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### Continuity of Care for Infants and Toddlers

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One of the most important needs of infants and toddlers is for regular, predictable caregiving which allows babies to develop a special relationship with a familiar adult (Honig, 1985). Yet so often group child care is structured to ignore that need. Children are classed by age, and when they have reached a particular milestone, they are moved to another group, with a new teacher. Furthermore, infants and toddlers often experience change in child caregiver because teachers leave their jobs or because parents initiate the change. The National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1990) found an average 48% turnover

ments were found to be less competent in interactions with peers (Howes & Stewart, 1987). One study assessed the separation stress of infants and toddlers in the process of "graduating" to a new class. They found that children were more fussy and aggressive, slept less during nap and cried more before going to sleep, were more active, and exhibited more problems at home during the move to a new class (Field, Vega-Lahr & Jagadish, 1984).

The impact of unstable caregiving during the first years of life has been docu-

## ATTACHMENT AND TRUST

The clearest benefit of the practice of continuity of care for infants and toddlers is to children, in the close relationship they build with their primary caregivers over the 3-year period. Children exhibit an evident level of trust and comfort, which comes from knowing their teachers so well. Teachers, in turn, recognize and understand the cues of the children because they intimately know the children's needs, moods, reactions, and dispositions. The fact is that children and teachers



staff at the Child and Family Research Center began the 3-year continuity arrangement, they thought that the change to new classrooms would now be effortless, and in many ways such transitions were eased since teachers and children, as a group, moved together to the new environment in the fall. Before the continuity program when, children got not only a new room but also a new teacher, it took the toddlers six to eight weeks to adjust to the change, similar to the research findings of Field and her colleagues (1984). Now, however, children seem to adjust within 2 weeks to the change, a considerably less stressful improvement.

changing from the relatively low-key infant room to the more stimulating 1-year

is often barely noticeable; but with infants and toddlers, such an age difference can



familiarity. In addition, the relations between teachers and parents are close and enduring. They recognize that for those all-important earliest years, they share in the nurture and care of their very special child. The comfort of well-known teachers helps children deal with transitions, which inevitably occur as they grow older; nonetheless, having the teachers they trust be there to provide support helps ease the stress of transitions and new experiences. *Income groups of the Child and*

McCartney, K., Scarr, S., Rocheleau, A., Phillips, D., Abbott-Shim, M., Eisenberg, M., Keefe, N., Rosenthal, S. and Ruh, J. (1997). Teacher-child interaction and child-care auspices as predictors of social outcomes in infants, toddlers and preschoolers. *Monist, Delinear Connecticut*, 48, 426-450

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