**[Mary Holwell]:** I have another question for you, Andi. And that is that one of the principles in the, or the practice principles in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, relates to the idea that we should have high expectations for every child. One of the ways that professionals might align their practice with this principle is to expect and ensure that children express their views and contribute to decisions that affect them. And I'm wondering, would you like to talk to us a little bit about what this might look like for children, maybe age from birth up to about two years of age? So those very youngest children that we have in education and care settings.

**[Dr Andi Salamon]:** Yes, yes. And this is a big one, and I think it can be hard to enact. And I think it also looks different for children who are birth to one, compared with between one and two years old. Partly because developmentally children aged between birth to one are quite different to those age, even between one and the three I'd say. So, I think that starts, that changes how it might look in practice, for children who are under one, it's often embodied, the opportunity for children to express their views and contribute to decisions doesn't happen in words, it happens more in some of the things that you were starting to kind of touch on. So it's not verbal, but they do vocalize, very young children communicate, like I said, with their eyes. So, from birth, once, once the sight starts to is, is developed well enough, it's actually a measure of developmental psychology research that, they follow the gaze to see what babies are interested in.

So I think a part of the answer before was this close observation, and really looking at what value these are looking at in these younger babies, is a helpful way to try and see. And I mean, the other part is, is you can give it a go and guess that yes, they do want that thing and you might get it wrong. But you know, a lot of the babies I've known will tell you if you've got it wrong. And again, they tell you, but they'll, they'll keep saying the same. It's like the older version of mum, mum, mum, until the thing that is wanting to be addressed or needs to be addressed is, they're good at repeating them.

**[Mary Holwell]:** They are persistent.

**[Dr Andi Salamon]:** Yes, they can be [inaudible]. I will say again, a lot of this is, there are some very young children who are not lucky enough to have that. And so one of the markers, I think of I, and I might be wrong, but certainly in child protection and neglect, is that they stop being persistent. Because again, they learn that it's either not going to be a good outcome, or nothing will happen. So I do need to flag that.

But I think, the other thing that babies do to show you, a lot of babies early on, is reach out and up. So they'll reach for things, including you. So, if people know about RIE, which is Respectful Infant Educare, I think, I believe, and please anyone correct me if I'm wrong. There's a lot of asking babies a question and waiting to see their response. I think with that, we, I think it's helpful to think about offering things within reason. And it touches on a point I used to discuss with my teams and parents, and now a research colleague, as we write about participation rights is everything that go through, do we ask a question? We want to hear the answer ‘no’ to, because then if someone says, ‘no’, then what do you do? So, for example, the number of times I've heard educators ask a baby if they want to have their nappy changed.

And I think we spoke about this leading up to this, and I know the debate around consent is connected here, and it's important to flag that, but I think that's one example of what people want is, is to give babies the right to choose. But is everything negotiable? Some of those babies that I've noticed that question being asked, do have pooey nappies, and those ones that slide up their back, or some babies that have, get a rash if they're not changed because they've got the sensitive, they've got sensitive skin. So, in those moments, I think it's important to keep in mind, are their protection rights more prevalent? And so, is it more in their best interest to make that decision for them and at the same time, give them choices within that.

So I think, I know some people ask if I can change your nappy now? Or I could come back later. That's a really hard question to answer for a baby, again, because I think the words they might not really know, but the attention, intention and energy is there, maybe giving them that chance. I know one thing I used to do is offer, so have choices within it. Do you want to take a train or a plane or whatever? Do you want to fly there? So, making choices within the boundary, I guess, which again, I think can help develop that security or, or keep that foundation of security. But even in, in saying it out loud, grappling with that, take some critical and ethical thinking. And I think what underpins this, there's a right’s based philosophy, and trying to think about ways to create space, that in which babies can naturally participate because, but that's about sharing power with them in the same way you might with older children and colleagues.

And again, I think the communication is, is embodied. Knowing that vocalizing and crying, like the example I gave before, are ways younger babies communicate and can contribute to making decisions that affect them. But then going with that is our reading of them. And I think that it takes to know the baby well enough, and also to be in a space that, you can respond. Pointing is another way babies tell you they're choosing something, and often these different practices, which is what I kind of got on the screen, they use together. So there might be a look and a vocalization or a point and a something.

So, there was this really great video. I, as I said, I've just finished this project and we're looking back on these videos and there's a baby in a high chair. And I had the privileged position of sitting with no responsibilities other than documenting what was happening. And this baby wanted watermelon, and the tray kept coming out with watermelon, and you can see her eyes in her that she got banana on her tray. And anytime she got banana, she tasted it and got that and spit it out. But when she got the watermelon, it was gone. Right, and so I was watching this happen, but, and it reminds me, reminds me of my cat who watches the food, and thinking that they're going to get it, but it takes for me to have seen that to, to be able. And actually we watched that video together with the staff and they were saying that they don't, sometimes you don't see that, especially at morning tea time. For example, when you’ve got, again, depending on what your morning routine looks like, you've got all these other pressures. So maybe I'll stop there.

**[Mary Holwell]:** Okay. Thanks Andi. I think that idea of, even the very youngest children being very clear communicators is something that's really important. And there's a really strong message in there about the need for us to be, the us there meaning for the early childhood professionals, to be patient and to slow down and to watch carefully. So we're talking about babies being very, keen and careful observers, but at the same time, there's a very strong need for us to be the same, to be very calm, very considered, very slow, I suppose, in some of our observations, rather than rushing and glibly sliding over the top of something that is significant for a baby. We need to stop and, and pay sufficient attention to that, to fully grasp what's going on. And it can be difficult in a busy room. So it's about trying to make spaces and work with your team to allow those things to happen. So that sometimes there can be someone who is doing the observing while someone else is doing some of those more demanding, physically demanding things where they're moving from space to space, delivering food or, or changing drinks or doing whatever is necessary while someone else is watching the reaction of the children. It just opens up a different way of working, I suppose.

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