



# The Family Connector

Spring 2014

Information and Resources for Parents of Young Children with Disabilities in Connecticut

Welcome to *The Family Connector*, Family Connections first newsletter. Family Connections is a statewide program that provides support, information and resources to parents who have infants or toddlers involved in Connecticut's Birth to Three System. Our quarterly newsletter is one way we hope to address any questions you have about raising a young child with a disability.

*Do you have a question that you'd like answered in our next newsletter? Let us know! Our goal is to provide you with a helpful and informative newsletter, so if you have feedback or suggestions, contact us today.*



## One Family's Story

*Sherri O'Neal, CPAC Parent Consultant*

The most valuable gift my Birth to Three service providers gave me was the encouragement and hope that I could handle this sadness, that I was capable of taking all the little steps to help my son Matt overcome his struggles. Although I had concerns about Matthew

since the day he was born, it wasn't until the social worker from Birth to Three said the words out loud--"Your son is delayed in all areas of development"--that I began to realize the weight of those worries. It was overwhelming. Matthew's struggles affected everyone around us- his sister, his grandparents, our friends. At the time, I worried how he would learn to read, ask for what he needed, and be safe in the world without me. The early experience of trust and teamwork with Birth to Three set the standard for future partnerships with the school's staff and community supports. With practice in good communication with the school, and an intuitive understanding of Matt's talents and strengths, we have been able to work together to create programming under which Matthew has flourished.

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The worries I had 15 years ago persist today. But I do have the confidence of knowing that along the way, Matt has amazed me with his intelligence, creativity, perspective, kindness and love. 15 years have passed since Birth to Three last came to my door. If I could see them today, I would tell them about Matthew's medals in track, his honors courses, and even that last girlfriend I wasn't too crazy about.

*Do you have a story to share?*

*Email us for possible inclusion in our next newsletter.*

## Helpful Family Resources

### 211 Childcare

[www.search.211childcare.org](http://www.search.211childcare.org)

211 Childcare helps parents find child care that best meets their needs.

### Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive

[www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/watch-me-thrive](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/watch-me-thrive)

Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! is a coordinated federal effort to encourage healthy child development, universal developmental and behavioral screening for children, and support for the families and providers who care for them.

### Caring for CT's Children

[www.chdi.org/publications](http://www.chdi.org/publications)

Caring for Connecticut's Children, Volume One, published by the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, Inc., provides information and resources on the growth and development of young children and how to keep them healthy and safe.

### The Tiny Miracles Foundation

[www.ttmf.org](http://www.ttmf.org)

The Tiny Miracles Foundation, Inc. is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to helping families with premature infants in and around Fairfield County, CT.

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**Family Connections**  
A Program of Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center

Funding for this newsletter is provided by a grant from the CT Birth to Three System.



## Dear Family Connector

*I've heard that I shouldn't use "baby talk" with my baby. Is this true?*

**Answer:**

Baby talk, also known as "motherese," "parentese" or "infant-directed speech," refers to the very recognizable speech patterns people use when speaking to babies. Baby talk has a higher-than-normal and more varied pitch, a slower rate of speaking, simpler vocabulary, lots of repetition, emphasis of important words, and exaggerated, positive facial expression. For example, "Are you looking at the light? D'you like that light? It's a bright light!"

It has been well-established that babies prefer "baby talk" as it helps them pay closer attention to speech, especially amidst background noise. "Baby talk" makes it easier for babies to figure out how language works and which words are most important to the meaning of what's being said. This helps them learn what words mean and, in time, helps them learn to say words. Therefore, don't be afraid to use baby talk with your baby - it's helping him tune in to you and what you are saying!

**Resource:** Lowry, L., *Fact or Fiction? The Top 10 Assumptions about Early Speech and Language Development.*

Retrieved from <http://www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Articles/Fact-or-Fiction--The-Top-10-Assumptions-about-Earl.aspx>



## 5 Ways to Make Quality Time for the Sibling of a Child with Special Needs

Providing your child with one-on-one undivided attention can be the most beneficial and valuable element to his development. However, when your child is the sibling of a brother or sister with special needs, that time becomes even more influential to their social and emotional needs. Finding time to focus individually with each of your children is critical to creating connections, building memories and fostering their sense of worth and confidence.

Here are five fun suggestions on how to spend quality time with your kids:

### 1. One-On-One Time

One-on-one time is best if it is scheduled! Determine if it is feasible to do it once per week, once per month or once every other month with your child. Make it known and follow through.

### 2. Integrate Together Time

Kids love to help so ask your children individually to help you grocery shop, pack lunches the night before school, fold laundry, bake a treat for work or school, etc. This "integrated time" will help you teach your child to build competencies and to work collaboratively.

### 3. Phantom Time

Let your child know you are there with special notes in his lunch box, on his night stand or under his pillow. Even though you can't spend tons of one on one time with him or let him assist with daily routines and household duties every day, this lets him know you are thinking of them all of the time.

### 4. 5-Minute Check In

The "5-Minute Check In" is an efficient way to fit in meaningful moments. Set aside cell phones and smart devices and check in with your child for 5 minutes. No distractions!

### 5. Break Time

If all else fails and you can't designate one on one time as often as you would like, try to incorporate "family breaks" for the entire family to do something together for 15 minutes. This is an opportune time to talk about the day's events or current happenings. Or maybe this is a good time for no talking, just a 15 minute dance party!

#### One-On-One Time Ideas

- Go for a walk or bike ride
- Paint nails or get a manicure
- Go get ice cream or a treat
- Sign up for a class together
- Start a special project together
- Plant a garden together

**Resources** Hoffman, A., (March 11, 2014). *5 Ways to Make Quality Time for the Special Needs Sibling.*

Retrieved from <http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2014/03/11/5-ways-to-make-quality-time-for-the-special-needs-sibling>.