INSTITUTE FOR LEARNING & BRAIN SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

Discussion Guide for Module 3:
The Importance of Early Interactions

Module run time: 20 min
Estimated time to complete the module with discussion guide: 40-60 min

Below are recommended stopping points and suggested questions to use in your group's discussion. Please feel free to follow your group's lead and discuss topics and questions that are of greatest value to the group! If you're working with a larger group, you may find it useful to discuss these questions in smaller groups and then reunite to summarize.

Key points:
- School-readiness starts from birth. Early cognitive and social experiences play an important role in children's early development.
- Children are particularly attuned to other people, and learn best from face-to-face interactions.
- Children are incredibly social. Using eye gaze, pointing, infant-directed speech, and contingent actions can draw children's attention to their environment and support learning.

Module synopsis:
Page 1: *Introduction*
Page 2: *Acknowledgements*
Page 3: *Meet Maya*
Page 4: *By the 2000th Day*

✪ **Recommended stopping point**
- Page 4 discussed elements of school readiness. These include both cognitive skills, like understanding symbols, and mental and social skills like impulse control, problem solving, and emotional awareness. Why are these mental and social skills important? How might a child build these skills?
- These examples represent only some of the many skills that contribute to school readiness. What other skills prepare children for school?

Page 5: *Learning in Supportive Relationships*
Page 6: *What's in an Interaction?*
Page 7: *What's in an Interaction? (videos)*

✪ **Recommended stopping point**
- On the previous page, you saw videos of parents interacting with children. What did you notice about these interactions? What did parents say or do in these interactions? How did the children behave and respond?
- What kinds of interactions do you regularly have with the children in your life? If you were able to view these from an outsider's perspective, what would you see?

Page 8: *Children Learn From Other People*
Page 9: *Video Chat*
Page 10: *Children Learn From Infant-Directed Speech (video)*

✪ Recommended stopping point

- Pages 8 and 9 discussed research about children's learning from screen media. Were you surprised by this research? Given this knowledge, how would you plan to use screen media in your home or classroom?
- Think of some everyday objects in your home or a preschool that could be used for interactive play. Given what you've learned in the previous pages, how would you use those objects to create a meaningful interaction with a child? How might you incorporate infant-directed speech, eye gaze, and imitation? What other social cues might you include?

✪ Recommended stopping point

- Caregivers can support children's learning through **scaffolding** – providing more or less help to encourage children to master a skill or concept. The module gives the example of the mother and child in the video clip reading. Think of a time you've encountered a child trying to learn a new concept or skill. What were they trying to learn? How would you scaffold their learning if they were having trouble? How might you behave when they were close to mastery?

✪ Recommended stopping point

- What new features of these interactions did you notice by watching the videos again?
- To repeat the question from the last page: Which aspects of your list address "behind the scenes" features? What are some others?

✪ Final discussion points

- So far we have focused on features of supportive interactions; however children don't always experience responsive, supportive relationships. What happens when a caregiver doesn't respond sensitively towards a baby's needs?

To learn more about early interactions, take a look at these resources:

Alberta Family Wellness Initiative | Early Experiences & Gene Expression
http://www.albertafamilywellness.org/brain-development-addiction/early-experiences-gene-expression

Thrive By Five Washington | Love, Talk, Play
http://www.lovetalkplay.org

Vroom
http://www.joinvroom.org

Zero To Three | Early Development
https://www.zerotothree.org/early-development/ages-and-stages

We are constantly working to improve our materials. Do you have suggestions about topics to add to this guide? Did your group discuss something we didn't suggest? We'd love to hear from you! Please email your thoughts to us at ilabsout@uw.edu.