store clerks, people in the park, bus drivers—same as I do!”

Toni encourages her younger brother, Darius, to play often with Thomas, and to bring his school pals home. “It's good for Thomas to interact with lots of people, and for them to notice and show interest in what he's doing,” she explains. “It's being responsive, and it makes all the difference.”

## Take another look:

Visit [www.researchtopractice.info](http://www.researchtopractice.info) to read or download the complete practice-based research synthesis by C. M. Trivette (2003). Influence of home environment on the social-emotional development of young children. *Bridges*, 2(2). Copies of the

research synthesis, this *Bottomlines* research summary, and a variety of print and multimedia practice guides based on this topic are available from Winterberry Press, online at [www.wbpress.com](http://www.wbpress.com), or by calling 828-432-0150 or 800-824-1174.