

MATERNAL BEHAVIORS FOLLOWING INFANT VOCALIZATION

Kate Doveikis

Dr. Mary K. Fagan, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Studies of maternal responsiveness suggest responsive maternal utterances may encourage infant behaviors important to mastering speech and language. However, little is known about instances in which mothers are non-responsive. This study examined maternal non-responsive utterances and nonverbal actions in 35 mother-infant dyads when infants were 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, or 14 months old, using a cross-sectional design. Maternal utterances deemed non-responsive to infant vocalizations in this study were divided into five mutually exclusive categories (activity comment, comment on new infant action, game/routine, redirect, and unchanged classification). Maternal nonverbal actions that occurred within 3 seconds of infant vocalizations were also investigated. Responsive nonverbal actions were defined as contingent upon and relevant to the preceding infant vocalization. Maternal actions included head nods, comfort behaviors, object-related behaviors, increased proximity, and repositioning. Maternal actions that occurred with maternal responsive utterances, non-responsive utterances, and silences were investigated. Results revealed mothers often produced activity comments rather than responding to infants' vocalizations directly. Mothers combined responsive actions with responsive or non-responsive utterances more often than with silences; however, object-related responsive but nonverbal actions were common across all categories studied. In conclusion, mothers frequently responded to infant vocalizations with appropriate verbal and nonverbal behaviors.