Eyes tell us a lot about what other people are interested in, and what they are thinking. Infants rely on nonverbal social cues such as eye gaze before they develop language.

The Take-Home

- In their first days and weeks of life, newborns love to look at faces, especially the eyes. Around 3 months of age, infants engage in dyadic eye contact, or face-to-face eye contact with another person. Through eye gaze, infants and caregivers create a strong emotional connection. This connection helps a baby feel loved and learn about other people.

- Gaze following is a powerful way for infants to learn and form social connections before they are able to talk.

Science Says

- From birth, children show interest in other people. By late infancy, they engage with others through joint attention. Joint attention is sharing attention between objects and other people.

- Around one year of age, children recognize the importance of other people’s eyes. They begin to follow others’ eye gaze.

- Children’s gaze following predicts other developmental outcomes, like language development. Sharing eye gaze doesn’t come as naturally to children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. This can affect their language and communication skills.

Try it at Home

- Expand upon words your child says, what your child points to, or what you both hear.

- Point to new objects that your child has not seen before, and tell him what it is called. Ask him to describe the image to you.

- Read a book with your child and ask them to point out various images in the pictures.

Want to Learn More?

To learn more, visit: modules.ilabs.uw.edu/module/sharing-attention-early-childhood/

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