

R.I.E. for Infants...



There are many different philosophies in child care. The R.I.E. (Resources for Infant Educators) philosophy is one that focuses specifically on the child under the age of two, and is based on the teachings of Magda Gerber. The belief behind RIE is respecting infants as people and not caring for them as objects. Caring for the infant as an active participant rather than a passive participant shows respect. This style of caregiving results in an infant developing self-identity and a positive self esteem as a toddler.

In any group care environment, caregivers often must give each child a turn for one-on-one attention. In an RIE philosophy center, children are told when and why they need to wait. A caregiver who is feeding an infant will not interrupt that infant's meal when another infant wants attention. Instead the caregiver tells the second infant "(caregiver's name) is feeding (1st infant's name) now, when (caregiver's name) is finished (caregiver's name) will feed (2nd infant)." This use of language recognizes the second infant without depriving the first infant of the attention he/she deserves.

The language avoids pronouns and the caregiver refers to himself or herself in the 3rd person because young children have a hard time understanding pronouns. When the first infant's meal is over, the caregiver will say, "Now that (1st infant's name) is finished with lunch (caregiver's name) is going to help (2nd infant's name)." It is now time

for the second infant to be fed, diapered, cuddled and cared for. This rotation is very much like the care mothers of twins or other multiple births give their children at home.

Unless there is an extreme emergency (i.e. fire), children are always addressed by their name before being handled. "Bobby, Cindy is picking up Bobby. Cindy is changing Bobby's diaper." Every interaction is narrated by the provider to ensure the infant has the opportunity to associate the language with the actions. A child who is being fed would hear the caregiver narrate, "Cindy is feeding Bobby peas ... now carrots." This narration allows a child to learn what to expect, and in time understand more language. The use of language gives the infant a sense of control and stability.

In the past, infant care was often very clinical and routine. Children were fed, and diapered as the caregiver went about his/her day with little or no language. Because babies had not developed speech, they were not spoken to. Infants were not told what was happening to them or what to expect. This makes a very unpredictable environment for them. In a center that practices respectful caregiving, even newborns are continuously spoken to.

Besides language, the original RIE philosophy stresses natural physical development. Infants are never restrained in high chairs, saucers, or other devices. Until an infant can sit

up without support, the infant is held for all feedings,

including pureed foods. This can be messy and takes effort on the part of the provider to take feeding at the infant's pace. Once an infant can sit unassisted, low to the floor chairs and tables may be used. Magda Gerber feels it is important that no child be put in a position he/she can not get out of on his/her own. If you sit a baby up who can not pull his/her body into a sitting position, the child does not have the physical skills to lay down safely, so the baby tips over or is stuck until an adult changes the baby's position. Very young infants (3 to 5 months) often get frustrated on their backs or stomach and will fuss until sat up. However, the RIE philosophy reminds us that unless a child develops on his/her own, including struggles to roll over, sit up or crawl, the child will continually cry for an adult to help and not develop independence. It is hard sometimes to remember that creating dependence on adults in the early months leads to tantrum throwing toddlers who will do nothing for themselves. Without a sense of independence, toddlers can become very dependent, refuse to walk, always fuss until carried, and they will not have the strong sense of self two-year olds are known for.

For more information on the R.I.E. philosophy, you can check out the website at www.rie.org