

Helping Parents Learn to Speak *Baby TALK*

One of the greatest opportunities related to working with young children is that they have not developed the language skills to express their emotions, needs, and perspectives. Yet, even without language, research makes it increasingly clear that newborns can interpret and react to their surroundings in sophisticated, individual ways. As such, Family Engagement Specialists like Sonia Romo at Educare West DuPage utilize tools designed to bridge communication between infants and their parents. With the support of Comic Relief USA through Red Nose Day funding, Educare West DuPage has given Sonia the opportunity to learn the Baby TALK community family support model and implement it with families.

Baby TALK (Teaching Activities for Learning and Knowledge) is a flexible, relationship-based model designed to help professionals and communities work with families. It is specifically geared to identify and support under-resourced families with high levels of risk and need. Educare West DuPage staff trained in the Baby TALK community family support model give families examples of what their children are thinking and feeling, in language they can understand, and guide them to reflect on what their children express and experience. Research on Baby TALK has shown that families that participate in the model report less parental stress, and that participation in Baby TALK enhances children's language development.



Arielle and Sonia

Sonia's educational experiences showed her how to teach families, but not necessarily how to work collaboratively with them. Baby TALK showed her that she did not always have to be the expert. Instead, she learned to engage families in conversations that allow parents, classroom teachers, and Sonia herself to share and reflect on what they have each observed in a child's behavior. Sonia says the Baby TALK model has given her language to guide families in productive conversations, and has given her confidence to meet parents where they are at any given time in their journey.





Arielle and Her Family

Sonia shares stories about how Baby TALK has positively impacted all of the families she works with; one that stands out is Arielle’s family. Arielle, who had just turned 1 year old, was occasionally showing aggressive behavior in her classroom. Using Baby TALK prompts and structure, Sonia gathered context from Arielle’s mother, Guadalupe, as well as from Arielle’s teachers.

When Guadalupe was pregnant, Sonia and the family figured out that Arielle was anxious about her role in the family with a younger sibling on the way. Sonia worked with Guadalupe and Arielle to find ways to channel and validate Arielle’s emotions, so she would not feel that she was being replaced and overshadowed by the new baby. They taught Arielle how to use “manos suaves” (gentle hands), providing her with tools to interact socially as well as ways to express her need for attention and affection.

With support from [Educare West DuPage](#) and from [Red Nose Day](#), Guadalupe reports that Arielle frequently shows affection for her new baby brother, and has become calmer and happier as she is more certain of her special place in her family.

In 2018, the [Educare Learning Network](#) received a grant from the Red Nose Day Fund at Comic Relief USA, half of which has been allocated across all Educare schools to support innovation, peer learning and professional development efforts.

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