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**05.00 – 06.00 p.m.**

**CEST- Central European Summertime  
(Germany)**

***„Creating a communication-rich  
environment: Practices and  
structures  
that help to build communication  
skills“***

# CREATING A COMMUNICATION RICH ENVIRONMENT: PRACTICES & STRUCTURES THAT HELP TO BUILD COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Julie Maier, Educational Specialist  
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German CHARGE Conference  
18<sup>th</sup>, June 2021



“All humans crave connection.  
Communication--the exchange of  
ideas and feelings and thoughts is a  
way creating connections.”

~Lauri Triulzi, teacher of the deafblind

# Searching for connection

- In fact, neurodevelopmental research has found humans are born with a innate need to build attachments as we seek the emotional safety needed to construct meaning in our world.
- To form connections with others we use the behaviors available to us to communicate with others.

# Importance of Attachment

Dr. Suzanne Zydeek, Developmental Psychologist, University of Dundee Scotland:

“Babies arrive with brains programmed to seek emotional and physical contact with other people. Over the first year, we discover who, in our world, is good at noticing our need for emotional contact and who isn't so in tune with our needs. A baby's rapidly developing brain keeps track of these patterns. He or she builds them into the expectations they are forming about relationships more generally.”

# Building connection through communication

- In typical development of communication skills:
  - Child uses facial gestures, vocalizations, gestures, movement, and speech or sign language to initiate or respond to others.
  - From birth a child learns these behaviors incidentally by watching and listening to others.
  - Babies and young children communicate with a small circle of trusted adults — parents and other trusted care providers — who can interpret and quickly respond to their attempts to communicate through behaviors.

# Communication & Concept Development

- Communication is central to learning about the world and developing relationships with others.
- Children with combined vision and hearing loss miss the visual and auditory cues other children rely on, so respectful touch and use of multiple modes of communication, including touch, are very helpful.
- Communication skills are learned through practice and use in every activity and setting across the day.

# Connection barriers for a child with CHARGE syndrome

- **Vision loss-** miss facial expressions, non-verbal gestures, opportunities to learn social skills incidentally.
- **Deaf or hard of hearing-** cannot hear or understand spoken language. Need for a visual language which is a different language than other family members.
- **Other sensory issues and needs-** balance, standing, walking, movement may be difficult and unusual posture and positions may be used out of necessity.
- **Medical issues and hospitalizations-** limits opportunities for building early connections, especially positive ones.



# Range of abilities in children with CHARGE

- Expressive communication in all children is delayed.
- Cannot generalize skill levels to all individuals with CHARGE due to range of their anomalies and abilities.
- All children start with pre-intentional behavior.
- Some will acquire language, either spoken or visual.
- Others will advance along the continuum but not reach symbolic language.
- For some children intentional behaviors and unconventional communication might remain most effective way to communicate.

# Behavior = Communication

Often unusual and unexpected behaviors are misunderstood labeled “attention-seeking” and perhaps a better description is “**connection-seeking**”.

- **External communication intent-**
  - Connecting and responding to others
- **Internal communication intent-**
  - Connecting and responding with your body or senses

Important to recognize the difference and respond accordingly.

# Communication development: Three important areas

- **Mode**-forms used to communicate
- **Function**-reasons to communicate
- **Rates**-how often an individual communicates,  
including rates of initiation

# Modes of communication

- \* Spoken language
  - \* Signed language
  - \* Gestures
  - \* Touch/Tactile sign language
  - \* Objects
  - \* Photos, picture symbols
- 
- Many children will use more than one modes or mode may change as they grow and develop.
  - Communicating with your child in their “language” is key to development of communication and interaction skills.

# Supporting child's communication skills

Identify child's **current** communicative behaviors

- **Pre-intentional-behaviors:** A response that demonstrate pleasure or displeasure. Crying or laughing and not directed to another person. Focus on applying meaning to actions.
- **Pre-symbolic:** gestures, pictures, touch cues, object cues, body movements, eye gaze shift, maladaptive behaviors.
- **Symbolic:** spoken or signed language to convey information to another person and receive information back.

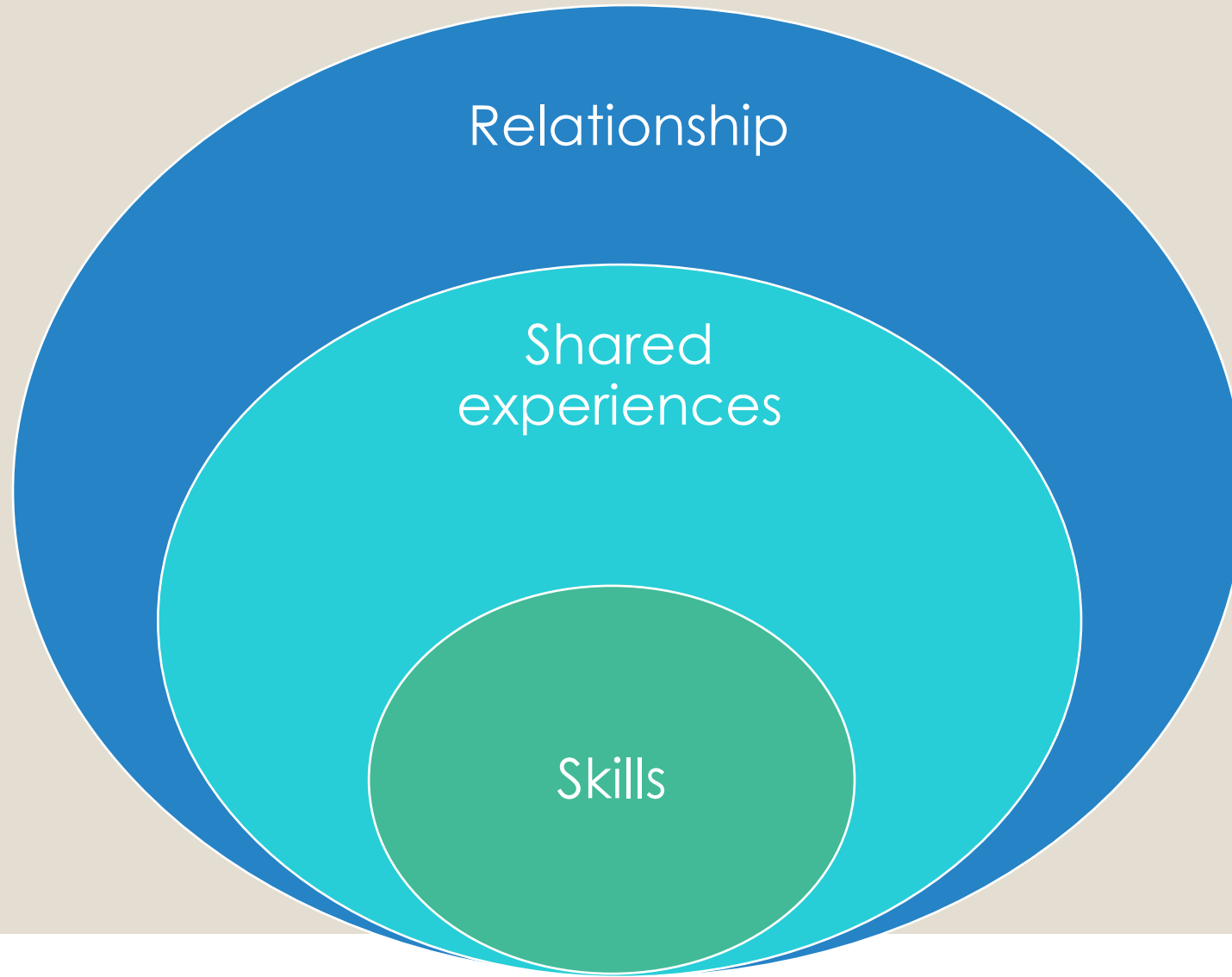
**Meet your child at their current level & support next level of skills.**

## Dr. Susan Bruce, Boston College

“Learning the meaning of symbols is not enough to ensure quality interactions. A rich history of early communication opportunities prepares children to successfully use symbols to communicate, express thoughts, and gain access to the thoughts of others.”

Source: Malloy, P. & Bruce, S. (2008) *NCDB Practice Perspectives*, 3

# Communication Context



# Influences on the development of symbolic communication

- Highly responsive adults.
- Experiences involving action and movement.
- Emotional impact of activities and materials.
- Activities and objects are interesting and meaningful to child.
- Interactions that occur with objects during play.
- Regular routines.
- Exploration using all of the senses, including touch.
- Maximize use of hearing and vision.

Source: Malloy, P. & Bruce, S. (2008) *NCDB Practice Perspectives*, 3



# Communication through connection

- Trusting relationships
- Importance of routines
- Physical spaces that encourage communication
- Sensory considerations
- Using child's interests to plan activities
- Focus on reciprocal interactions
- Time and patience

# BUILDING TRUST:

## Communication partners

- Need to be trusted, respectful, and patient.
- Hold expectations that the child can and wants to communicate.
- Notice behaviors AND respond to the messages your child sends to you or others and apply meaning to the behavior.
  - Example: Reaching for an item means "I want that." or "What is that? I'm curious".
- Respond to ALL initiatives.
- Follow the child's lead and pace for interactions.

# Importance of routines

- Routines provide child chance to learn concepts and skills not learned incidentally.
- Routines provide structure and predictability.
- Predictability allows child to anticipate and initiate.
- Promotes active participation and a means for child to contribute to family life.
- Use of routines lead to increased confidence and independence.

# Elements of routines

- Predictable routines need a clear beginning, middle, and end.
  - Example: Undressing for bath while water fills tub, playing and washing in bath, drying body and putting on pajamas.
- Allows child to anticipate the activity or next step and initiate action or a message.
- Slight changes in steps in a routine provide another opportunity for child to initiate and express a message about the change.

# Family Routines

- Identify the daily routines for your family.
- If you can't identify many, then consider establishing more routines.
  - Examples: dressing, mealtime, bath time, playtime, bedtime story
- Initially, routines occur in **same** space at the **same** time.
- When possible, try to follow important routines when you're away from home, such as bedtime routine on vacation.

# Family Routines

- Include your child in each routine and give them parts of the routine to complete themselves—even small parts, such as pulling up pants, putting toys in basket, holding bath sponge.
- As child engages in routine with you, apply meaning to all attempts to communicate through gesture and behavior. (giggling= “That’s fun.”; jumping=“I’m excited”; reaching=“I want that!”)

# Routines: Opportunities for communication

- Within routines create opportunities when child needs to comment, request, or ask a question.
- Change or delay the routine and see if child notices and lets you know or corrects you.
- Forget some material needed in the routine. Does child ask for it or comment about?
- Pretend to forget a step or skip the child's turn. What do they do?
- Keep it fun, use humor. Do NOT cause the child distress.

# Spaces that encourage communication are...

- Organized.
- Inviting and interesting.
- Include the visual, auditory, tactile, physical enhancements and supports your child needs.
- Limit distractions.
- Allow child to easily navigate and locate or look for favorite items in environment.
- Include preferred toys and materials AND add new and unexpected items for novelty and generalizing skills.



# Connecting through available senses

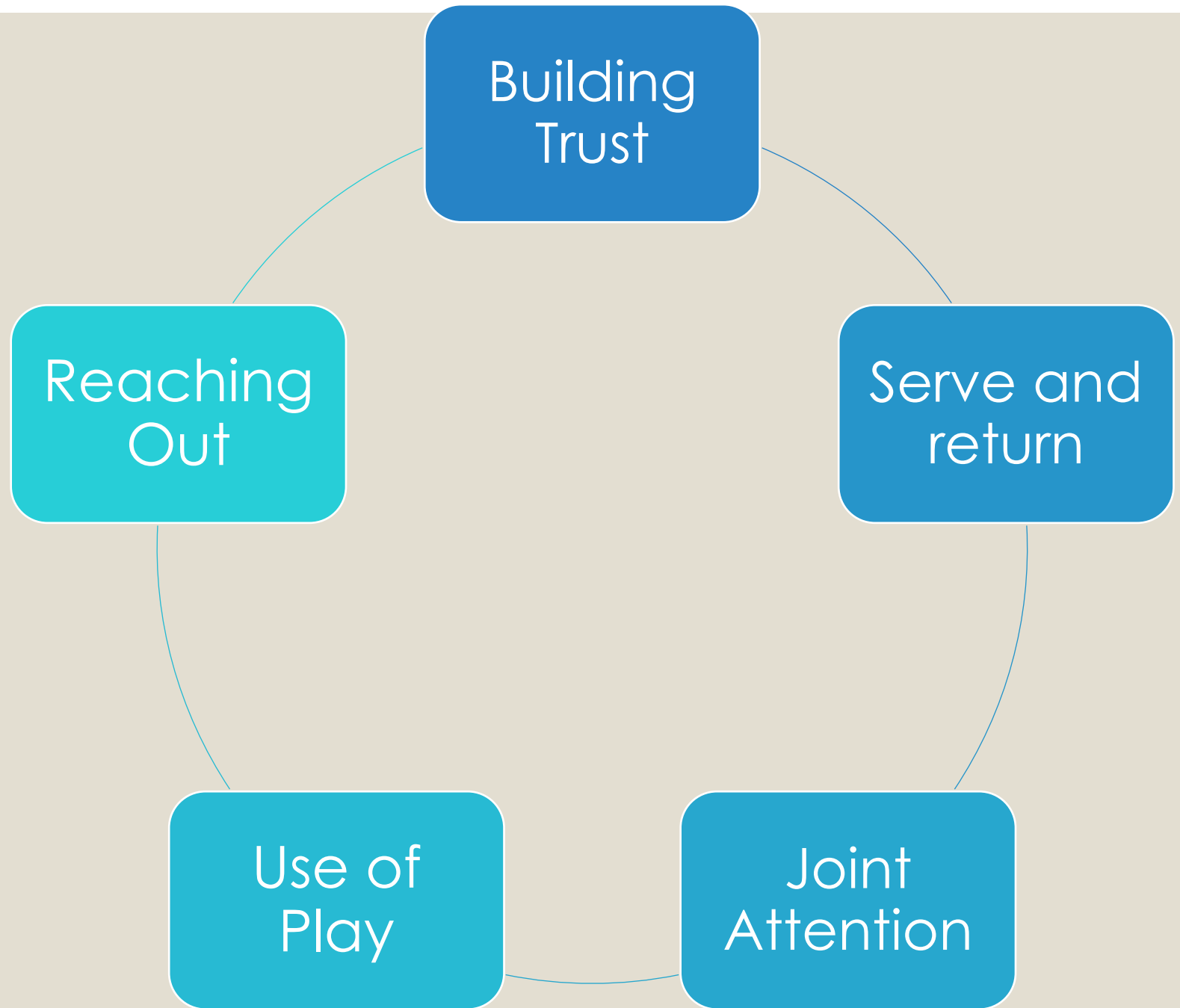
- Use and model the communication modes your child uses to communicate.
- Watch for signals your child gives that they're ready to communicate, need more time, or want a break or to end interaction.
- Enhance visual and auditory cues when selecting materials or planning activities.
- Use touch cues, name cues, and hand-under hand support to provide additional information.
- Consider other senses to provide information.

# Use child's interests to promote communication

It's easier to engage someone in activities and conversations they enjoy or find interesting and this will lead to more positive interactions.

- What interests and motivates your child?
- What types of toys, materials, and activities do they prefer?
- Which senses do you think they use best?
- What sensory experiences do they seek?
- What topics, people, and places are preferred?

# Quality Reciprocal Interactions



# Promoting harmonious interactions

Communication partner must...

- **Recognize** the child's signals and initiations
- **Affirm and respond** to the child in appropriate ways
- And make changes to the environment to **encourage** increased interactions.

It is the adult's responsibility to create and maintain harmonious interactions.

Malloy, P., Janssen, M., Riksen-Walveren, van Dijk, J., van den Tillaart, B. (2007).

# Reciprocal interaction and positive self-image

When you affirm a your child's initiative, you are strengthening their self-identity. Your child...

- discovers they can influence other people
- feels competent in expressing
- develops a better idea of who they are
- feels validated and positive about themselves

~B, van den Tillaart & T. Hertzog 2014

# Joint Attention

- This occurs when two people are paying attention to each other the same thing at the same time and both partners know they are both paying attention to the same thing at the same time.
- Joint attention typically develops in children around 9 months of age through play and book reading with care providers.

# Play promotes communication

- Opportunities for commenting, asking questions, making choices and to share information about new concepts.
- Demonstrate that you share your child's interest as you join them in play.
- Perfect way to teach and practice turn-taking.
- Provide opportunities for choices and for leading the play.
- **Remember play is fun** and this can be a good avenue for including siblings, other family members or peers into interactions with your child.

# Communication takes TIME

- It requires time to learn and develop the skills needed for fluent communication.
- Your child needs time to receive and respond to messages.
- Build time into routines which follow child's pace and rhythm.
- Communicating can be tiring and frustrating for the child, and for you at times. Take breaks.
- The effort and energy required can result in communication breakdowns.



# Reaching out

- By providing your child with positive experiences through joint attention and responsive affirmations and initiatives toward the child, they feel safe and secure.
- This security gives them confidence to reach out to explore new materials, new activities and new people.
- This expands their experiences and opportunities.

## Reaching out (2)

- In typical development children acquire language and social skills through interactions with trusted adults who care for them.
- As they grow older, they disengage with those adults and the connections formed with same age peers becomes important part of their social and emotional development.
- This can be another area of difficulty for some children and youth with CHARGE.

# Sharing information with others

- Providing your child with a secure base of attachment will support their journey to build connections outside of family.
- Your role transitions from primary communication partner to
  - coach or mentor for your child and peers,
  - interpreter of how your child communicates,
  - and supportive advocate
- Creating a “Personal Passport” or “All About Me” book and communication dictionary can be very helpful for others.

“A good life is human life. A human life is social life. The essence of human nature is to be in the company of others -- companionship, fellowship and connection to others is essential to our well being.”

~Al Etmanski, community organizer & author

# Questions? Comments?

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