

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Caregiver Involvement in Infant Peer Interactions: Scaffolding in a Social Context

Williams, S. T., Mastergeorge, A. M., & Ontai, L. L. (2010). Caregiver involvement in infant peer interactions: Scaffolding in a social context. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 25*(2), 251-266. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2009.11.004

**SUMMARY:** Infants learn a great deal about social skills and interactions from their caregivers, and it is important to identify techniques caregivers can use to promote positive outcomes. The relationship between daycare caregivers' scaffolding techniques (e.g., offering suggestions, giving gentle feedback, altering the environment) at baseline and infant sociability at follow-up were examined. Results suggest child-centered scaffolding is more beneficial for infant sociability than adult-centered or group scaffolding.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Analyses identified three broad types of social scaffolding, including adult-centered (e.g., caregiver distracting the child, giving directions, inviting or moving the child into the peer group), child-centered (e.g., caregiver incorporating the child into the peer group, communicating about child's peers and their belongings, feelings, or intentions), and group (e.g., caregiver interacting with child and informal or structured peer groups).
- Adult-centered scaffolding was used more often than child-centered or group scaffolding; however, group scaffolding was used for the greatest overall duration.
- Greater duration of adult-centered and group scaffolding, but not child-centered scaffolding, at baseline were associated with poorer peer sociability at follow-up.
- Greater duration of child-centered scaffolding at baseline was related to less refusal to interact with peers at follow-up; greater group scaffolding was associated with more peer refusal at follow-up.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Offer trainings where military families can watch trained caregivers provide child-centered scaffolding in a community daycare setting
- Help develop trainings about caregiver scaffolding and child outcomes to educate professionals working with military families

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops to military families that train caregivers to use child-centered scaffolding techniques
- Provide classes that educate military caregivers on how a child-centered parenting approach can be used, particularly as opposed to using adult-centered approaches for child behavior management

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend teaching child-centered scaffolding techniques within existing military parenting programs
- Encourage military daycare providers to use child-centered scaffolding and plan activities that allow this scaffolding

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## METHODS

- Infants' families and caregivers were recruited from three child care centers in Northern California with a 92% participation rate for both families and caregivers.
- Caregivers were video-taped with each infant at baseline, and scaffolding technique use and duration was coded for interactions; parents and caregivers also completed demographic and sociability questionnaires at baseline and follow-up.
- Caregiver's use of scaffolding techniques was analyzed for themes, as well as the relationship between types of scaffolding used and child sociability outcomes at follow-up.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 11 daycare providers and 36 infants, who were 47% female and ranged in age from 12-17 months at baseline and 18-24 months at follow-up.
- Infants were 69% White, 6% Latino, 3% Asian American, and 23% another race; most were from middle class (71% greater than or equal to \$50,000 per year income) two-parent (97%) families.
- Caregivers were all female and identified as 64% Latina, 18% White, 9% Asian American, and 9% another race.

## LIMITATIONS

- The small sample size with all female caregivers limits generalizability to the broader population.
- Only infants in center-based child care programs were observed, and scaffolding may differ in other childcare settings.
- Caregivers were aware that they were being observed and may have attempted to perform in a manner that they perceived as more socially acceptable.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore whether differences in the effects of scaffolding exist between demographically different groups (e.g., race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family structure)
- Conduct a study with more long-term follow-up to examine how the effects of scaffolding impact children's sociability into middle childhood and adolescence
- Examine whether caregiver scaffolding for infants effects other long-term youth outcomes (e.g., academic achievement, delinquency, community involvement)

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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