



Supporting Parenting with Infants and Toddlers During COVID-19 DANCE in Practice

We know all of our families' lives have changed drastically in recent weeks. Many of our caregivers are feeling stressed, frustrated, scared, disappointed, fatigued, and overwhelmed. A parent's equilibrium is one of the key factors that affects a baby's developing brain. Sensitive, responsive caregiving is more difficult when caregivers are stressed and yet it is the very thing a young infant or toddler needs most. Nurturing caregiving is the most powerful buffer against the harmful effects stress can exert on child development. Therefore, supporting families to provide care that is sensitive and responsive, while recognizing their stress and increased burden, is key to our program's mission and goals.

DANCE, DANCE STEPS and your DANCE resources (*DANCE Cards*, *What My Child Says*, *DANCE Developmental Milestones Chart*, *DANCE Behaviors Book and Song Suggestion Guide*) are key tools you have for supporting families during this time. Please note all DANCE related materials are available on the DANCE website (<https://cittdesign.com/dance/>). This document provides suggestions for using DANCE during Telehealth visits and highlights ways to use DANCE to support key caregiving strategies.

Using DANCE During a Telehealth Visit

Following is general guidance to help you use DANCE during telehealth visits. Adapt this information to work with your practice, your clients' varying needs, and the different ways you are staying connected.

Any Telehealth Visit or Contact:

- Use the DANCE Cards to share information on behaviors you've been working on with your clients or introduce a new behavior
- Provide clients with a customized *What My Child Says* handout to highlight the important ways they are already supporting their children's development and what else their child may need. Simple reminders of one's strengths can be a great morale boost when life feels overwhelming.
- Reflect on the *DANCE Developmental Milestones Chart* as you check-in with clients to track their children's growth and development. Use DANCE STEPS to promote development as needed.

Video Conferencing Visit:

Video conferencing with clients can offer the opportunity to conduct a partial DANCE observation and gain helpful insight into clients' caregiving during this challenging time.

- Conduct an **informal**¹ DANCE observation as opportunities arise
- Consider the observational requirements
 - Routine visit
 - Telehealth/video conferencing is now routine
 - Familiar location
 - Familiar location is where your client is currently

¹ An informal DANCE assessment involves using DANCE as a framework to support your understanding of your client's caregiving behaviors. An informal assessment should not be entered into a data entry system.

- Child Available for Interaction
 - If the child is present and you have an awareness of the child’s location, needs, communications, emotional state (whether or not your client is interacting with the child) for at least 5 minutes, you can reflect on the “P” behaviors.
- Caregiver is the active caregiver
 - If others are watching the child (caregiver is not the active caregiver), consider supporting a caregiving activity for a brief period of time (see below) and observe/code only during the caregiving activity.
- Caregiving activity
 - Provided there are no concerns regarding health or safety, encourage caregiver and child to engage in a caregiving activity. Older infants and toddlers are likely to be interested in seeing you in the video and you can build on this interest.
 - Ask the caregiver to read a book, play a game, dance, show something new the child is learning or doing, sing songs, etc.
 - If the caregiving activity doesn’t last at least 5 minutes, code what you observed (and in reflection consider the influence of a shorter duration on your observation).
 - If the caregiving activity doesn’t occur and the child was around during your visit, reflect on what you observe for the “P” behaviors.

Ultimately, you will use your clinical judgment to determine which behaviors you are able to observe and code through a video conference. While these observations will not meet the requirements of a formal DANCE observation, using informal DANCE assessments to guide your visit planning and reflect on caregiving during this stressful time can provide invaluable support to clients and their children.

Using DANCE to Support Key Caregiving Strategies

Following are caregiving strategies to consider sharing with your clients during upcoming visits (whether that visit is a phone call, video conference, text exchange, etc.). Each strategy includes background information, connections to DANCE behaviors, and additional resources. As you connect to DANCE behaviors, review the DANCE STEPS to identify PIPE lessons and program guideline materials that you might share with clients. You may also find the *DANCE Cards, What My Child Says, and DANCE Developmental Milestones Chart* helpful in supporting conversations with clients.

Support your client’s caregiving strengths: Share your client’s strengths as a caregiver using information from past DANCE assessments and/or informal DANCE observations with your client. Reflecting back your client’s strengths will help to establish a sense of self-efficacy during a time of uncertainty. Sharing strengths also highlights the vital role caregivers play in helping children to feel safe and secure.

DANCE behaviors: All Behaviors

Resources: This is a great time to use the DANCE STEPS *What My Child Says* parent handout to share strengths and also to share what her child might need during this time.

Establish and maintain routines: Now more than ever routines are key for both your clients and their young children. Routines create a sense of predictability and security. They are vital to supporting infant and toddler behavioral and emotional regulation.

DANCE behaviors: Responsiveness, Completes Interactions

Resources: <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/223-creating-routines-for-love-and-learning>

Play, Play, and Play: Infants and toddlers learn through joint and independent play and even young infants and toddlers manage stress through play-based activities. During joint play, encourage caregivers to set their phone aside for a few minutes and ask “I wonder” statements. “I wonder which toy he will touch first,” “I wonder how long it will take him to see the rattle,” “I wonder how many times she will open her mouth, smile, coo, etc.” “I wonder how many blocks he can stack.” During independent play children are able to engage with their environment and experience opportunities their brain is expecting (experience expectant brain growth) to happen. Through these experiences (e.g., having safe objects to reach for, the opportunity to kick my legs, pull up on a table, etc.) infants and toddlers learn to grasp, roll, stand, etc.

DANCE behaviors: Expressed Positive Affect, Visual Engagement, Pacing, Non-intrusiveness, Responsiveness (joint play); Positioning, Responsiveness, Supports Exploration (independent play)

Resources: AAP: The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bond: Focus on Children in Poverty

<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/129/1/e204.full>

Move, Move, and Move: We often think that infants and toddlers learn to move (roll, sit, crawl, stand, walk, skip, etc.) however the reverse is also true – infants and toddlers move to learn. There is a relationship between the opportunity to engage in free movement (kicking, rolling, walking, etc.) and development of the frontal cortex. Infants, toddlers and caregivers also experience more pleasure when they move!

DANCE behaviors: Positioning, Negative touch (See DANCE STEP for positive touch as well), Pacing, Non-intrusiveness, Responsiveness, Supports Exploration

Resources:

<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/142/3/e20182058> (A bit academic but interesting)

Talk, Talk, and Talk: From birth, children are prepared to learn language. Newborns are especially sensitive to the sounds of human speech and are able to recognize and respond to their own caregiver’s voice. Children enjoy listening to caregivers and will orient themselves toward their caregiver when they hear their caregiver’s voice. The caregiver’s voice (when using good verbal quality) brings comfort to the child.

DANCE behaviors: Verbal Quality, Pacing, Verbal Connectedness, Negative Verbal Content

Resources: <https://www.webmd.com/parenting/baby/baby-talk-language>; DANCE behaviors book and song suggestion guide

Remain calm: During a child's distress the caregiver provides a secure base for the child to explore their feelings. This exploration allows children to begin to understand and deal with the various emotions they can experience. Caregiver's regulated responses to children's distress helps children to learn that they are supported when they are experiencing distress. During prolonged stressful periods of time, remaining calm can be a greater challenge.

DANCE Behaviors: Caregiver's Affect Complements the Child's Affect; Response to Distress, Verbal Quality, Responsiveness

Resources: <https://www.erikson.edu/fussy-baby-network/>
<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/197-colic-and-crying>

Take a break: Taking periodic breaks from interactions with infants and toddlers can help caregivers manage stress and refuel so they are ready to reengage with their children in sensitive and responsive ways. Furthermore, infants and toddlers enjoy and benefit from periodic safe, stimulating, independent play. Supporting caregivers to identify signs they (or their baby) needs a break and placing the child in a safe, supportive place during that time is beneficial to both caregiver and child.

DANCE behaviors: Positioning, Responsiveness, Supports Exploration