

# Facilitator Guide

## Family Play and Infant Development

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**Note to facilitator:**

The online training module "Family Play and Infant Development" provides an excellent opportunity for home visitors who appreciate the flexibility of distance learning.

The pairing of the online training with a facilitated discussion (a proven more traditional method of education, whose efficacy is widely recognized) is innovative and provides for added value. The discussion allows for the sharing of personal experiences that help to illuminate the information in the module. It also provides opportunities to use the basic skills that are so essential for communication – “serve and return”, listening, facial expressions, vocal intonation, eye contact - things that are absent from today’s communication using technology. (In these days of emails, text messages, "selfies", and social media, it’s nice to meet face-to-face once in a while!) Also, laughter, stories, music, and role-plays as part of the discussion, injects an emotional component to the learning opportunity. These types of elements are incorporated into this Facilitator Guide.

Home visitors spend time with families that have an array of gifts, skills, cultures and many times challenges. The opportunity to share experiences, strategies, solutions, and successes with other family workers is much more powerful than completing the online education alone.

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This Guide provides some ideas for a trainer or supervisor wishing to facilitate a follow-up discussion with a group of home visitors who have completed the module. It assumes that the facilitator has also completed the module and is familiar with its contents and resources. You don't necessarily have to be a content expert to lead the activities and discussions. Feel free to adjust and add your own creative ideas.

We hope you enjoy the process!



## **Introduction/Icebreaker**

Post the question: “What is Play?”

Begin the session by organizing participants into small groups. Ask each of them to think for a moment and then share with their group the one word that best describes play. After groups have discussed their words, review a definition of play as described in the article in this module “Rediscovering Play”:

- Play is voluntary
- Play is intrinsically motivated
- Play is recreational

Pose a follow-up question: What then, is play for a baby?

Invite responses from the group, including ideas from the module which describe play with sound and turn-taking games.

## **Review Learning Objectives**

After having completed this module, home visitors should be able to:

1. Describe family play and its importance in children’s development.
2. Discuss how temperament, individual preferences and abilities, and family culture affect family play.
3. Help families recognize when infants are ready to participate in play.
4. Discuss various kinds of play between infants and adults or other children that promote attachment and early social behavior, cognitive abilities, language, and sensory-motor development.
5. Reflect on how to respond and engage in self-care when families have difficulty playing and engaging with their infants.

## Self-Select Topics

Write each of the following items on separate papers and post on walls throughout the room. Allow participants to select the topic of most interest and gather around that question. Provide ample time for the groups to discuss their topic, then signal for their attention and ask each group to share an idea with the whole group for consideration. Facilitate large group discussion.

1. *Should we assume that adults know how to play with their children? Why or why not?*
2. *What do parents do when you ask them to play with children as part of the home visit? Are some of them hesitant? Why might they feel uncomfortable doing so?*
3. *Who plays with babies? When you were young, who were your playmates? (Today it is more common to have fewer or only one child. What implications might this have - for the need of adults to engage in play with children?)*
4. *How do you explain to families the importance of play?*

## Review Vocabulary

In order to review some of the key concepts, use the Crossword Puzzle handout (at end of guide). Have participants work with partners to complete it. Then ask if there are any terms that they found tricky and discuss those items in more detail to provide any needed clarification.

## Whole Group Discussion

Provide an opportunity for home visitors to share the strategies they use to help families to learn about their infants' psychological states. Ask them:

*What are some strategies you have used to help families learn to follow their babies' cues? How do you help them know when it is **not** a good time to play?*

Optional follow-up question:

*In one section of the module, it's mentioned that adults sometimes use playful behaviors to soothe or distract a child who is upset. When is this a good idea? When might it **not** be a good idea?*

## **Think-Pair-Share**

Prompt each participant to think about the following and then share with a partner:

Identify some pros and cons of the home visitor bringing interesting toys vs. using objects found in the home that could inspire play.

Invite a few teams to share with the group.

## **Whole Group Discussion**

In the module, home visitors are asked to consider activities that would be a good play match. This requires having some sense of what parents might enjoy themselves.

Prompt a conversation: *How do you learn about various family play styles? Does your curriculum allow space to differentiate for each family?*

## **Small Groups**

### Sharing Games

Provide post-it notes and have each home visitor write down one of their own family's favorite baby games and or songs. In small groups, have them share their notes while posting them on a large piece of paper. Using markers, they can add notes based on the following:

- Describe the roots of that play, if they know.
- Identify the benefits that those games might have for a baby's development (referring back to the concepts from the module).
- Finally, think about the enjoyment factor – digging back into some of their favorite moments as a young child, or thinking about their favorite moments with their own children.

Post the completed posters for all to see.

## **Sharing Games Activity wrap-up (whole group):**

What are some implications for how powerful it might be to tap into those kind of interactions for families; the importance of learning about what might be culturally meaningful? In addition, for families that haven't had these fond experiences, contemplate what a gift it could be to introduce that special "thing" that could become someone's most cherished memory one day.

### **View Video**

Use the video "When Play Isn't Working" from Part 5 of the Module. Re-watch as a group and use as a springboard for discussion.

### **Personal Reflection**

#### Self-Care

Use the following prompts to encourage reflection:

- *Think about a family you work with or have worked with in the past where you feel like you haven't been as effective as you'd like in supporting their parenting. How have your feelings been affected by your interactions with this family?*
- *What strategies have you used to manage your frustration or worry?*

Acknowledge the difficulty of this work and invite home visitors to share either their feelings and/or coping strategies. This exercise provides an opportunity for peer empathy and support.

### **Role Play**

Group participants into small groups of 4.

- Invite two members of each group to take on a role – one as a home visitor, and another as a parent.
- Provide the scenarios (on next page) to each group and allow them to either choose one or identify their own – and then act out how they would approach that situation.
- Pass out copies of the "Guiding Questions" document from Printable Resources section of the module for their review.
- Provide dolls and toys as props.
- Additional participants can observe the interaction and provide feedback.

### Scenarios:

- Conversation with a dad who expresses having a challenge engaging his child who he reports is not interested in playing with him.
- Supporting a parent in engaging an infant during tummy time and explaining the benefits of this play.
- Conversation with a frustrated and overwhelmed mom who needs help setting aside time to play with her baby who is showing an interest in playing with her.

After providing ample time for this activity, debrief with each group and invite them to share their insights.

### **Whole group Discussion**

In the module, home visitors are encouraged not to place too much emphasis on milestone checklists, but rather to focus on supporting secure attachment, play and relationships. Acknowledge that this may be contrary to the expectations of their programs. Ask them to describe ways they are able to incorporate these elements into their work while completing curricular requirements.

### **Small Groups**

#### Sharing what worked

Ask if anyone in the group tried using the Family Play Log. If so, have them share how that went. Then, within small groups, ask them to share the alternative ways they document and celebrate the play interactions families have throughout the week. They could also brainstorm new ideas to try.

## **Individual Reflection**

### Play as Self-Care

Provide the following prompts and time for individual reflection and writing:

- *How do you play?*
- *Where do you find time in your day to have fun?*

Provide an opportunity to share.

## **Action Plan**

Have participants develop an Action Plan:

- *What 3 things from this session will you try with families in the next week?*
- *Also, set one goal for your own self-care.*

## **Closing**

“The Importance of Family Play”

Show this video from Part 1 of the module. Commend home visitors for their efforts to encourage family play and for supporting children’s healthy development.

## **Additional topics for discussion**

### Dual-Language Learners

The module encourages support for dual language learning. What do home visitors think of this idea? Invite to share ways that they support families to use their primary languages with their babies.

### Gender Differences in Play

Discuss the importance of including fathers and supporting their unique play styles and contributions to their babies' development.

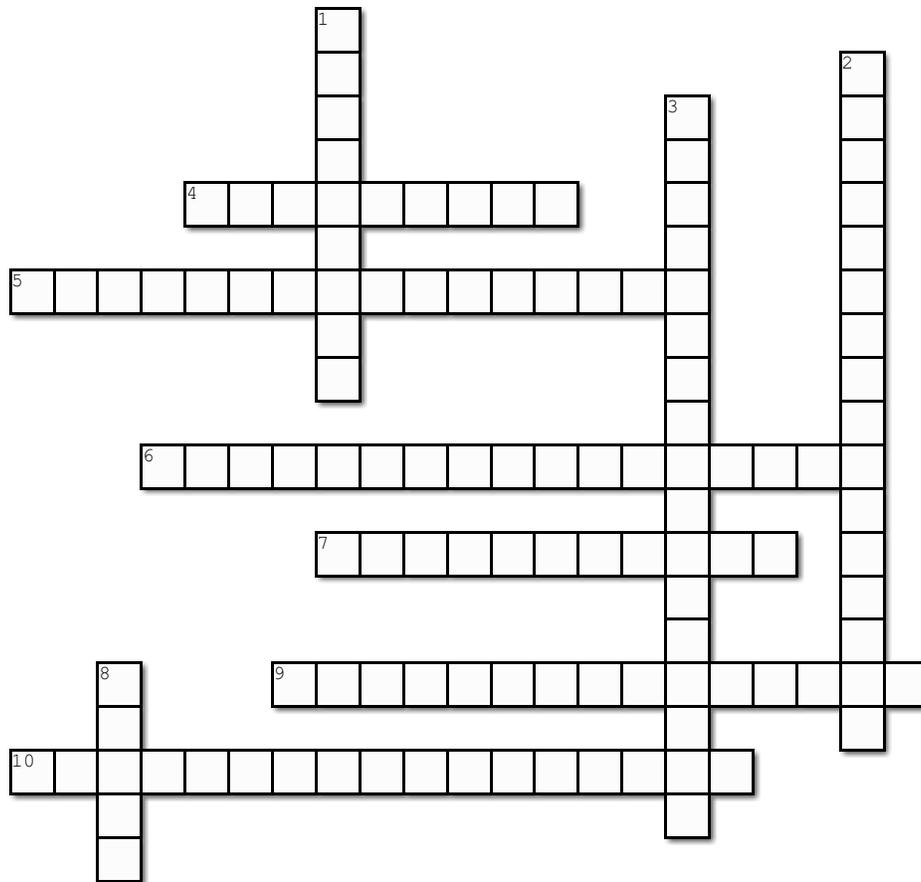
### Brain Development

The practice of home visitors may be enhanced if they knew some of the brain science behind “serve and return.” You may want to provide an article or show a video on this topic.

*This document was created for the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood by the Center for Early Childhood Education at Eastern Connecticut State University with contributions from Doug Edwards. The document is meant to support facilitated discussion groups for home visitors who have completed the online learning module.*



# Family Play and Infant Development Crossword Puzzle



## Across

4. The sounds of language.
5. An understanding, usually emerging between 8 and 12 months of age, that objects still exist even if they cannot be seen. (*two words*)
6. The style in which various families and cultures communicate with each other. (*two words*)
7. A process in which infants become so familiar with objects or events that they show disinterest in them.
9. When an adult and infant mimic each other's actions and/or sounds. (*two words*)
10. A set of brain functions that are responsible for regulating mental action i.e. attention, memory, and self-regulation. (*two words*)

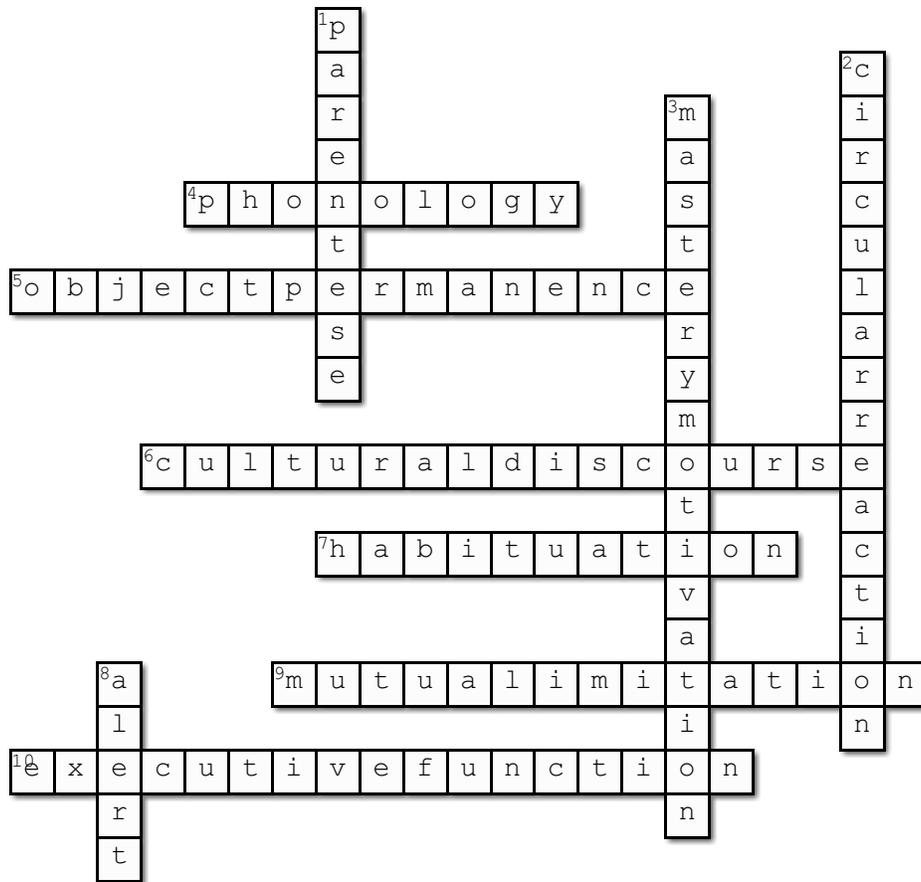
## Down

1. A special form of language that parents around the world speak to children that may include exaggerated intonations.
2. An action in which an infant performs a movement or vocalization, gets a response, and then repeats it back. (*two words*)
3. The intrinsic drive to master a new skill, frustration and challenges. (*two words*)
8. a psychological state in which infants are very attentive to what others are saying and doing.

## **Word Bank**

alert  
circular reaction  
cultural discourse  
executive function  
habituation  
mastery motivation  
mutual imitation  
object permanence  
parentese  
phonology

Answer Key Family Play and Infant Development Crossword Puzzle



**Across**

4. The sounds of language. (**phonology**)
5. An understanding, usually emerging between 8 and 12 months of age, that objects still exist even if they cannot be seen. (**object permanence**)
6. The style in which various families and cultures communicate with each other. (**cultural discourse**)
7. A process in which infants become so familiar with objects or events that they show disinterest in them. (**habituation**)
9. When an adult and infant mimic each other's actions and/or sounds. (**mutual imitation**)
10. A set of brain functions that are responsible for regulating mental action i.e. attention, memory, and self-regulation. (**executive function**)

**Down**

1. A special form of language that parents around the world speak to children that may include exaggerated intonations. (**parentese**)
2. An action in which an infant performs a movement or vocalization, gets a response, and then repeats it back. (**circular reaction**)
3. The intrinsic drive to master a new skill, frustration and challenges. (**mastery motivation**)
8. a psychological state in which infants are very attentive to what others are saying and doing. (**alert**)