

What, Why, and How of Serve-Return-Rally-Learn

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The Serve-Return-Rally-Learn (SRRL) Framework helps us understand how simple, everyday interactions can support a child's learning and development. Think of it like a tennis game that goes back and forth between an adult and child. It's based on a sequence:

What?	Why this matters.	How do babies, children, and adults serve, return, and rally?
 <h2>Serve</h2> <p>A serve is the starting point of an interaction—it's when an adult or baby/child initiates a connection.</p>	<p>When BABIES & CHILDREN SERVE, they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> show us what they're curious about show us what they're focused on invite us to respond and connect start a moment of connection that may grow into a Serve-Return-Rally-Learn cycle <p>When ADULTS SERVE, they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> open the door for connection and interaction signalling that they are present, engaged, and interested model communication set the tone help a child to feel seen and valued invite a child to respond activating their curiosity and motivation 	<p>BABIES & CHILDREN may SERVE, RETURN, or RALLY using:</p> <p>Nonverbal Cues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> pointing at something using facial expressions or body language to show emotion using facial expressions or body language to show interest making a sound or babbling smiling or making eye contact <p>Objects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reaching for a toy or person showing or handing you an object <p>Words:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> making a comment: "Look what I made!" asking a question: "Why is the moon out during the day?" saying: "Guess what?" starting a game or inviting play: "Let's pretend we're dinosaurs!"
 <h2>Return</h2> <p>A return is when an adult or baby/child responds to a serve.</p>	<p>When ADULTS RETURN and RALLY they select a response based on the baby or child's development, communication styles and interests using a variety of strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> engage in sensitive interactions engage in responsive interactions engage in enriching interactions show a baby or child that they're interested show a baby or child that they're engaged promote a sustained interaction may promote joint attention may build connection and trust encourage deeper learning model communication create emotionally safe environments for children to explore their: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ideas feelings thoughts 	<p>ADULTS may SERVE, RETURN, or RALLY by using:</p> <p>Words</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> commenting: "That's a hairy caterpillar!" using a variety of question types: "Do you think it's eating?"; "What do think it's doing?" using 'I wonder...' statements: "I wonder what type of butterfly you think it would turn into?" copying or mirroring a child's turns to show you're engaged echoing what a child says and expanding using more complex language: "A hairy caterpillar... with hairs that help to protect it from predators" naming what the child is doing: "You are really trying hard to balance that block on the top of the tower!" using collective pronouns (e.g., "we") to let them know we're in this together using open inquisitive language: "I'd love to hear more about that" <p>Nonverbal Cues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> smiling and making eye contact pointing to something interesting showing a toy or book <p>Objects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> offering a toy or object starting a game or activity reading a book aloud or singing a song
 <h2>Rally</h2> <p>A rally happens when the interaction keeps going, with each person taking turns. The most engaging rallies happen when adults use different strategies to respond to a baby or child's turns or cues.</p>	<p>Refer to the 'How' column for strategies.</p>	
 <h2>Learn</h2> <p>Serve-return-rally interactions help a baby/child know they are safe, connected, belong and enable them to learn:</p>	<p>Emotional regulation including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> understanding and responding to feelings, new words, how to express themselves, and how conversations work reading emotions and building relationships <p>Social understanding including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> understanding and responding to one's own and others' thoughts understanding and responding to one's own and others' emotions understanding and responding to one's own and others' intentions 	<p>Communication skills including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> understanding and using body language, facial expression, tone of voice (Social Communication) understanding and comprehending communication approaches (Receptive Language) using communication approaches to express themselves (Expressive Language) <p>Executive functioning skills including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> temporarily holding, processing, and manipulating information for complex tasks like problem-solving (Working Memory) adjusting thinking and behaviour in response to changing goals and environmental stimuli (Cognitive Flexibility) sustaining and directing focus, impulse control, resisting or delaying an urge, temptation or impulse to act; manage reactions and behaviours (Focusing Attention)