



## Gentle Touch Means So Much

Best practice with infants and toddlers includes careful and thoughtful procedures, activity needs of each child, careful organization, and attention to the quality of a baby's day. It also should include responsive caregivers that support babies as they get to know about and "live in" their bodies, find pleasure in and learn from what their bodies can do and to realize that their skin is a natural boundary between them and the rest of the world. D.W. Winnicott said, "A baby's skin is the membrane that separates for him, the "I" from "not I".

*\*\*"A caregiver must acknowledge that babies have a keen awareness of their bodies too, that infants and young children live, feel, learn and express themselves above all through their body." (Dr. Judit Falk)*

- When approaching a baby, a caregiver can let a baby know by gently calling the baby's name, smiling, making eye contact and entering the baby's space facing the baby. Avoid startling babies by picking them up from the back and with no warning.
- A responsive caregiver announces to a baby that she'd like to pick her up by slowly rubbing her hands together, palms open and saying, "Here I come. I'd like to pick you up now so we can change your diaper together."
- Your hands and face should send the same gentle message as your words.
- Responsive caregivers know when to hold babies just close enough and just when to let go.
- Moves your body into the places where babies are playing respectfully and quietly without interrupting their play.
- Busy babies have big ideas while at play. Resist interrupting babies while they are having "Ta Dah!" moments. Waiting a moment or two is a great investment in a young child's confidence and learning.
- Repeat the same steps and words during routines so that infants and toddlers can begin to predict and participate more in daily routines. This can become a beautiful wordless "dance" between baby and caregiver.

The youngest of babies take cues from watching their caregiver's faces and body movements. Responsive caregivers take on

the role of news caster to infants and toddlers. They talk to children about what is going on around them, to them and what will happen next. A young child has two ways of developing an image of his own body, starting from being born.

1. By everything he does to his own body (by the activities of his own body)
2. By everything that is done to his body when he is touched, held and fed.

When moving infants and toddlers from place to place, a respectful caregiver makes physical adjustments that leave the child's natural body posture in place. She...

- ✓ Holds infants in positions that they can get into themselves
- ✓ Makes a statement to a child and then waits for their response
- ✓ If she must guide moving toddlers, she gently takes them by the hand only, never the wrist arm or clothing
- ✓ When walking with children, she remembers that 1 adult step equals 3-4 children's steps and they like to "stop and smell the roses along the way"
- ✓ Slows down her speech and movements so that children can process what she is saying along with any physical/visual cues

*When we touch the infant's body.....by Judit Falk / Educaring/Resources for Infant Caregivers. Resources for Infant Caregivers (RIE) [www.rie.org](http://www.rie.org)*

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