



Handout 11

Running commentary for babies

Tuning in to your baby's thoughts and feelings

Often, parents and carers can be heard talking to their babies and children. In particular, there may be a kind of running commentary for very young babies and toddlers. Babies and young children usually experience life through their senses. Parents can be heard saying things like 'Oh you're looking at...', 'You enjoyed that piece of apple', 'You're looking a bit hot', 'You're looking deep in thought', 'That's upset you', 'You don't like that, do you?'. These comments may seem simple enough but they have very important functions.

Some of the important functions of running commentary are described below.

- It helps babies and young children to start making sense of the world and what is going on around them.
- Imagine if there was no running commentary for a baby or young child. It would be a bit like experiencing different sensations, sounds, distress, from all different angles – which would make little sense and therefore become overwhelming.
- Parents and carers give voice to the experience of young babies and children so that early senses, thoughts and experiences are identified, named and verbally expressed for them.
- Running commentaries are usually accompanied by different tones of voice, such as surprise, joy and sadness which aim to attune to the baby's/child's experience. This all helps to attach emotional understanding and significance for a developing baby or young child.
- It promotes language development but also promotes the future abilities of a baby/child to talk about their thoughts and feelings. This is important because in relationships the expression in words is preferable to other more negative ways of expressing more frustrating thoughts and feelings.
- Overwhelming experiences can be named and spoken about and in this way babies and children learn over time to calm down and regulate their feelings. They can then also express how they are feeling to others and to ask for support when needed.