Meet TMW Power Parent Erika

Erika Ramey graduated from a lot of things in her role as a TMW parent. In addition to being a single mom to 2-year-old Gabriel, she’s a full-time student and helps to care for her mother, who is in a long-term care facility. "I need to balance a lot of things, but I’m doing it. I have a lot of support from my family and my kids are very supportive," she says. "In addition to being a single mom to 2-year-old Gabriel, Erika found time to participate in TMW-Home in-person classes and TMW-Home Online. She is excited about this research for a variety of reasons. The importance of engaging in early childhood conversations, what we call Take Turns, is a core component of our curricula. The McGovern Institute’s work is a critical reminder that it’s not the quantity of words that matter, rather the parent-child relationship and the interaction it promotes. These findings also support one of TMW’s foundational tenets: the majority of parents reported discussing feeding (79%) and baby’s weight (67%). The TMW Center is excited about this research for a variety of reasons. The importance of engaging in early childhood conversations, what we call Take Turns, is a core component of our curricula. The McGovern Institute’s work is a critical reminder that it’s not the quantity of words that matter, rather the parent-child relationship and the interaction it promotes. These findings also support one of TMW’s foundational tenets: the environment is excited about this research for a variety of reasons. The importance of engaging in early childhood conversations, what we call Take Turns, is a core component of our curricula. The McGovern Institute’s work is a critical reminder that it’s not the quantity of words that matter, rather the parent-child relationship and the interaction it promotes. These findings also support one of TMW’s foundational tenets: the majority of parents reported discussing feeding (79%) and baby’s weight (67%).

*These findings are particularly promising,* notes Director of TMW Research Christy Leung. *"Research has shown that the behaviors that have been shown to promote young children’s cognitive development and language learning include the use of positive (i.e., encouragement, explanations, and open-ended questions, as well as less frequent negative criticism, physical control, and intrusiveness with their toddlers including more back-and-forth conversations.*

**New research** from the McGovern Institute at MIT has revealed that, using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), the number of conversations a child experiences before they start talking is associated with brain activity. This finding is particularly promising because it shows that the brain is ready to learn from the very beginning of life. The TMW Center is excited about this research for a variety of reasons. The importance of engaging in early childhood conversations, what we call Take Turns, is a core component of our curricula. The McGovern Institute’s work is a critical reminder that it’s not the quantity of words that matter, rather the parent-child relationship and the interaction it promotes. These findings also support one of TMW’s foundational tenets: the majority of parents reported discussing feeding (79%) and baby’s weight (67%).

Preliminary results show that after receiving the 12-module intervention, low-SES caregivers demonstrated increased knowledge of early childhood cognitive and language development. These caregivers also showed increased confidence in their ability to engage in frequent and meaningful conversations with their children. They also used more positive, explanatory, and open-ended questions, as well as less negative criticism, physical control, and intrusiveness with their children.

More Than Idle Talk: The Value of Conversation

"Often when people think about trying to close the word gap, all they think about is the quantity of words, but this is the wrong thing to focus on," says Dr. Dana Suskind, Professor of Surgery and Pediatrics and Director of the Pediatric Cochlear Implant Program at the University of Chicago. "What we’ve found is that it’s not just the words that matter, it’s the context and the interaction that goes with them." These findings are particularly promising because they show that the brain is ready to learn from the very beginning of life. The TMW Center is excited about this research for a variety of reasons. The importance of engaging in early childhood conversations, what we call Take Turns, is a core component of our curricula. The McGovern Institute’s work is a critical reminder that it’s not the quantity of words that matter, rather the parent-child relationship and the interaction it promotes. These findings also support one of TMW’s foundational tenets: the majority of parents reported discussing feeding (79%) and baby’s weight (67%).

Recent TMW graduate Erika has a lot going on in her life. In addition to sharing updates from the TMW Center, we’ll be looking to the broader early childhood community and beyond for inspiration. We’re excited to share some of our favorite quotes and resources with you, and we look forward to hearing your thoughts and ideas on how to bring the best practices and interventions to the largest number of families. The TMW Center is a merging of disciplines, marrying fields as diverse as economics and medicine, developmental psychology and public policy, anthropology and medicine. As we navigate our first year, there is much to be excited about. A key distinction of our reimagination of early childhood conversations is that work is a family’s responsibility. Much like the TMW-Home program we’re excited to share with you as we all work to support parents and caregivers in the critical role of raising our next generation, the TMW Center is excited about this research for a variety of reasons. The importance of engaging in early childhood conversations, what we call Take Turns, is a core component of our curricula. The McGovern Institute’s work is a critical reminder that it’s not the quantity of words that matter, rather the parent-child relationship and the interaction it promotes. These findings also support one of TMW’s foundational tenets: the majority of parents reported discussing feeding (79%) and baby’s weight (67%).

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