



# INFANT & TODDLER



# Teacher's Guide

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## INTRODUCTION

Learning Beyond Paper is a social-constructivist curriculum. Young children are inherently social beings. As such, learning is most robust when children engage with peers and adults around activities where they are actively engaged. Children construct knowledge bridged upon what they already know, but it is that social, relationship-based connection that acts like glue - cementing understanding and seeking more.

## 21st CENTURY LEARNERS



**“You can’t teach about things that don’t exist yet, but you can teach someone to learn how to learn.”  
- Leo SaLemi**

**Did you know that some experts identify that 85% of the jobs that will exist in 2030 haven’t been invented yet?** What does that mean for us as early childhood educators? We need to think of the young children we work with as global learners who will need some more universal tools we know, such as collaboration, critical thinking, communication, and creativity, as well as those they will have to develop as they journey further in their life. These universal tools are sometimes called the Four C’s of 21st Century Learning. While

changes will be rapid over time, these more universal tools are constant and can help children handle things that may come their way.

The children we work with today are children of the world, an interconnected world that we as adults did not experience at an early age. While concrete experiences with real three-dimensional objects, actual in-person relationships, and authentic problems to solve are of the most critical importance, children of today have, or will have, access to tools and technology that we didn’t have when even sending people to the moon. Technology itself is neither good nor bad, but how we use these tools as tools to progress the 4 C’s could not be more important.

Teaching good problem-solving, critical thinking, will be important in solving new problems that our generations couldn’t even dream of. People will be called to work together, collaboratively, to design greener spaces, determine how to best govern ourselves, and that takes a great deal of communication. It takes time and practice to understand verbal and non-verbal communication - and multiple languages, across cultures. But what excitement is there to be found in this new frontier.

The Learning Beyond Paper (LBP) Curriculum focuses on HOW to learn as well as teaching content based on developing all areas of developing themes. Think of it as weaving threads within a fabric that can be shaped into a shirt, a hat, or a fancy dress - it can become anything because of the fabric (universal tools).

*References:*

85% of Jobs That Will Exist in 2030 Haven't Been Invented Yet: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/85-jobs-exist-2030-havent-been-invented-yet-leo-salemi/>

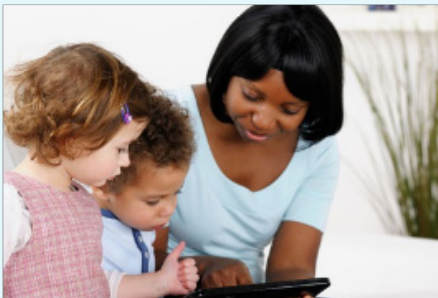
Characteristics of 21st Century Learners: <https://blog.kamiapp.com/characteristics-of-21st-century-learners/>

Education for the 21st Century: [https://globaled.gse.harvard.edu/files/geii/files/2014\\_education\\_report\\_web.p](https://globaled.gse.harvard.edu/files/geii/files/2014_education_report_web.p)

## CHARACTERISTICS OF INFANTS AND TODDLERS

Characteristics of Infants and Toddlers Infants and Toddlers are born ready to learn. Through interactions, relationships, and active exploration of the world around them, infants and toddlers begin to build their understanding of how to move, make things happen, communicate, and interact with the people around them. The relationships that infants and toddlers have with their caregivers are critical in the child's learning and development. Caregivers play a crucial role in a child's development. By providing secure, trusting, and predictable relationships with infants and toddlers you are providing them with the confidence to explore their environments and build a strong foundation for learning and development. Caring for infants and toddlers in groups can be challenging if caregivers are not aware of the characteristics of infants and toddlers. For example, in an infant room a caregiver may be responsible for 4 children that are in very different developmental stages such as a newborn, a 6-month-old, or a 9-month-old.

Infants and young toddlers, and older toddlers each have distinct characteristics, and development is rapid.



# CHARACTERISTICS OF INFANTS AND TODDLERS

Here are some basic characteristics by age groups:

## Young Infants: Birth – 6 months

- Sleeps often and shows alertness during waking
- Cry to get needs met
- Startles easily
- Are learning about their bodies
- Can move hands, feet, legs, arms, head
- Likes to be held.
- Begin to self-soothe by sucking on fingers or hands
- Kick at mobiles
- Smiles when smiled at
- Begin to show emotions
- Turns head to see something
- Begins to hold head up
- Rolling over at roughly 4 to 6 months,
- Sitting up unassisted by 6 months old.
- Smile, babble and laugh or squeal with emotion.
- Begins to explore food with fingers
- Manipulates objects
- Repeat actions to make something happen again



## Older Infants: 6 to 12 months

- Begins to move independently, crawls or scoots
- Eat solid foods
- Holds own bottle
- Shows stranger anxiety
- Lifts arms up to be picked up
- Explores interesting toys and may have favorite toys or objects
- Babbles and tries to imitate adult language
- May say simple words, such as “mama,” and understand a limited vocabulary of basics, such as “no”
- Hand skills to use a pincer grasp, pick up and put down small objects and make attempts to scribble with a crayon or other writing tool
- Recognizes familiar people and objects in his/her environment
- By 10 to 12 months may creep, crawl and may support weight on legs



# CHARACTERISTICS OF INFANTS AND TODDLERS

- Learn object permanence (objects still around even when out of sight)
- Shows interest in rhymes, finger plays, and stories with props

## Young Toddlers: 12 to 24 months

- Picks up and carries objects
- Walks, Throws, Climbs, runs, jumps
- Mouths objects
- Points to and names items
- Uses two or more words in sentences
- Assembles simple puzzles
- Builds with blocks
- Scribbles, draws
- Follows simple directions
- Aware of emotions
- Easily frustrated
- Capable of self-help skills
- Use a variety of single words by 18 months and speak in sentences of two to four words by 24 months (may combine nouns and verbs, like “mommy eat”); has an expressive vocabulary of 50 words and receptive of 200+ words by 24 months



## Older Toddlers: 24-36 months

- Walk, run, and start learning to jump with both feet
- Pull or carry toys while walking
- Throw and kick a ball; try to catch with both hands
- Stand on tiptoes and balance on one foot
- Climb on furniture and playground equipment
- Walk upstairs while holding the railing; may alternate feet
- Start brushing own teeth and hair
- May pull pants up and down
- Turn on the faucet and wash hands
- Build a block tower of at least four blocks
- Start practicing snaps and zipping up (if you start the zip)
- Hold utensils and crayons with fingers instead of a fist, although at this age the grasp still may not be

## CHARACTERISTICS OF INFANTS AND TODDLERS

quite right

- Enjoy more complicated pretend play, like pretending that a box is a spaceship or assigning people characters when playing
- Remember and talk about things that happened in the past, using phrases like “the other day” or “a long time ago”
- Do three- to four-piece puzzles
- Group toys by type, size, or color
- Recite favorite books and nursery rhymes with you
- May follow two-step directions, such as “take off your coat and hang it up”
- Understand the words for familiar people, everyday objects, and body parts
- Understand the words for familiar people, everyday objects, and body parts
- Between 24 and 36, a child’s expressive vocabulary will typically increase to about 300 words.) receptive vocabulary grows to about 900 words.
- Repeat words they hear
- Start asking “what’s that?” and “why?”
- Begin using plurals (dogs) and basic pronouns (me, you)
- Mimic what other kids and adults do and say, as well as how they say it
- Be happy to play near, if not with, other kids
- Start to realize they can do things without your help
- Disobey more than before, doing things they are told not to do, just to test what happens
- Have tantrums when frustrated
- Become increasingly independent and aware of themselves as their own person between 24 and 36 months

## INTENTIONAL TEACHER ROLES

Without a plan, it’s hard to know where to start or where you may end up. Teaching young children requires intentionality, a meaningful plan grounded in child development, and social-constructivism. Intentionality describes a mindset where you, as the teacher, create meaning - the why - behind all instructional decisions.

Intentionality means that each activity, interaction, selected materials, or learning center have had deliberate thought put into it and matches what is most meaningful for young children’s learning and development. This could be in room arrangement, intentionally placing furniture to prevent an area for running, or a small group, planning carefully for three children’s learning needs in today’s group.

# INTENTIONAL TEACHER ROLES

Intentionality is also explaining the reasoning behind decisions to others - children, teachers, parents - to grow child development understanding and collaboration that benefits children.

## **As an intentional teacher, you create a nurturing environment for young children by:**

- Communicating daily with children in positive and respectful tones
- Praising children and acknowledging their efforts using kind affirmative words
- Encouraging and motivating children to do more and to continue trying
- Using words which inspire curiosity, creativity, and confidence
- Modeling practical conversational skills of listening and speaking and encouraging children to do the same
- Building positive relationships through immediate and appropriate responses to children's physical and emotional needs
- Encouraging children to express themselves freely and foster thinking through open-ended questions
- Demonstrating enthusiasm and respect by engaging with children —not just for behavior or academic interventions



## **Here are some characteristics of your role as an intentional teacher**

- Recognize each child is an individual with different life experiences
- Understand that families are the child's first teacher
- Establish relationships to engage the family in the child's learning journey
- Observe and use informal and formal assessment tools to guide the development of learning opportunities to scaffold each child's learning path
- Consider every minute of every day as a learning opportunity
- Organize, plan and use reflection as a part of daily practice
- Remain curious and motivated as a teacher to continue Professional Development by attending conferences and workshops and sharing with colleagues (including online groups and forums)
- Recognize that research guides practice and acknowledge that the "this is the way it has always been done" mentality is not a reason to do something

# INTENTIONAL TEACHER ROLES

- Ensure that each choice made demonstrates knowledge of child development and developmentally appropriate practice

Reference:

<https://extension.psu.edu/programs/betterkidcare/early-care/tip-pages/all/intentional-early-educators-tell-me-more#:~:text=Intentionality%2C%20as%20described%20by%20the%20National%20Association%20for,of%20Young%20Children%2C%20is%20being%20planful%20and%20deliberate>

## NAEYC Advancing Equity Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators

Create a Caring, Equitable Community of Engaged Learners

**1. Uphold the unique value and dignity of each child and family.** Ensure that all children see themselves and their daily experiences, as well as the daily lives of others within and beyond their community, positively reflected in the design and implementation of pedagogy, curriculum, learning environment, interactions, and materials. Celebrate diversity by acknowledging similarities and differences and provide perspectives that recognize beauty and value across differences.

**2. Recognize each child's unique strengths and support the full inclusion of all children**—given differences in culture, family structure, language, racial identity, gender, abilities and disabilities, religious beliefs, or economic class. Help children get to know, recognize, and support one another as valued members of the community. Take care that no one feels bullied, invisible, or unnoticed.

**3. Develop trusting relationships with children and nurture relationships among them while building on their knowledge and skills.** Embrace children's cultural experiences and the languages and customs that shape their learning. Treat each child with respect. Eliminate language or behavior that is stereotypical, demeaning, exclusionary, or judgmental.

**4. Consider the developmental, cultural, and linguistic appropriateness of the learning environment and your teaching practices for each child.** Offer meaningful, relevant, and appropriately challenging activities across all interests and abilities. Children of all genders, with and without disabilities, should see themselves and their families, languages, and cultures regularly and meaningfully reflected in the environment and learning materials. Counter common stereotypes and misinformation. Remember that the learning environment and its materials reflect what you do and do not value by what is present and what is omitted.



## INTENTIONAL TEACHER ROLES

**5. Involve children, families, and the community in the design and implementation of learning activities.** Doing this builds on the funds of knowledge that children and families bring as members of their cultures and communities while also sparking children's interest and engagement. Recognizing the community as a context for learning can model citizen engagement.

**6. Actively promote children's agency. Provide each child with opportunities for rich, engaging play and opportunities to make choices in planning and carrying out activities. Use open-ended activities that encourage children to** work together and solve problems to support learning across all areas of development and curriculum.

**7. Scaffold children's learning to achieve meaningful goals.** Set challenging but achievable goals for each child. Build on children's strengths and interests to affirm their identities and help them gain new skills, understanding, and vocabulary. Provide support as needed while you communicate—both verbally and nonverbally—your authentic confidence in each child's ability to achieve these goals.

**8. Design and implement learning activities using language(s) that the children understand.** Support the development of children's first languages while simultaneously promoting proficiency in English. Similarly, recognize and support dialectal differences as children gain proficiency in the Standard Academic English they are expected to use in school.

**9. Recognize and be prepared to provide different levels of support to different children depending on what they need.** For example, some children may need more attention at certain times or more support for learning particular concepts or skills. Differentiating support in a strengths-based way is the most equitable approach because it helps to meet each child's needs.

**10. Consider how your own biases (implicit and explicit) may be contributing to your interactions and the messages you are sending children.** Also reflect on whether biases may contribute to your understanding of a situation. How might they be affecting your judgment of a child's behavior, especially a behavior you find negative or challenging? What messages do children take from your verbal and nonverbal cues about themselves and other children? Recognize that all relationships are reciprocal, and thus that your behavior impacts that of children.

**11. Use multi-tiered systems of support. Collaborate with early childhood special educators and other allied education and health professionals as needed.**

Facilitate each professional establishing a relationship with each child to foster success and maximize potential.

# INTERACTION

Interactions involve how a teacher communicates with and responds to the children in their classroom. Because learning is a social process, quality interactions are essential to the development of infants and toddlers across all domains. Meaningful interactions stretch cognitive abilities and teach infants and toddlers to get along well with others. Infants and toddlers spend a good portion of their day in early childhood classrooms, and the encounters they have there will shape their attitudes towards future educational experiences.

Relationships with caring, responsive adults are at the very foundation of a young child's learning. Teachers must provide a consistent and inviting environment that is emotionally supportive of all children. Some suggestions for forming the type of connections with students that will foster meaningful interactions are listed below:

- Get to know your student's backgrounds, temperaments, interests, and preferences.
- Respond to their needs and emotional cues consistently and with sensitivity.
- Validate children's feelings and match their affect.
- Create a joyful atmosphere, smile and laugh often, make eye contact, and provide physical affection.
- Use a warm and welcoming tone of voice and maintain approachable body language.
- Encourage peer interaction and model social problem-solving strategies.
- Find ways to show children they are valuable members of your class, and you enjoy being their teacher.



The connections you make with infants and toddlers are essential in providing meaningful interactions that will foster cognitive development. In the book, *Powerful Interactions: How to Connect to Children to Extend their Learning* (Dombro, Jablon, & Stetson, 2011), the authors discuss a three-step strategy for providing high-quality interactions that positively impact young children's growth and development. Teachers are encouraged to "be present, connect, and extend learning." Once you have determined a child's interests and established a meaningful connection, there are several ways to extend learning in infant and toddler

## INTERACTION

classroom, such as:

- Offering hands-on opportunities and encouraging exploration.
  - Providing an array of engaging materials that address different interests and learning styles.
  - Engaging in conversations with the children as they play.
  - Looking for opportunities to stretch their thinking.
  - Thoroughly answering their questions using language that they understand.
  - Encouraging higher-order thinking by asking open-ended questions.
  - 
  - Assisting children in linking new skills and knowledge to concepts with which they are already familiar.
- Consistently facilitating intentional, high-quality and responsive interactions with infants and toddlers will lead to increased engagement, improved child outcomes, and a life-long appreciation for learning

## RELATING WITH INFANTS & TODDLERS

Nurturing infants and toddlers socially and emotionally is of utmost importance and positively impacts Intellectual Development, Physical Development, Social Development, Behavioral Development, Emotional Development.

Relationships lay the foundation for later developmental outcomes of Self-Confidence, Sound Mental Health, Motivation to Learn, Achievement, and Self-Control.

- When building relationships with and nurturing infants, consider these important points:
- Interactions should inspire curiosity, creativity, and confidence. Always interact with infants and toddlers in positive and respectful tones.
- Praise their efforts using kind, affirmative words. Teachers should provide opportunities for infants to build on their accomplishments.
- Build positive relationships through your immediate and appropriate responses to infants' physical and emotional needs.
- Demonstrate your enthusiasm and show respect as you engage with infants and toddlers.
- Interact with infants using sign language in multiple situations.
- Tone should be respectful at ALL times.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) encourages practices in which “the

## RELATING WITH INFANTS & TODDLERS

curriculum guides the development of a daily schedule that is predictable yet flexible and responsive to individual needs of the children” (NAEYC, 2015, p. 9)

Consistent routines, activities that happen at about the same time and in about the same way each day, provide comfort and a sense of safety to young children. Whether it is time to play, time for a snack, a nap, or a loved one to return, knowing what will happen next gives babies and toddlers security and emotional stability. —Zero To Three (2010, p. 2)

### Resources

Interactions Matter: What Research Says and What You Can Do

[http://bkc-od-media.vhost.psu.edu/documents/HO\\_InteractionsMatter.pdf](http://bkc-od-media.vhost.psu.edu/documents/HO_InteractionsMatter.pdf)

Building Positive Teacher-Child Relationships

<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefs/wwwb12.pdf>

### References

Dombro, A. L., Jablon, J., & Stetson, C. (2011). *Powerful Interactions: How to connect with children to extend their learning*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

## LEADING WITH EQUITY

Young children’s development in the first five years of life is extraordinary and unparalleled. It is during these years when the brain’s development helps set the tone for later learning and ultimately, success. We know that prevention, by teaching children appropriately and ensuring they meet developmental milestones and skill development, is much more productive and easier than intervention. Also, intervention earlier is more productive than as the child gets older.

However, far too few children have access to high quality early childhood experiences, whether at home or school children. This can be improved best in programs that reflect on how to ensure that children and families have equitable access to attend. This may include scholarships or other support and creative solutions. While some of these decisions are outside the realm of the classroom teacher’s responsibility, teachers have a voice to help shape program policy.

Teachers also have a responsibility to continuously build a more equitable classroom. Like many other topics, it’s hard to ever know enough or do enough. It is a case of always working to improve conditions of equity, reflecting on our practice to see where we are and where we could go, and building relationships



## LEADING WITH EQUITY

necessary to make equity a reality for ALL children. While this can seem incredibly daunting, every step toward creating equity, every action and strategy that benefits the children in your classroom, can make the life of an individual child that much better. That effect is invaluable.

Learning about equity has many paths. Learning about biases we may hold is very valuable. Understanding that we all have biases, and understanding what your biases are, helps us to keep an eye on it and work on improving it. One way to take a look at your biases is to try one of the Implicit Association Tests (IAT) that are a part of Harvard's Project Implicit®. These online IATs, for your own benefit and consideration, can be found here: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>. One quote from the National Equity Project sums bias up well. "Bias is inevitable. Your Interactions are not." - National Equity Project Leaders (retrieved from page 16: [https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/initiatives/equity\\_summit\\_final.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/initiatives/equity_summit_final.pdf)).



# LEADING WITH EQUITY

The NAEYC Position Statement, Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education, includes recommendations for early childhood educators, categorized into 4 groups:

- Creating a Caring, Equitable Community of Engaged Learners
- Establishing Reciprocal Relationships with Families
- Observe, Document, and Assess Children's Learning and Development
- Advocate on Behalf of Young Children, Families, and the Early Childhood Profession

The recommendations are included within this guide in appropriate sections. The entire position statement, including recommendations, can be found here as well: <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/equity>.

## Early Childhood Educators' Key Responsibilities to Create Equity

Early childhood educators, that's you, have a responsibility to create more equity daily, yearly, and in as many ways as we can. It is not easy work, but important to best serve children and their families. The strategies outlined below are from the NAEYC Equity Summit report (retrieved from page 19: [https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/initiatives/equity\\_summit\\_final.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/initiatives/equity_summit_final.pdf))

- Reflect and learn
- Create a caring, equitable community of engaged learners
- Establish reciprocal relationships with families
- Teach to promote learning and plan curriculum to meet meaningful goals
- Assess children's learning and development
- Advocate on behalf of young children and the profession

## Early Childhood Workforce Equity

There are also incredible challenges in creating equitable working conditions for early childhood educators. There exist great disparities in education and compensation across the early childhood spectrum, depending upon the funding stream(s) of various programs.

While The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has been a leader in thinking about and promoting equity. Information, including articles, can be found on the Advancing Equity Initiative

## LEADING WITH EQUITY

page here: <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/initiatives/equity>.

Part of NAEYC's work in this area includes a report from the Leading and Working toward Equity Leadership Summit entitled Leading with Equity: Early Childhood Educators Make It Personal. This report includes information about workforce equity, examining biases, how to engage in conversations, and plans for an equity statement (which has been completed since the summit). The report is here: [https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/initiatives/equity\\_summit\\_final.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/initiatives/equity_summit_final.pdf).

The Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education position statement is available in English, Spanish, and Chinese here: <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/equity>.

NAEYC Advancing Equity Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators Advocate on Behalf of Young Children, Families, and the Early Childhood Profession

Speak out against unfair policies or practices and challenge biased perspectives. Work to embed fair and equitable approaches in all aspects of early childhood program delivery, including standards, assessments, curriculum, and personnel practices

Look for ways to work collectively with others who are committed to equity. Consider it a professional responsibility to help challenge and change policies, laws, systems, and institutional practices that keep social inequities in place.

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/equity/recommendations-ECE>

## INCLUDING INFANTS & TODDLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Inclusion involves more than merely having children with disabilities in your classroom. The practice consists of providing a nurturing environment for them to make meaningful connections with typically developing peers as they play, learn, and grow. The benefits of inclusion for children with disabilities have been well documented and include increased outcomes in language, communication, and social skills. Typically developing peers are provided with daily opportunities to practice empathy, compassion, and friendship skills. While some children with disabilities may require significant accommodations to a particular lesson or even the classroom environment, many will benefit from simple strategies and support. Making the accommodations necessary to maximize each child's potential for a successful and enjoyable classroom experience is what inclusion is all about. Children of all ability levels learn best in developmentally appropriate environments that offer the support necessary to interact with their peers in meaningful ways. You may find that many of the children in your classroom will enjoy and benefit from the strategies you use to support a child with a disability.

# INCLUDING INFANTS & TODDLERS WITH DISABILITIES

When thinking about an infant or toddler with a disability, there are some additional things to consider. You may have an infant or toddler with an identified special need, or you may notice a concern as you observe, plan and reflect on the child's development.

## Tips for Successfully Including Infants and Toddlers with Special Needs

- Use positive, "People First" language. For instance, if it is necessary to refer to a toddler's disability, say, "toddler with a visual impairment" rather than "visually impaired toddler" or "blind toddler." If it is not necessary to address their disability, simply use the child's name.
- Communicate frequently with families (e.g., daily texts, emails, photographs with short narratives, or a "school-home notebook").
- Ask permission to exchange information with therapists (e.g., speech and language, occupational, physical) and

identify helpful strategies.

- Learn about specific disabilities through families, therapists, and other reputable sources (see resources).
- Use specialized equipment and assistive technology when appropriate.
- Intentionally select materials and equipment to match children's varying interests and ability levels.
- Help a child accomplish a complicated task by breaking it into smaller parts and providing pictures of each step.
- Take every opportunity to maximize a child's chance of success.
- Provide books, posters, and materials that portray individuals with disabilities as strong and capable.
- Use verbal, visual, and physical cues to provide clear directions and expectations.
- Enhance oral language with pictures, symbols, props, and American Sign Language.
- Employ "First-Then" statements when modeling language for an infant or toddler, to help with understanding the order and expectations as the day proceeds ("First we will put the blocks away. Then we are going to wash our hands for lunch.").
- Create a picture schedule that reflects daily activities and refer to it throughout the day. Be sure it is posted at infant and toddler level, which may even be adhered with contact-paper on the floor.
- Assist infants and toddlers with transitions by preparing them ahead of time and telling them what to expect. Have the next activity prepared to reduce transition time.



# INCLUDING INFANTS & TODDLERS WITH DISABILITIES

- Model for typically developing infants and toddlers how to initiate interactions with peers.
- Provide a small object (“fidget”) for a toddler to hold during group time.
- Plan for, and support, peer interactions.
- Provide play materials and activities designed for two or more children.
- Be creative, and remember that learning should be fun!

## Children’s Books About Disabilities

*Daniel’s New Friend* by Becky Friedman

*My Brother Charlie* by Holly Robinson Peete & Ryan Elizabeth Peete

*Playing and Learning Together Meeting Mimi* by Francie Dolan

*Roxy the Raccoon: A Story to Help Children Learn about Disability and Inclusion* by Alice Reeves

*Some Kids Are Blind (Understanding Differences)* by Lola M. Schaefer

*Some Kids Are Deaf (Understanding Differences)* by Lola M. Schaefer

*Some Kids Use Wheelchairs (Understanding Differences)* by Lola M. Schaefer

*Some Kids Wear Leg Braces (Understanding Differences)* by Lola M. Schaefer

*Susan Laughs* by Jeanne Willis

*We’ll Paint the Octopus Red* by Stephanie Stuve-Bodeen

## Resources for Early Childhood Professionals

ADHD in the Young Child: Driven to Redirection: A Guide for Parents and Teachers of Young Children with ADHD by Cathy Reimers & Bruce A. Brunger

Cara’s Kit: Creating Adaptations for Routines and Activities by S.A. Milbourne & P.H. Campbell

The Inclusive Early Childhood Classroom: Easy Ways to Adapt Learning Centers for All Children by Patti Gould & Joyce Sullivan

Simple Signing with Young Children: A Guide for Infant, Toddler, and Preschool Teachers by Carol Garboden Murray

Teaching Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder by Clarissa Willis

## Websites

Council for Exceptional Children, Division for Early Childhood [www.dec-sped.org](http://www.dec-sped.org)

Center for Parent Information and Resources [www.parentcenterhub.org](http://www.parentcenterhub.org)

National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center [www.ectacenter.org](http://www.ectacenter.org)

Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina [www.fpg.unc.edu](http://www.fpg.unc.edu)

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/index.html>

Circle of Inclusion <http://circleofinclusion.org/>

# SERVE & RETURN

There is likely no more important strategy for teachers and parents of infants and toddlers to learn, practice, and use consistently. Serve and return interactions build infant and toddler brains within an environment of safe, responsive caregiving.

Serve and return interactions can be described initially by thinking of playing tennis. One player serves, and the other player returns the ball. A good game of tennis will have several back and forth plays after the serve. The same is true for the back and forth interactions between an adult caregiver and a baby or toddler. Over time, the number of interactions and the depth of interactions increases. Serve and Return is a means of scaffolding interactions learning with very young children.



## **There are five primary elements to Serve and Return:**

- Notice the serve and share the child's focus of attention.
- Return the serve by supporting and encouraging.
- Give it a name
- Take turns...and wait. Keep the interaction going back and forth.
- Practice endings and beginnings.

A short overview of each of these elements can be found on this handout:

[https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/HCDC\\_ServeReturn\\_for\\_Parents\\_Caregivers\\_2019.pdf](https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/HCDC_ServeReturn_for_Parents_Caregivers_2019.pdf)

More information, including video examples, about what Serve and Return is, as well as how to Serve and Return can be found on Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/5-steps-for-brain-building-serve-and-return/>

# SCAFFOLDING

In construction, scaffolding is a temporary structure workers use to access heights and areas that are too challenging to reach. In education, scaffolding is the process of providing structured support and guidance for thinking and learning. You scaffold through language and social interactions. The goal of scaffolding is to offer children enough assistance to be more successful than they would be without it. You offer children ways to achieve a task through subtle interventions and varying levels of support.

A key concept in scaffolding is the Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD, the range of competencies that a child can perform with assistance but cannot yet perform independently. Teachers can make the most of a child's ZPD by regularly providing opportunities that stretch the child's existing knowledge and skills and providing the scaffolding necessary for success. Your role is to observe the child, assess their needs, and provide the support needed to reach the next level. Eventually, you remove the support (scaffolding), and the child will be able to complete the task independently. Scaffolding success uses a variety of strategies:

- **Hints** - Provide just enough information to enhance the child's understanding without giving away the answer.
- **Suggestions** - Offer multiple ways to complete a task.
- **Modeling** - Demonstrate ways to solve the problem or complete the task.
- **Questioning** - Ask open-ended questions such as: "What do you think will happen if...?" Or, "What is another way you might...?"
- **Providing Feedback** - Offer just enough feedback to move the child to the next level.
- **Offering Encouragement** - Inspire the child to continue trying by commenting on their persistence, problem-solving abilities, or creativity.

Scaffolding can take place in various settings, using a variety of tools and approaches.

A teacher may ask how to make the block structure taller, or a peer may explain how to hold a crayon sideways to make a leaf rubbing. Scaffolding takes on many forms but always leads to the child coming away from experiences with more information than when they started.





## SCAFFOLDING

By understanding what children can achieve independently and what they can achieve with assistance from an adult, educators can develop plans to teach skills in the most effective manner possible. For more information about scaffolding, check out these links:

Scaffolding: Approaches and Practices (article) [http://bkc-od-media.vmhost.psu.edu/documents/HO\\_MIL\\_GI\\_Scaffolding.pdf](http://bkc-od-media.vmhost.psu.edu/documents/HO_MIL_GI_Scaffolding.pdf)

Scaffolding Children's Learning (video) <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/scaffolding-childrens-learning>

Scaffolding Tips for Teachers (article) <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/iss/engaging-interactions-2/scaffolding-teachertips.pdf>



One way to scaffold a child's learning is to ask open-ended questions. These inquiries encourage reasoning and creative thinking while helping the child see that there are often many solutions to a problem. Open-ended questions have no one right answer, require more than a one or two-word response, and encourage reflection, creativity, and prior knowledge. They also promote the use of advanced language. Asking children open-ended questions starts a conversation and supports brain development. As you implement the lessons provided in this curriculum, be sure to make good use of scaffolding and open-ended questioning. The following resource offers examples of age-appropriate open-ended questions:

Questions to Help Children Think (article) [http://www.dec.al.gov/documents/attachments/Questions\\_Children\\_Think.pdf](http://www.dec.al.gov/documents/attachments/Questions_Children_Think.pdf)

## CURRICULUM WITH INFANTS & TODDLERS

Infants are born ready to learn. Through interactions, relationships, and active exploration of the world around them, infants and toddlers begin to build their understanding of how to move, make things happen, communicate, and interact with the people around them. The relationships that infants and toddlers have with their caregivers are critical in the child's learning and development.



# CURRICULUM WITH INFANTS & TODDLERS

Caregivers play a crucial role in the child's development. By providing a secure, trusting, and predictable relationship with infants and toddlers, you are providing them with the confidence to explore their environments and build a strong foundation for learning and development. You as the teacher must learn and practice the relationship-building, brain-building strategy of serve and return. This is the basis of responsive caregiving and children's learning and development in your classroom.

Caring for infants and toddlers in groups can be challenging if caregivers are not aware of the characteristics of infants and toddlers. For example, in an infant room a caregiver may be responsible for 4 children that are in very different developmental stages such as a newborn, a 6-month-old or a 9-month-old.

Relationships lay the foundation for later developmental outcomes of:

- Self Confidence
- Sound Mental Health
- Motivation to Learn
- Achievement
- Self-Control

**“In high-quality infant/toddler programs, the interest of the child and the belief that each child has a curriculum are what drive practice”** (Lally, 2000, pg. 6). The adult role is to discover the infant's curriculum and support its implementation.



National Infant & Toddler Child Care Initiative: [https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/infant-toddler\\_curriculum\\_and\\_individualization.pdf](https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/infant-toddler_curriculum_and_individualization.pdf)

The caregiver's role is to provide a safe, nurturing environment where routines are based on children's individual needs and include transitions to and from home, diapering, feeding, naps for infants and toileting, meals, and naps for toddlers.

## CURRICULUM WITH INFANTS & TODDLERS

Routines provide the opportunities for caregivers to observe and respond to each child's interest and needs for much of the child's learning. Learning Beyond Paper supports facilitation of infant/toddler individualized exploration and interactions which lays the foundation for responding to the child's interests and needs.

The environment needs to consist of materials and equipment to support the infant/toddler needs for consistent routines and exploration. The curriculum provides experiences to enhance growth and learning during routines, exploration, and interactions. The experiences are a guide however it is important to observe the child's response and follow the child's interests and needs.

### **Important Curriculum Experience Tips for Infant and Toddler Teachers**

- Activate and assess each infant and toddler's prior knowledge.
- Employ ongoing-informal assessments to determine where each infant or toddler is, and what their next step should be.
- Know each infant and toddler. Consider their personalities, interests, ability levels, and learning styles.
- Describe new concepts in multiple ways as you model and demonstrate the new concept.
- Support different learning styles (auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic).
- Select materials that fit each child's interests and developmental needs.
- Develop clear learning goals using standards or curriculum.
- Recognize and provide different levels of support based on individual needs.
- Provide infants and toddlers with choices about how they will investigate something new.
- Model, with actions and words, and provide assistance as necessary.
- Offer many, many, many opportunities for hands-on, multi-sensory practice and exploration.
- Encourage your tone and non-verbal communication.
- Remember to keep it fun and positive!

## CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The classroom's physical environment, both indoor and outdoor, set the stage for learning. The physical environment sends strong messages to children and adults about what is valued, who is valued, and what learning can occur within the spaces designed. As the teacher, your mindset is visible in the environment. The type of activities and learning that go on are reflective of your mindset. The emotional environment created by the teacher is also important. You should look to see that the values between the physical and emotional environment show consistency.

# CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The majority of a child's day is spent in the physical environment you design. Design your space in a way that offers children the opportunity to feel comfortable owning the space. It is their space as much as yours.

No matter how your space currently looks, you must continuously reflect on the space and use of space to make updates and changes that provide improvement.

When you are in the mindset of a reflective practitioner, nothing is ever indeed “done” or complete. While things should run smoothly, there are always opportunities to improve and enhance your program, thoughts, and experiences for children for this year's particular group of children.

The terms environment and space mean all indoor AND outdoor spaces children use. Sometimes, people consider only indoor space; however, outdoor spaces often have more space and opportunities to create than what may be available indoors. In most parts of the country, outdoor spaces can host a full range of activities, not just gross motor play, throughout the school year.

Designing the Indoor and Outdoor Environment Here are a few questions to think about as you design your environment, both indoor and outdoor:



# CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

## Environmental Messages to Children

**What messages do I want to send to children about this space? Does a child say/think/feel this in your physical environment?**

- This space is mine. It's designed just for me as a baby or toddler.
- My teacher trusts me to use these materials and put them in my reach so I can explore my world at school.
- I know where things are, things are at my level, and it makes sense to me.
- I am becoming more independent and want to do things for myself. My classroom has everything organized so I can use what I need and when I am a toddler, I can help take care of the classroom when it is time to clean up.
- I am learning a lot of new things as I become more independent, and my teacher trusts in me.
- I am a competent and capable learner, and my teacher gives experiences to show and grow my learning.
- My teacher listens to my classmates and me. Both our spoken words and non-verbal cues send messages about how we use the physical environment.
- I feel at home here. This is MY classroom.



## Environmental Messages to Families

**What messages do I want to send to families about this space? How might an adult family member respond to the environment?**

- Wow, my child is trusted here and the space is designed for them (non-mobile infants, mobile infants, younger and older toddlers)
- Everything is at my child's level so that they can be a part of the action.
- The organization tells me a lot of thought went into this space, and safety is a top priority.
- There seems to be just the right amount out. It's not overwhelming and feels intentional and meaningful in this space. My child can learn and grow, feeling safe here.
- The staff knows that infants and toddlers put lots of things into their mouths as they explore, and there are yuck buckets available for mouthed toys (to reduce germ spread), so staff know what needs to be cleaned before another child can use it.
- My child, and all children, are represented here (e.g., photographs, books, posters, etc.).



# CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- This space tells me that teachers care about my child.

## Discovering Current Messages About Physical Environment

### What messages are currently sent by the physical environment?

#### Entry Space

- Does the entry space welcome families? Include images of families, comfortable adult-size furnishings, other pictures, and messages that say, “both you and your child are welcome here.”
- Are messages for families framed and phrased in a positive, inclusive way? (e.g., We love our ECDC families. Your family is important to us)
- Even if a program’s make-up is not diverse (e.g., race, ethnicity, language, ability), are visuals diverse? Would a potential new diverse family come to visit and feel represented?
- If using bulletin boards, are they current and inclusive of child-created elements? Bulletin boards should be free of faded, torn, or outdated material.
- Is there a current lesson plan posted and dated where families can easily view it. It is fine to post modifications for learning activities in addition to the lesson plan. Still, individual modifications and accommodations must not be displayed, due to confidentiality and legal reasons, including HIPAA and FERPA.

#### Indoor Furniture and Ambience

- Does the furniture arrangement, including area rugs, help define boundaries of various areas and send visual messages?
- Are furnishings and materials for infant/toddler routine care and supervision (e.g., diaper changing stations, rockers, adult floor seating, bottle warming station, food service preparation) well-planned and organized to make things easier for adult physical needs and reducing wait time for infants and toddlers transitioning from one activity to another.
- Are there larger, open spaces for areas that need more space to work (e.g., construction/block) and smaller, cozy spaces that allow more personal space to rest and recharge? It can be overwhelming for some children to share space with so many others for so many hours a day.
- Is the furniture arranged so that there are not large spaces for toddlers to run in circles indoors?
- Are furniture pieces arranged so that there is line-of-sight supervision for teachers?
- Does the classroom utilize daylight from windows, whenever possible?
- Are lamps used to create a homey feel, adjust light levels in the room, and to bring more soft light options than fluorescent lighting can? (pics of hanging lamps, touch lamps, area/bedside lamps in classrooms, twinkle lights)

# CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

## Outdoor Furniture and Ambience

**Does the space look like the community, using safe, native plants and topography to represent the area?**

- Are steps taken to soften the hardscape by adding soft objects and soft surfaces (e.g., grass, mats, old comforter) for infants and young toddlers' comfort? (images of this)
- How have indoor areas been extended to provide opportunities to continue similar play outdoors (e.g., seating area with books, infant/toddler-sized sensory table, mud kitchen, materials for building, wall/fence painting), and infant/toddler gross motor play?
- Are there spaces for individual or small numbers of toddlers to work and play that offer uninterrupted space as well as easy supervision?
- In what ways have I maximized the physical space provided to benefit children's development and well-being throughout the day?

## Materials

**Are materials intentional, meaning there is a purpose to including it in the environment? (e.g., not because it's "cute" or theme-related)**

- Are colors used and displayed in meaningful ways, and not overwhelming to the eye?
- Are natural materials and natural colors used?
- Is the space comfortable and homey, not institutional? Remember, children may spend 11 hours a day in this environment.
- Does the space represent the children and families expressly, and the community generally? Ask families to bring in family pictures, share family messages, and use pictures of the class's children throughout the room. Including baby dolls, puzzles, artifacts, toy people sets, and other toys representing various races, ethnicities, and abilities in positive and affirming ways (e.g., not token or costumed) is essential, even if the group of children and families are not diverse.
- Does the space look like the community? This may include photos of local buildings and locations



# CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

recognizable to children represented in a homemade book in the construction area, images of the local built environment superimposed on blocks to encourage play.

- Are well-loved materials included, so long that they are in good condition?

## Quality and Quantity of Materials

- There are enough materials for a given area so that multiple children can use materials reasonably.
- Because toddlers have a difficult time sharing, identical materials are presented in sets equal to the number of children in the group to reduce frustration over materials (e.g., for a group of six, there are six puzzles available, six buckets and six shovels)
- Materials include authentic (real) objects whenever possible (e.g., actual kitchen tools and pots and pans in the mud kitchen). While child-size is important, so is authenticity.
- Variety, so that materials can be rotated to maintain interest.

## Living Things for Children to Care For

**Plants** - There are many hearty plant varieties, including those that may not need much/any light. For plants at child-level, consider plants that are not poisonous if ingested. Plants can also be on top of high shelves or hung in baskets to bring nature indoors. Plant selection is also important outdoors and varies significantly based on your space, location (planting zone), and the sun/shade available. In many parts of the country, plants are an important part of creating outdoor classroom space. Follow your local licensing rules regarding plants (indoor and outdoor).

- Toddlers should be involved in caring for plants.
- Toddlers must learn how to handle plants carefully so as not to damage them.
- Include books about plant care as references in the classroom.



**Animals** - Choose classroom pets that you have researched, considering all of the animal's needs. Some choices may include fish, hermit crab, rabbit, guinea pig. For pets that can be petted or handled, consider getting them while young and handling frequently. Follow your local licensing rules regarding pets in your classroom. (any other links - articles about classroom pets, anything from CDC?)

Toddlers should be involved in caring for the pet(s).

- Toddlers must learn how to treat animals (e.g., don't poke their bodies or faces) and how to read the animal's cues (e.g., relaxed versus tense) to have positive experiences.

# CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- Animals must always be handled with adult supervision, and children should wash their hands afterward.
- Include books about animal care (specific to the pet(s) you have) as references.

## Accessible Materials

Accessible materials are those which children have access to. Accessible materials are within child reach and at child level. They don't need to ask to get them, because they are accessible. Available materials are those that the teacher has available (e.g., books for new themes or arising interests, additional manipulatives, things to rotate) but they are not out for children to use at their level. Both have their place in an early childhood classroom.

- Are materials accessible for children to use (versus adults having to get and control access to materials)?
- Does the room arrangement send messages to children about where to use materials (e.g., A table adjacent to a shelf of manipulatives says this is where to bring the manipulatives, a soft mat for babies on open floor space with toys arranged to explore near)?
- Are materials for infants and toddlers accessible to them, with unsafe materials (e.g., cleaning supplies, choking hazards) inaccessible to children?
- Are extra consumable materials (e.g., chunky toddler crayons and markers, butcher block paper) readily available for me to restock and make accessible for specific activities?
- Are extra non-consumables (e.g., theme-related materials, additional books, props) organized and available, even if not in the classroom / outdoor space?

## Intentional Organization

- Can children see, reach, use, and return materials without assistance, promoting independence?
- Are materials organized in logical ways, based on the space/center? (add examples)
- Are all materials purposeful, used, and useful?
- Are unused or unneeded materials removed to prevent clutter and promote the intentional inclusion of materials?

## Promoting Independence

- Can the children in my group access the things they need to be successful independently?
- If I provide some support or experiences, how could children become more independent?

## Increasing child control while teachers are in charge

- Does my environment have me controlling what and how children access materials during most of the



# CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

day, which does not promote independence?

- Have I set up the environment so that children know I am in charge, but they have control over many parts of the day and what/how they interact with the environment?
- Have I included children in setting up the environment, especially as toddlers get older?

## Involving Children in Design of Physical Environment

**Do children have a voice in how the physical environment develops during the year?**

- The physical environment continues to grow as the class grows.
- I keep adjusting things (adding, removing) as needed, but not in a way where the environment becomes unpredictable to children.
- I include children in conversations and the work of adjusting the physical environment because it is OUR classroom, not just mine. Even with infants and young toddlers who may not be able to share a lot of



# CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

ideas using expressive words, I recognize them as people and include them as I talk about changes and moving things. Toddlers can help move things, reasonably for their age, which helps them know where things will be.

## Sharing Power With Children In Design of Physical Environment

**Am I willing to give up some control and share power with children in designing the physical environment during the year?**

- I am willing to have conversations with children about how the space is working / not working and get feedback, verbally and non-verbally, from children.
- I am willing to have conversations with families about how the space is working / not working and get feedback from families.
- I am willing to use children's and families' ideas to adjust parts of the environment that are not working for the class.
- I am willing to include children in making adjustments because their input and valuing their voices are vital to their development.



## Ideas for Maximizing Design of Indoor and Outdoor Classroom Spaces

Every physical space, indoor and outdoor, will have its physical challenges and drawbacks. Do your best to take advantage of every space available and maximize its use. Here are a few ideas:

- Design attractive and inviting spaces with available furniture. Remember, less is more.
- Create areas ample storage for materials organized in a way that makes sense.
- Designate a large group gathering area where the entire group can fit comfortably. This is often where block/construction play occurs during center time, due to space needed for this type of play.
- Think of classroom organization as a place for everything and everything in its place.
- Add related materials on Monday, and additional materials on Wednesday, depending upon observations of need and interest. This will encourage exploration and enhance children's learning and curiosity.
- Locate quiet areas apart from noisier ones. Remember, children need variety based on individual needs and preferences and cycles throughout the day. Children spend as many as 11 hours in your space, which

# CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

can be overwhelming to certain children.

- Display children's current art throughout the classroom. Be sure it is art rather than craft.
- A well-organized classroom encourages children to interact predictably and efficiently. Predictability in schedule and organization helps children to gain confidence in trust in you and school.
- Set up activities in a way that encourages independence, with materials accessible and organized nearby.
- Design individual workspaces with carpet squares, trays, work mats, etc. This helps to define personal space and sends a message as to how many children can comfortably work in an area.
- Display photographs of children engaged in activities and those of children's families in attractive ways.
- Label shelves and storage containers with words and pictures to encourage independence in getting and returning materials. Write words in languages prevalent in the community, utilizing family/community resources if not within the center staff.
- Create a "lost and found" container for loose objects.
- Promote creativity with a variety of enhancements, including natural materials, found/recyclable materials. Sometimes, these are called loose parts. (can do a whole section on loose parts).
- For teacher-directed activities such as small groups or large groups, organize materials in advance for the task. This reduces child wait-time and enhances attention during teacher-directed activities.
- Use print in meaningful ways, from labeling and organizing materials to children's names and other important words. A print-rich classroom establishes a connection between the spoken word and the written word.

## Messaging to Families

Have a space set up where you can easily post messages to families on a dry-erase board. This is often near where sign-in/sign-out occurs, or near the classroom door, depending upon how your building is set up.

## General Setup

The classroom must meet the needs of the children who use the space and the teaching staff. Included are essential environmental considerations for several areas and setups, but keep these factors

in mind when it comes to classroom setup:





# CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- Remain flexible; areas and their location can move as it makes sense to do so.
- Materials can move. Materials don't have to "live" in only one area. For example, books belong in every center (examples ahead), clipboards and pencils are useful in multiple spaces.
- Stay organized. Containers (including inventive ones) and labels, and "a space for everything, with everything in its space" help children feel secure knowing there is a plan.
- Less is more. While it is useful to have additional materials to add, what is at children's level (accessible) should be enough without being overwhelming. Having too much out can make clean-up overwhelming.
- Supervision is key. Check your room set-up from several different spaces where you are likely to be when children are throughout the area (indoor and outdoor). While children need and deserve privacy and space, your setup should also allow for manageable supervision without interruption.

## Indoor and Outdoor

Many activities can occur both indoors and outdoors.

## Infusing literacy and math throughout Older/toddler classrooms

It is helpful for children to experience literacy and math in meaningful ways. This starts with a classroom set up across areas. Here are a few suggestions:

### Literacy

- Include board books in every area (e.g., books featuring cities, farms, buildings in the construction area, books about butterflies or lizards in the sensory/science center)
- Make writing and mark-making central. (e.g., have small clipboards and toddler-size crayons accessible for mark making)

### Mathematics

- Organize materials to encourage 1:1 correspondence
- Organize materials by color to encourage classification. The first way children classify objects is by color.
- Offer opportunities where counting is logical. (snack, manipulatives (organization like ice cube trays)
- Tools for measuring (measuring spoons and cups, sensory table containers marked with amounts)





# CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

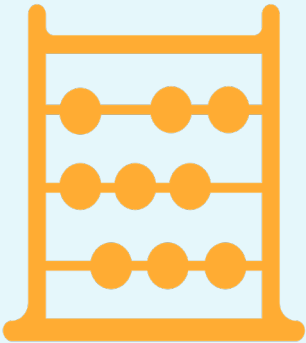
- Provocations (how many cubes can you stack?)

## Quiet / relaxation / safe space

- Separated from more active play areas
- Logical space for just a few children
- Soft surfaces and objects, a rug or carpet, stuffed animals and puppets
- Visual sensory toys (e.g., liquid motion sensory toys, sensory bottles, stress balls)
- Pictures and photos of family displayed nicely on a wall, shelf, or binder
- Muted/filtered lighting or controlled lighting (lamps or lights with separate switches, curtains/blinds for windows)
- Cozy space



## Language & Literacy



## Construction / blocks

- Shelving for blocks and accessories and containers for accessories
- Organized and labeled blocks (at least two types, enough for a reasonable number of children in the space)
- Accessories that are always accessible, including construction or theme-related books (ideas for books can be found online, such as this resource: <https://www.pre-kpages.com/books-blocks-center/>)
- Accessories that rotate, with extra accessories available to teachers
- Classmate blocks or cut-outs (samples found here: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/383439355756666400/> and here: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/347903139937541908/>)
- Overhead projector for shadow play and projection

## Dramatic play

- Shelving and containers for props and supplies
- Housekeeping furniture sized for toddlers (e.g., kitchen set, pots and pans, dishes, table and chairs, cribs and baby dolls, high chairs)

## Science / Sensory Table

- Shelving and containers for science materials
- Space to use materials (e.g., table, floor space)
- Scientific materials for general use (e.g., hand lens, microscope, tweezers, classroom pets, eye droppers,

# CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

measuring cups and spoons, magnets, play dough, clipboards and pencils for sketches and plans) (Ideas for science center materials can be found online, such as this resource: <https://pocketofpreschool.com/the-science-center-in-my-classroom-is/>)

- Scientific materials for specific themes or studies (e.g., books, robots, entomology, nature items, incubator, rocks, seeds, shells), with additional materials available to teachers
- Light table and overhead projector for shadow play and projection experiments

## Writing

- Shelving and containers for writing materials
- Space to write (e.g., table or desk and chairs)
- Standard writing materials sized for toddlers (e.g., small clipboards and chunky pencils, plain copy paper, well-organized markers and crayons)



## Art

- Shelving and containers for organized storage
- Toddler-size easels (preferably two, side-by-side)
- Areas to dry, store, and display children's work (indoor or outdoor)
- Area to hang smocks
- Nearby access to child-level sink(s)
- Non-consumable materials (e.g., sponges, paintbrushes in varying sizes, paint cups, smocks, play dough props, stencils, shatterproof mirrors, pipe cleaners)
- Consumable materials accessible to children (e.g., various types of paper, markers, colored pencils, crayons, sharpened pencils, various washable paints (purchased or homemade), play dough, glue and glue sticks, chalk)
- Consumable and non-consumable materials for rotation, available to teachers. (Ideas for consumable and non-consumable materials available in online resources, such as <https://www.prekinders.com/art-center/>)



# CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- Overhead projector for shadow play and projection experimentation with design, light, and color

## Gross Motor

- Toddler-size tricycles and helmets, including trikes with a back seat (e.g., taxi, bus, rickshaw)
  - Wagons
  - Parachute
  - Balls (and air pump/needles)
  - Large paint brushes and rollers (think to paint your house) with buckets to paint water on fences, sidewalks, and building
  - Sand toys, including vehicles
  - Water table and toys
  - Books and a book basket with a handle
  - Outdoor easels (or fence surface) for painting
  - Items for various uses, such as cones and beanbags
  - Natural objects, stored in containers for use (e.g., pine cones, acorns/walnuts/seed pods, tree cookies, seashells, rocks, sticks)
- Setting up shared-use toddler spaces



## Small Group

- Space and seating for the small group of 3-5 to work with the teacher (e.g., table and chairs, individual mats/carpet squares on the floor)
- Adult-level counter or top of the shelf where the day's prepared small group materials are ready
- Location giving teacher visibility to scan the environment, and providing some separation from other activities

## Large Group

- Space and seating for the whole group to gather, with teacher seating visible to the entire group (e.g., carpet for children, with low teacher chair)
- Display/storage space for day's large group materials, preferably movable (e.g., big book display and storage or teacher's learning center/chart stand)
- Access to cued-up music (e.g., CD player / portable Bluetooth speaker connected to iPod/phone)

## Environment considerations for mealtimes

- Rolling plastic or metal cart (2-3 levels) that can be in mealtime area as needed, and then rolled out of the way
- Easy access to food, serving containers, utensils, and plates/silverware (e.g., top of shelf/teacher counter,

# CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

a cart)

- Child-safe space and means to clean and store cleaning supplies
- Appropriate-size seating and chairs to accommodate all children and staff sitting together, including low teacher-size chairs that fit the table
- Close access to child-size hand washing sink(s)
- Plan for how children will clean up (e.g., bus tub for dirty dishes, trash can nearby to scrape plates, dump milk in the sink rather than trash can). Set up the environment according to your plan.

## Environment considerations for naptime

- Cots or mats stored on rolling frame/container to reduce staff fatigue and speed process of naptime set-up and clean-up
- Laminated floor plan with a dry erase marker to indicate each child's cot placement available for all staff
- Place children strategically to minimize distractors
- Arrangement to allow easy supervision as the teacher moves around the room
- Play/stream quiet music
- Reduce light (e.g., cover windows, turn main room lights off, use small lamps/night lights as needed)
- Reduce the temperature slightly, if possible

### Classroom Environment Resources:

Infant and Toddler Spaces: Design for a Quality Classroom

<https://www.wested.org/resources/infant-and-toddler-spaces-design-for-a-quality-classroom/#>

Learning Environments (An Introduction, Designing and Organizing, The Outdoor Environment: Designing for Engagement, The Environment: Materials, The Environment: Schedules and Routines)

<https://www.virtuallabschool.org/infant-toddler/learning-environments>

Creating a Yes! Environment: Supporting Creativity and Exploration <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/feb2019/supporting-creativity-exploration>

Inspired by Reggio Emilia: Emergent Curriculum in Relationship-Driven Learning Environments <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/nov2015/emergent-curriculum>

What Does a High-Quality Program for Toddlers Look Alike? <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/what-does-high-quality-program-for-toddler-look-like>

11x: Welcome Children and Families to Your Classroom <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/jun2009/welcome-children-and-families>

Some states will have resources that may be useful, such as this from Louisiana:





# CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Infant/Toddler Classroom Pre-Coaching Quality Checklist: <http://www.agendaforchildren.org/uploads/documents/tieredta/CLASSROOM%20QUALITY%20CHECKLIST-Infants%20and%20Toddlers.pdf>

## TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

It is essential children make digital connections as they are growing up in a digital world. However, technology must be purposeful and intentional as an open-ended tool to extend learning, grow relationships, and share understandings with peers and significant adults (i.e., family and teachers). Technology includes those items that improve the quality of life. Learning Beyond Paper provides age-appropriate technology connections throughout the curriculum.

The U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services collaborated in the development of the Early Learning and Educational Technology Policy Brief in 2016 to promote developmentally appropriate use of technology in homes and early learning settings.

**The Departments' four guiding principles for the use of technology with early learners are as follows:**

- Guiding Principle #1: Technology—when used appropriately—can be a tool for learning.
- Guiding Principle #2: Technology should be used to increase access to learning opportunities for all children.
- Guiding Principle #3: Technology may be used to strengthen relationships among parents, families, early educators, and young children.
- Guiding Principle #4: Technology is more effective for learning when adults and peers interact or co-view with young children.

More detail about the Guiding Principles for Use of Technology with Early Learners can be found here: <https://tech.ed.gov/earlylearning>

### Examples of Technology in the Toddler Classroom

- Use an overhead projector to project a scene on the wall of the block area to encourage play (e.g., ocean photo to encourage children's play with ocean animals)
- Include easy-to-use voice recorders for children to use and replay to hear themselves
- Project short videos of children's play for them to see later, helping them to recall what they did earlier



## TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

- Add a cash register in the housekeeping center for children to play grocery shopping
- Assist children with using a digital camera to take pictures of their work
- Use the computer with a child to search for an age-appropriate website to answer a child's question or interest
- Provide a variety of audiobooks/player in your reading center
- Collect outdated cell phones (take out batteries) for children's exploration
- Model appropriate technology behavior
- Provide opportunities for children to share technology tools to encourage interactions

### Resources

Scholastic.com: Using Technology in the Early Childhood Classroom

National Association for the Education of Young Children: Technology and Young Children

National Association for the Education of Young Children: Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth to Age 8

National Association for the Education of Young Children: Finding the Education in Educational Technology with Early Learners

## HEALTH & SAFETY

Teachers are required to follow Health and Safety Policies and Procedures, which address the health and safety of children, families, staff, and volunteers. Child Care programs develop these policies based on the local and state regulatory agencies that approve and monitor childcare programs. Additionally, if your program is accredited, there are health and safety requirements included there as well. Sometimes, nutrition is included with health and safety.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children's accreditation Standard 5 is Health. The Standard is: The program promotes the nutrition and health of children and protects children and staff from illness and injury. Children must be healthy and safe to learn and grow. Programs must be healthy and safe to support children's healthy development. The NAEYC accreditation standards, including what to look for in an accredited program for each standard, can be found here: <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/10-naeyc-program-standards>

## HEALTH & SAFETY

In February 2020, the COVID-19 virus resulted in stricter requirements to help stop the spread of the virus, which changed the health and safety guidelines of Child Care program operations. The Center for Disease Control issued guidelines for Childcare providers which can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html>. Your state and/or regulating body may have additional guidance on the topic of COVID-19.

### Health and Safety Practices

As the classroom teacher, you will consistently model health and safety practices that children, starting as an infant, will take part in to keep everyone in the classroom as healthy and safe as possible. Some policies and procedures may be school-wide or dictated by regulation (i.e., licensing or funding source), and others may be specific to your classroom.

These include health practices and procedures for hand washing, toileting, toothbrushing, sneezing and coughing, nose-blowing, and what to do with objects that have been mouthed. You'll want to make sure you know that safety practices and procedures are for things such as responding to an evacuation or shelter drill, moving safely in the classroom vs. outdoors, ensuring more young infants are protected from more mobile infants, cleaning up a spill or mess, and keeping ourselves and our classmates safe. You should expect that you will repeat expectations and model consistently over time. This repetition is typical with young children, so find songs or poems to help everyone remember, and approach it with a cheerful, non-judgemental attitude as you remind and reshare. There are many teachable moments for you to capitalize on when messes occur, or there are missteps. You will want to show as much patience and compassion as possible while teaching children about health and safety throughout the day.



# CLASS STRUCTURE

## Schedule

Sample 1, 2 are examples of full-day schedules.

Your schedule may vary based on your program's operating hours and needs, but there are essential considerations when developing a schedule. Your schedule must provide:

- blocks of time to enable children opportunities for discovery as they are involved in integrated, active, engaged learning experiences.
- a balance of large group (e.g., together time), small group, individual activities that include child-selected groups, and teacher-selected groups.
- times, when children can work and play together with peers as well as alone (self-selected by the child).
- time planned for physical movement and outdoor activities as well as snacks/meals and rest times.
- a sense of what comes next. A predictable schedule helps children anticipate what will happen, and thus feel more secure.

## Tips for developing a schedule

- For shared spaces (e.g., a playground), you will need to plan a program-wide schedule with others.
- Consider the type of activity and alternate active and passive activities,
- Plan your day, and be organized. Prepare things needed for each part of the schedule in advance (e.g., have your large group book and materials out with music cued up before children come to large group time, ensure paint and brushes are available at the easel before center time, fill the water table before outdoor play begins). This reduces wait time and problem behavior.
- Think about the transitions/ routines throughout your day and allow time for transitions and routines, so children (and you) are not frustrated with unrealistic expectations.

## Time Needed for Routine Parts of Day

For infants and young toddlers, there are some additional parts of the day that are routine, but also very important learning opportunities. Here are a few to consider:

**Sign Language**—Using sign language provides infants an opportunity to communicate before they can verbalize using words. These activities should be repeated often throughout the week.

**Feeding Time**—Feeding time offers opportunities for one-on-one interactions and bonding.





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**Changing Time**—Like Feeding Time, Changing Time also provides opportunities for one-on-one interactions. These activities have been created to maintain the infant’s attention, build skills, and encourage interactions.

**Tummy Time**—Tummy Time allows for the development of neck, arm, leg, back, and stomach muscles for infants who are not yet crawling. These activities also provide opportunities for reaching, grasping, and tracking. As infants engage in Tummy Time, peer interactions are encouraged and adults should also be on the floor, so babies see others’ faces, not just feet.

**Outdoor Exploration**—Outdoor activities are in addition to regularly available outdoor options such as sandbox, water play, trikes, swings, and slides. They are theme-related and should be presented every day the weather permits. Check your state regulations for the amount of time your age group should spend outside.

### Exploration Times

Exploration times are experiences that correspond with the weekly themes which are typically presented at the beginning of each day.

**Language Exploration** enhances language development which includes expressive language, receptive language, and early literacy.

### Music and Movement

These activities provide infants the opportunity to respond to music and experiment with vocalization and sound. They also promote physical and language development.

### Creative Exploration

These activities include finger plays, stories with props, and hands-on creative activities where infants will explore simple art materials.

### STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics)

- Cognitive Exploration—These activities focus on areas included in the Cognitive Domain.
- Engineering introduces different ways to solve a problem, such as how to build a ramp, how to keep a baby doll in the stroller, or how to keep water in a funnel.
- Technology introduces various tools to help complete a task, such as using a pulley to lift a bucket to the top of the climber, recording a song to share with parents later, or taking a picture of a block structure

# CLASS STRUCTURE

before cleaning it up so it is easier to remember your work.

- Mathematics introduces numbers and counting, shapes and patterns, sorting and classifying, and measurement and comparison.
- Social Studies includes family, people, and community.
- Science focuses on learning about the world through senses.
- Cognitive Processes include thinking skills and problem solving.

Older Toddlers will have many of the same routine parts of the day as preschoolers, though their attention for whole group and small group activities is shorter.

- Large Group/Together time (5 to 10 minutes each in the morning and toward the end of the day)
- Small group time (10 minutes), scheduled small group times
- Learning Center time (at least 45 min each) morning and afternoon
- Outdoor time (30 min each) morning and afternoon
- Snack time (15 minutes each) morning and afternoon
- Lunch (30 min)
- Naptime (at least 2 hours)



Post your schedule with different audiences in mind, but primarily families and children. Post your schedule with the times for each segment of the day for your families in a conspicuous place. Some programs have a parent information board (pic) or an online place where families can view the schedule (pic). Licensing may also require a schedule to be posted, so be sure to follow any specifications for this.

For children, a visual schedule is necessary and explained in more detail below.

## Visual Schedules

Children are visual learners, and creating a visual schedule provides a pictorial representation of what they will be doing throughout the day. It helps children predict what is coming next, which helps children feel safe and secure.

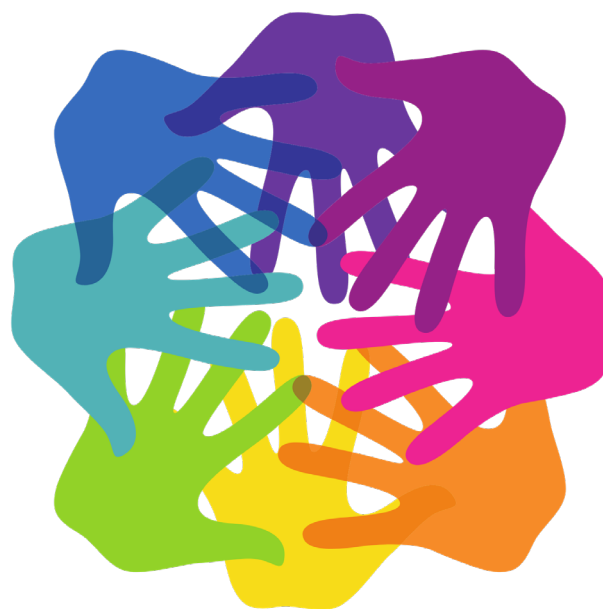
## Creating a Visual Schedule

- Pictures should be larger than words. Use stock photos until you take pictures of your children during each segment of the day. Use pictures of your actual class to reaffirm and motivate, which is easy to do with a digital camera.
- Using 8x11 pictures will allow the children to see the activities efficiently.
- Post at children's eye level preferably left to right (but can be top to bottom/vertical, if space does not

## CLASS STRUCTURE

allow horizontal placement). In an infant or young toddler classroom, the visual schedule may even be on the floor, adhered with contact paper - at their level.

- Place the pictures in a sheet protector so that you can change them more easily.
- Adjust the schedule with additional pages/pictures as needed (e.g., weather, a special activity, field trip).



### Using a Visual Schedule with Toddlers

- During the first few weeks, or any time there is a schedule change, talk about the schedule/schedule change, and refer to it during Together Time.
- Go to the visual schedule on the wall frequently to point out what is coming up next.
- Refer to the schedule often so that children begin to use it as a reference too.
- Make your schedule interactive by placing a clothespin or other child-friendly clip on the schedule. Move the clip (or have a child move the clip) as the schedule changes throughout the day. This helps children to understand the movement of time during the day.

### Toddler Routine Parts of the Day

#### Infant Schedules

Schedules for infants in your care are individualized based on the infant's routines for feeding, diapering and sleeping. Individual schedules will be developed in coordination with the family to ensure consistency with routines and rituals at home.

Nurturing infants socially and emotionally is of utmost importance and positively impacts Intellectual Development, Physical Development, Social Development, Behavioral Development, Emotional Development.

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## Sample Schedules

### Infant Schedules

Schedules for infants in your care are individualized based on the infant's routines for feeding, diapering and sleeping. Individual schedules will be developed in coordination with the family to ensure consistency with routines and rituals at home.

Nurturing infants socially and emotionally is of utmost importance and positively impacts Intellectual Development, Physical Development, Social Development, Behavioral Development, Emotional Development.

Relationships lay the foundation for later developmental outcomes of Self-Confidence, Sound Mental Health, Motivation to Learn, Achievement, and Self-Control.

When building relationships with and nurturing infants, consider these important points:

- Interactions should inspire curiosity, creativity, and confidence. Always interact with infants in positive and respectful tones.
- Praise their efforts using kind, affirmative words. Teachers should provide opportunities for infants to build on their accomplishments.
- Build positive relationships through your immediate and appropriate responses to infants' physical and emotional needs.
- Demonstrate your enthusiasm and show respect as you engage with infants.
- Interact with infants using sign language in multiple situations.
- Tone should be respectful at ALL times.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) encourages practices in which “the curriculum guides the development of a daily schedule that is predictable yet flexible and responsive to individual needs of the children” (NAEYC, 2015, p. 9)





# CLASS STRUCTURE

Consistent routines, activities that happen at about the same time and in about the same way each day, provide comfort and a sense of safety to young children. Whether it is time to play, time for a snack, a nap, or a loved one to return, knowing what will happen next gives babies and toddlers security and emotional stability. —Zero To Three (2010, p. 2)

## Daily Room Schedule

### Morning

- Greetings and check-ins:
- Diapering, naps, and feeding as needed
- Exploration of sensory materials, objects, toys
- Reading and exploring books
- Music and movement
- Outdoor exploration

### Afternoon

- Diapering, naps, and mealtime as needed
- Quiet music, reading, and low lights
- Exploring materials, objects, toys
- Music and movement
- Outdoor exploration

### Late Afternoon

- Diapering, naps, and mealtime as needed
- Reading and exploring books
- Exploring materials, objects, toys
- Music and movement
- Outdoor exploration
- Transition to family

Your licensing agency may require a schedule posted with times. Create the room schedule with times consistent with your program hours of operation. The caregiving routines provide opportunities for teachers to facilitate learning in all areas of development.

### Resources

Early Head Start National Resource Center. (2014). Individualizing care for infants and toddlers: Part 1

## CLASS STRUCTURE

[Technical assistance paper no. 16]. Retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/docs/ehs-ta-16.pdf>

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

(2015). NAEYC early childhood program standards and accreditation

criteria and guidance for assessment. Standard 2: Curriculum.

Washington, DC: Author

Zero To Three. (Feb, 2010). Creating routines for love and learning.

Retrieved from <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/223-creating-routines-for-love-and-learning>

Individualizing Care for Infants and Toddlers – Part 1 • TA Paper 16  
<https://www.zerotothree.org/early-learning/child-care>



### Sample Schedule - Younger Toddlers - 12 to 24 months and Older Toddlers - 24 to 36 months

8:00 - 9:00	Arrival
9:00 - 9:15	Breakfast/morning snack
9:30 - 10:00	Outdoor time
10:15 - 10:30	Story time
10:45 - 11:30	Exploration with sensory materials, toys, and objects Prepare for lunch
11:30 - 12:00	Lunch
12:15 - 2:00	Nap
2:15 - 3:00	Outdoor time
3:15 - 3:30	Snack time
3:45 to 4:00	Story time
4:00-5:00	Exploration with sensory materials, toys, and objects Dismissal
15-minute transition times and care routines between activities	

Schedule times can be adapted to your program schedule.

### Resources for Schedule, Rituals, and Routines

The Value of Classroom Rituals and Routines: <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/value-classroom-rituals-routines/>

Routines, Rituals, and Rules - Can these tools help eliminate behavior issues (PPT slides): <https://cms.azed.>

# CLASS STRUCTURE

[gov/home/GetDocumentFile?id=5c521df81dcb2513a8973f56](http://gov/home/GetDocumentFile?id=5c521df81dcb2513a8973f56)

Structure and Routines for a Pre-K Classroom: <https://education.seattlepi.com/structure-routines-prek-classroom-5062.html>

## Reference

Siegel, D. J., & Bryson, T. P. (2011). *The whole-brain child: 12 revolutionary strategies to nurture your child's developing mind*. New York: Random House.

## Creating a Sense of Community

Creating a sense of community should begin from the first day of school and continue throughout the year. A new group of children arrives with different interests, abilities, cultures, and families. Many may have experienced child care since they were infants, while others are experiencing it for the first time. How you meet and greet each child and family is a role model for meeting and greeting their peers. Part of creating a sense of community is to remember that “the teacher is the environment. The teacher creates a sense of community that is equitable for all children.

### As a teacher, you will:

- Create a welcoming classroom that reflects and celebrates children's identities, including images of children (e.g., self-portraits) and families (e.g., photos), and offer different opportunities for children to learn about themselves and each other throughout the curriculum
- Show respect for children of different cultural backgrounds in school settings
- Welcome families and children to share their cultural heritages at school-wide events such as cultural fairs or a cultural week and include a sustained focus on children's social identities throughout the year
- Include children's books and media in early childhood classrooms which represent different cultures and diversity
- Are enthusiastic and use positive verbal and nonverbal language
- Empower children to have some influence over decisions in play
- Ensure children have input in curriculum topics, parts of the daily schedule, and creating class rules and job responsibilities
- Give children the space they need to explore, experiment, and make—and learn from—mistakes
- Provide experiences of working together to solve problems in both play and projects
- Understand that a strong classroom community is one in which children feel empowered and valued, and children will learn and grow
- Model behaviors of respect, caring, self-control, and fair decision-making

## CLASS STRUCTURE

### References:

[https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/DEL\\_Cultural%20and%20Linguistic%20Diversity\\_Creating%20and%20Celebrating%20Diversity.pdf](https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/DEL_Cultural%20and%20Linguistic%20Diversity_Creating%20and%20Celebrating%20Diversity.pdf)

<https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/10-naeyc-program-standards>

<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/4-approaches-building-positive-community-any-classroom-maurice-elias>

## STANDARDS-BASED LEARNING

Early childhood educators, more than most people, realize that young children do not divide their learning into subjects or neat and tidy lessons. More often than not, learning comes through repeated experiences that build upon past experiences. The scaffolding, modeling, and language support you provide as the teacher is invaluable to each child's development. To provide the best scaffolding and ability for children to reach their full potential, you must understand the standards your program uses well. Often, standards are known as child outcomes or Early Learning and Development Guidelines (ELDG), and these terms are interchangeable in this guide. These will vary from state to state, or even by program funding (i.e., state PreK or Head Start), but these documents have many commonalities. See this link for a document including links to ELDGs from various states: <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/state-early-learning-standards-and-guidelines>. Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (HSELOF) includes the child outcomes used by Head Start programs. The HSELOF website is here: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/head-start-early-learning-outcomes-framework>.

### Linking Standards to the Curriculum

The term intentional has been used repeatedly in this teacher's manual. As a teacher, intentionality and reflective practice are symbiotic - one cannot exist without the other. When thinking about the curriculum, the actual activities and experiences children take part in through the day; it is critical to plan the steps to help children achieve standards (state, local, or program) by the end of the program year. Standards are the finish line, but there are many incremental steps to get to that point. For infants and toddlers, standards or benchmarks are often typical developmental milestones.



As the teacher, it is your job to plan, scaffold, and create experiences that tie to the incremental progress infants and toddlers will make through the year. It is never enough that an activity is cute or fun. It must



## STANDARDS-BASED LEARNING

be intentional, meaningful, engaging, and targeted toward building children's competencies: focusing on what each child can do, challenging them, and planning the next steps. This is especially important for infants and toddlers, because their attention span is generally shorter the younger they are. The more meaningful and engaging things are, the more targeted to the specific individual child or class, the better conditions are for learning and connection.

Learning Beyond Paper is designed to scaffold children's skills and developmental progression across domains to meet general standards adopted

by most states and programs. Remember, especially for infants and toddlers, this is tied to developmental milestones. Your small groups will help you work strategically with children who need additional scaffolding and opportunities for practice.



### Complexity and Depth

Within the Learning Beyond Paper curriculum, it is essential to know that all children, and especially infants and toddlers, will begin in your classroom with varying levels of skills and knowledge. This can be due to huge variation in month-by-month development, experience (or lack of), or possibly developmental delay (identified or not). It is important to keep expectations positive and high for children. Children will work up to your age-realistic expectations and necessary level, with the right encouragement, scaffolding, and modeling, as described in the teacher guide and professional development. While individual children may have challenges, use these challenges to understand how to best support the child's learning rather than to lower expectations for what a child can achieve.

The Scope and Sequence provided is valuable to ensuring that your planning will help typically developing children are progressing in a way to make sure that they will be able to meet age-appropriate standards by the end of the year, or consistent with their age. The Scope and Sequence covers an entire calendar year and breaks down the year's standard into quarterly targets.

When you think about the topics of scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development, presented earlier in this guide, breaking down skills into smaller steps along the way is a way to build competence of skills through practice and building along the way. Imagine if you were going to run a marathon on a certain date, there would be training along the way, building up endurance and distance over time, rather than arriving at

# STANDARDS-BASED LEARNING

the gate expecting to do well without the necessary steps along the way.

## Play and Authenticity

Play is the vehicle for learning with young children. Through play, children learn things more quickly in a way that sticks. Play is the way children practice and refine their skills, have fun (a necessary component in learning), and try things they otherwise may not. Vygotsky famously stated, “In play, a child is always above his average age, above his daily behavior; in play, it is as though he were a head taller than himself.

You can plan authentic experiences - solving real problems that come up throughout the day WITH children, involving even infants and toddlers in small ways with set-up and clean-up, helping to make play dough for the class, and numerous activities that are necessary and important. Children prefer “real” to busy work, and will remain attentive for longer when engaged and the vision is viewed as important.

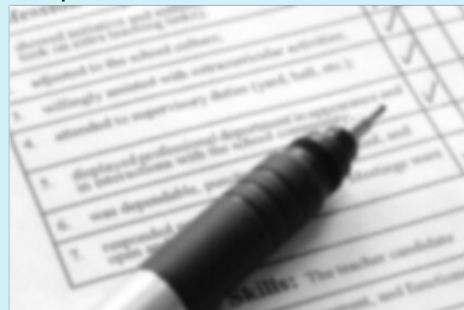
One important way that teachers of infants and toddlers encourage play is to provide the right activity or toy at the right time, and ensure children have time to explore, as most things they encounter are novel to them as less-experienced humans.

Another important way that teachers of infants and toddlers encourage play is through teacher-guided experiences where the teacher is sportscasting (talking aloud about what is going on in an enthusiastic, positive voice) and interacting with the child(ren).

There are some skills that are highly unlikely to spontaneously occur during play alone. Skills can be practiced in teacher-guided experiences (e.g. circle time, small groups, or even 1:1 experiences), but still retain the most benefit when this is done in a playful way where children’s senses are activated and there is active engagement.

## Planning and Reflection

You should plan regularly, updating plans based on the curriculum as well as observation of the children in your class. As you complete any progress monitoring or assessment, it is important to use these data to



## STANDARDS-BASED LEARNING

inform your next steps.

Minimally, plan with your colleagues that teach with you in the same class. For maximum benefit, work with the director to determine if planning can occur with other teachers of infants and toddlers. You can gain efficiency, get additional ideas and insights, and build collaboration in this way.



Throughout the day or by the end of the day, take a few minutes to make notes about the day. Within the week, have a planned time to actively reflect - with colleagues, if possible - on the learning based on what you have planned and how children responded to plans. This involves thinking about the progress of individual children, groups of children (e.g., mobile vs. non-mobile infants, toddlers working on toilet training vs. not yet), and the group. It includes you thinking about your perspective, challenging yourself on things that you could do differently or better (even if you don't yet know how to do something differently yet), and reflecting on what went well or what could have gone better. It is not about being critical or judgmental; rather, seeing things accurately and from different lenses.

## TEACHER BOOTCAMP

**Teacher Boot Camp** is an aspect to be developed in a further iteration. The purpose of this is to help you as a teacher understand the background skills and progressions related to different cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills typical of infants and toddlers. The better we understand what we're teaching about, the easier it is to ask the right questions, prepare an activity, or understand when a child may need more practice or opportunity with you in order to gain that skill.

**Physical Development-** addresses the young child's overall health, bodily growth, and increasing control of their large (gross motor) and small (fine motor) muscle movements. The ability to move and physically interact with the environment supports the child's understanding of the world in which they live and plays an important role in cognitive and social development.

**Language and Literacy-** These skills play a key role in all domains of learning. Development in these areas

# TEACHER BOOTCAMP

is inextricably linked. As infants and toddlers listen to and imitate sounds and words, they make important connections and learn how language works. Talking, singing, and reading to young children fosters language development and positive feelings about reading.

**Social and Emotional Development-** addresses the young child's emerging sense of self and relationships with others. Building connections with nurturing and responsive caregivers supports self-regulation, confident exploration, and engaged learning.

**Approaches To Learning-** focuses on the skills and behaviors that children use to engage in learning. These include attitude, initiative, persistence, curiosity, and creativity. As infants and toddlers interact with their environment, they use these skills to gather information and make connections and generalizations about how the world works.

**STEAM** - encompasses the content areas of science, technology, engineering, the arts, and Mathematics. For infants and toddlers, STEAM experiences are opportunities to explore, experiment, discover, and develop a wide range of skills across all domains of development. Early STEAM experiences foster curiosity, engagement, communication, problem-solving, and executive functions.



## Infants and Toddlers

Infants and toddlers are explorers. They are curious and use their senses to investigate and discover new learning as they explore their environment.

**“The research is clear: when we say children are ‘born scientists,’ we’re not just being cute; they really are active scientists, right now, systematically and intentionally exploring their environments, even from the day they are born” (McClure, 2017).**

Once the child holds and shakes the rattle, he/she is learning about cause and effect.

Adults support children's explorations by spending time interacting and providing a safe and healthy





# TEACHER BOOTCAMP

environment with developmentally appropriate materials and equipment which supports a fun playful environment.



**“Our role is to facilitate children’s thinking and learning as they discover meaningful experiences (Jablon, Dombro, & Dichtelmiller 1999, 20)”**

STEAM is perfect to use with children as it provides an approach which focuses on what to learn as well as how to learn. The how to learn is based on inquiry. Children naturally want to find out about their world. They are curious and use their imaginations as they discover new learning. It is not telling children what we think they should know. Rote learning does not provide the foundational skills for later learning.

STEAM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics  
Integrating 2 or more of the STEAM areas activates more cells in the brain.

## **S is Science.**

Science for infants and toddlers is exploring and trying to figure things out. Using senses to observe, touch/feel, hear and taste.

- Blowing bubbles and pointing out when they pop.
- Fitting the shapes into the correct places
- Sensory bottles

## **T is for Technology.**

Technology is any man-made object or tool which can be used during a child’s explorations. Exploring with objects and tools strengthens the child’s fine motor skills and hand eye coordination needed for use of technological devices in later years.

- Crayons, paints, paper, scissors, markers, dough, blocks, rattles, mirrors, flashlights, sound boxes,

## **E is for Engineering.**

Engineering is using materials to construct as they are exploring how things go together and solving problems.

- When it is time to feed the infant say: “I am going to get your bottle, I wonder where it is? “
- How are we going to get all our things outside to the playground?
- Describe the child’s position. You are sitting on my lap. I am picking you up. I am putting you down.

# TEACHER BOOTCAMP

## A is for Arts.

Children engage in painting and drawing, pretend play, music, and movement.

Infants and Toddlers are involved in discovering how things feel, sound, taste and move.

- Placing the child's hand in paint and making a handprint on paper or cloth.
- Singing songs with movement - Move the infant's hands to the music. "If you are happy, clap your hands."
- Music has patterns which support cognitive skills.

## M is for Mathematics.

Math during the early years is about building a foundation of math concepts as children explore objects.

- Putting on children's shoes asking how many feet do you have?
- I see your nose, you have one nose, I see your eyes, you have two eyes.
- Wheels on the bus go round and round.
- Counting the child's toes when putting on or taking off socks
- Singing songs with numbers
- Read books with numbers.
- Play I Spy
- Songs- counting how many friends at school today.

Integrating 2 or more of the STEAM areas activates more cells in the brain.

Learning Beyond Paper provides the teacher with daily STEAM activities which embed STEAM concepts into the daily routine. They include developmentally appropriate open-ended materials and teacher talk to guide the teacher as the child is exploring the environment using his/her senses.

Social emotional skills as well as learning supports are included to guide the teacher.

There are many opportunities throughout the day to support the child in his/her exploration of the environment.

## Language Development

As you are implementing STEAM activities you will be supporting the child's language development by using the following strategies.

- Playing with the child taking turns back and forth



# TEACHER BOOTCAMP

- Asking open ended questions and waiting for the child to respond.
- Watching when it is time to end and start something new
- **Using Parallel Talk**
- You are touching the fluffy ball, it feels soft.
- You are getting closer to the book.
- Using self-talk (I am reaching for the diaper on the shelf right next to me)
- Asking W questions- What can you tell me? What do you think will happen?
- What should we do next?
- Reading books about people, animals, nature, objects
- Exposing the children to math and science language



## **Developmentally Appropriate Open-ended materials**

Materials are the technology for infants and toddlers. Children are curious and use their senses to explore their environment. They are using their sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell to explore. . Materials need to be accessible, well organized to stand out to the child as something he/she wants to explore. The teacher observes the child to determine what interests him/her and keeps notes on what interests the child to best meet the child's strengths and needs.

## **Open ended materials**

Items which do not have directions. Children can explore and use their imagination as they use their senses in making decisions and problem solving.

Infant and Toddler STEAM: Supporting Interdisciplinary Experiences with Our Youngest Learners | NAEYC-article----

EARLY SCIENCE LEARNING FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

[News You Can Use \(hhs.gov\)](https://www.hhs.gov)

Breaking Down STEAM for Young Children \_ NAEYC.pdf

Breaking Down STEAM for Young Children. Part 2\_ Teacher-Child Interactions\_ Inspiring Conversations \_ NAEYC.pdf

Breaking Down STEAM for Young Children. Part 3\_ Questioning. Asking Questions and Being Problem Solvers \_ NAEYC.pdf

# TEACHER BOOTCAMP

STEM activities for Toddlers

<https://littlebinsforlittlehands.com/toddler-stem-activities/>

Serve and Return- 5 steps for Brain Building (video)

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/serve-and-return/>

Exploring Force and Motion with Infants and Toddlers

[ChuteSilos\\_ExperienceSheet.pdf \(uni.edu\)](#)

Contents and Containers: Exploring Space with Infants and Toddlers

[ContentsContainers\\_ExperienceSheet.pdf \(uni.edu\)](#)

Exploring Light & Shadow with Infants and Toddlers

[ExploringLightShadowInfantsToddlers\\_ExperienceSheet.pdf \(uni.edu\)](#)

Exploring Sound with Infants and Toddlers

[ExploringSoundInfantsToddlers\\_Experience Sheet.pdf \(uni.edu\)](#)

Infants and Toddlers Block Play: STEM in the Blocks Center

[InfantsToddlersBlockPlay\\_ExperienceSheet.pdf \(uni.edu\)](#)

[Understanding STEAM and How Children Use It \(hhs.gov\)](#)

Engaging Children in STEM Education EARLY!

Joshua M. Sneideman

| Natural Start

## Infant & Toddler Executive Functions

Executive functions are a set of cognitive processes involved in skills such as managing behavior and impulses, regulating emotions, planning, focusing, and remembering directions. These skills influence physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development and are strongly connected to early academic outcomes. Research suggests they predict academic success better than I.Q. or alphabet and number knowledge. Executive functions provide essential support for learning, development, and eventual success in school. The three key components of executive functions are:

Cognitive Flexibility- assists in sustaining attention, switching gears, and adjusting to changing demands. Children demonstrate cognitive flexibility when they use different strategies to reach a goal or solve a problem. And, when they use “running feet” outside but not inside, engage in simple role-play, and begin to manage transitions.



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Working Memory- supports children in remembering and applying information to daily activities and events. Young children use working memory when they act out the motions to a familiar fingerplay as it is being recited or raise both arms when they hear the word “up.”

Inhibitory Control-describes the ability to manage thoughts, emotions, and impulses. It allows children to think before they act. Young children practice this skill when they begin to self-soothe or wait their turn.

While these essential skills are not present at birth, infants are born with the capacity to acquire them. Executive functions develop over time and continue to mature into adulthood. Research suggests, however, that the first five years of life provide a critical period for laying their foundation. They develop through quality interactions, creative play, engaging activities, and daily opportunities for exploration.

When important adults support their efforts, young children are likely to build effective executive functions. Caregivers and families foster the development of these skills when they:

- Establish and maintain consistent, supportive relationships with infants.
- Provide warm and responsive interactions.
- Create predictable routines.
- Consider the child’s interests and choose enjoyable activities.
- Demonstrate ways to play with toys.
- Model how to behave in different situations.
- Encourage gradual independence and decision-making.
- Actively teach children how to regulate their emotions.
- Offer experiences that provide opportunities for skill practice.
- Plan activities that support creative play and encourage social interaction.

A young child’s day should be filled with supportive interactions and opportunities to develop and practice these essential skills. The following experiences and strategies offer developmentally appropriate ways to build and strengthen these competencies in infants and toddlers.

- Narrate the steps involved in an activity.
- Engage children in fingerplays, familiar songs, and predictable rhymes (e.g., Itsy Bitsy Spider, Head Shoulders, Knees and Toes, Hickory Dickory Dock, etc.).
- Play Peek-a-Boo and hiding games (e.g., place a ball under the blanket and ask the child to find it).
- Encourage exploration by providing a variety of engaging toys and materials.

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- Talk with the child often, name and describe items that hold their attention.
- Play imitation games (e.g., clapping hands, stomping feet, etc.).
- Encourage participation in clean-up routines.
- Practice turn-taking.
- Play simple matching and sorting games with toddlers.
- Engage infants in lap games such as Pat-a-Cake or The Wheels on the Bus.
- Encourage Imaginary play (e.g., rocking a baby, preparing food, etc.).
- Explore action games (e.g., Freeze Dance, Hokey Pokey, Follow the Leader, etc.).

Executive Function skills are essential to learning, playing, interacting with others, and managing emotions. Caregivers and early educators should be intentional about planning and providing opportunities for the development of these important skills.

## Guiding Principles

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines Developmentally Appropriate Practice as, “methods that promote each child’s optimal development and learning through a strength-



## TEACHER BOOTCAMP

based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning (NAEYC, 2020, 6). This guide is built upon the principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practice and takes into consideration the unique developmental needs and characteristics of infants and toddlers. The experiences and activities provided in the Learning Beyond Paper curriculum acknowledges the following:

Infants and toddlers learn about the world through nurturing, responsive, and trusting relationships with caring adults. The brain develops through affirming interactions.

Knowledge of and responsiveness to the child and their family members is essential to positive growth and development.

Each child brings unique experiences, preferences, and interests to the classroom. It is essential that they receive consistent and predictable care based on their individual needs, signals, and preferences.

Infants and toddlers are constantly attempting to make sense of the world and benefit from caregivers who support their sense of wonder and encourage playful exploration.

Language has a powerful influence on a young child's development across all areas. Narrating their actions, verbally labeling objects and feelings, singing, and reading activities support their language and communication skills.

## ROLE OF ASSESSMENT

Assessment is an organized way of collecting and measuring information about a particular topic. It plays an integral role in the classroom. Depending on the type utilized, it can yield data that: informs individualized learning goals, shapes classroom instruction, signals the need for further evaluation, or provides suggestions for classroom-wide improvement.

Teaching young children requires a lot of precision. Knowing what to do, when to do it, and generally how to put the pieces together in a way that makes each day full of meaning and opportunity, learning within an emotionally safe space. Teaching is both an art and a craft that can be further honed by continuous learning and reflection cycles.

You may be fortunate enough to have an early childhood coach - either as a separate role or as a part of a position that a director may play. Unlike a sports team or an orchestra conductor, most of your work will not happen in the presence of a coach. There are tools to help you reflect on practices good teachers develop to make children's learning in your classroom the best experience possible.

There are also means to look at quality at a program-wide level. Tools that look at an entire program are also

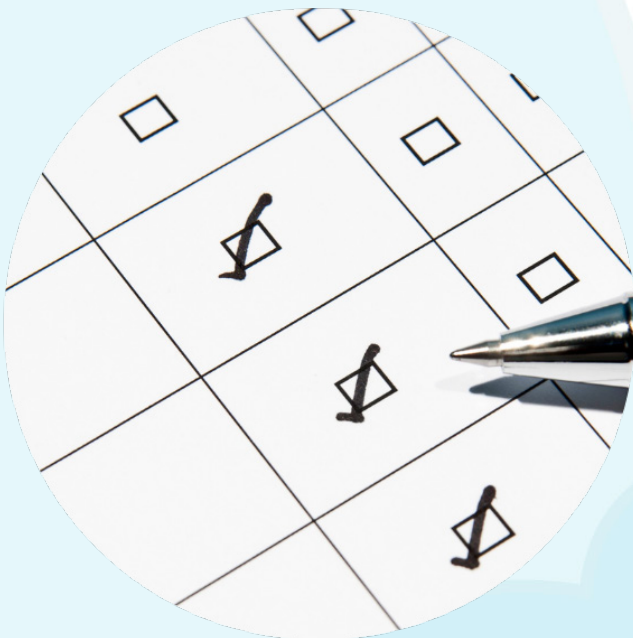
# ROLE OF ASSESSMENT

crucial because greater consistency and quality across all classrooms usually means a better experience for children and families. It can say that the workplace's quality is high, and employee satisfaction is essential to further opportunities and keep valued staff working together and moving in the same direction.

Depending on any federal, state, or local funding your program receives, you or your program may be required to use specific tools as a part of your requirements. Even if required, it is crucial to go beyond the mindset of "I completed this requirement." and use both the tool and the data gathered responsibly. Any time that data is collected, you have an ethical responsibility to children to use that data (information) to help improve yourself and the program for the benefit of children's learning and development.

Included are some common classroom-level and program-level assessments, but note this list may not be exhaustive.

## Child-Level Progress Monitoring and Assessment



### Purpose and Big Picture

Ongoing assessment is an essential component of quality early childhood programs. When teachers have detailed knowledge about their student's developmental skill levels, they can more effectively scaffold or differentiate learning. Progress monitoring and assessment, ongoing throughout the year, offer a way to see all aspects of the child's and class' developmental and skill growth throughout the year. You will have an individual relationship with each child, yet it is important to not let that relationship sway your data collection when assessing or using progress monitoring. Remain neutral, with a clear lens. Later, after data collection, you will interpret the results to understand what you have collected.



## ROLE OF ASSESSMENT

NAEYC Advancing Equity Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators Observe, Document, and Assess Children's Learning and Development Recognize the potential of your own culture and background affecting your judgment when observing, documenting, and assessing children's behavior, learning, or development. Approach a child's confusing or challenging behavior as an opportunity for inquiry. Consider whether these may be behaviors that work well for the child's own home or community context but differ or conflict with your family culture and/or the culture of your setting. How can you adapt your own expectations and learning environment to incorporate each child's cultural way of being? Also, consider the societal and structural perspectives: How might poverty, trauma, inequities, and other adverse conditions affect how children negotiate and respond to their world? How can you help each child build resilience?

Use authentic assessments that seek to identify children's strengths and provide a well-rounded picture of development. For children whose first language is not English, conduct assessments in as many of the children's home languages as possible. If you are required to use an assessment tool that has not been established as reliable or valid for the characteristics of a given child, recognize the limitations of the findings and strive to make sure they are not used as a key factor in high-stakes decisions.

Focus on strengths. Develop the skill to observe a child's environment from the child's perspective. Seek to change what you can about your own behaviors to support that child instead of expecting the child to change first. Recognize that it is often easier to focus on what a child isn't doing compared with peers than it is to see what that child can do in a given context (or could do with support).

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/equity/recommendations-ECE>

### Types of Assessment and Progress Monitoring

#### Progress monitoring assessments:

**Anecdotal Notes** - Narrative writing about exactly what is seen as a child is playing or working.

**Checklists** - A means of noting if a child has completed something, or has a level of skill (e.g., not yet, progressing, mastered)

**Screenings** - provide a "developmental snapshot" of the child, based upon defined standards. They yield information that helps determine individualized learning objectives and the need for formal evaluation

**Work Samples** - A child's work, dated, related to some aspect of development or a standard. Work Samples are sometimes called artifacts, such as a piece of artwork, a photograph of a block structure, a picture, or an audio or video clip.



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## Using Child-Level Assessment Results

Sometimes, various assessments are required to satisfy a supervisor or a funding source. Regardless of the “why” - when data - any sort of assessment or progress monitoring - is collected on a child, you have an ethical responsibility to maintain confidentiality of individual results AND to use that information to benefit the child. It is important to look at various (multiple) data points to see what story the data tells. This is often called triangulating data. Is the child progressing as expected, experiencing unexpected challenges in one area or another? We do not want to depend upon one data point, as it may or may not be an accurate depiction of the child.

It is important to look at individual child results AND aggregate results (look at the entire class) too. This will help you understand where the class is as a whole, which children may need more support in small groups, or if there is a child struggling that may need a different look to understand them better.

These results should be intentionally used as a part of planning. If reviewing and interpreting data is new to you, don't worry. Everyone must start somewhere. Practice makes permanence. Ask your director or a more experienced staff person for support too. This is also an advantage of planning in collaboration with other teachers, because this opportunity can be a place where assessment results are discussed, confidentially, to increase understanding.

## Learning Beyond Paper Progress Monitoring

The LBP Progress Monitoring Tool should be used as described in the Professional Development to understand how children are growing and learning in your classroom. We always want to look at children with a strengths-based perspective - what they CAN do, where their strengths ARE - and build from this. If a child doesn't have a skill, we frame it as “not yet” - indicating a positive frame of reference (“You can't do it yet, but you'll get it. We are going to work on it”).

## Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ)

caregiver - or both. For infants and toddlers, ASQ-3 is available for children of the following age in months: 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 27, 30, 33, and 36. The ASQ-3 is currently available in English, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, French, and Vietnamese.

A second, dedicated screening tool, Ages and Stages Questionnaires: Social-Emotional, Second Edition (ASQ:SE-2) is available to better understand a child's social-emotional development in the areas of self-regulation, compliance, social-communication, adaptive functioning, autonomy, affect, and interaction with people. The ASQ:SE-2 is completed by a parent. For infants and toddlers, the ASQ:SE-2 is available based on

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the following months of age: 2, 6, 12, 18, 24, 30, and 36. It is available in English, Arabic, French, and Spanish. It is rated by the parent as “often or always,” “sometimes,” or “rarely or never.”

Both tools can be used as a paper version or online. The tools have been rigorously tested, and can help identify a child who may be at risk for developmental delays.

For more information and purchase of materials and professional development, start at this website: <https://agesandstages.com/>.

## Classroom-Level Assessments

### **CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) Tool**

The CLASS tool measures caregiver interactions from birth through 12th grade. There are different iterations for various age groups. A caregiver can be in either a home or classroom setting, and denotes the process of teachers and caregivers interacting with children, separate from the content taught.

CLASS is essential because it looks at the experienced interactions a child may have throughout the day with all staff in the classroom - it measures the “how” teachers are going about their practice rather than “what” they are teaching. Children learn from those they have a relationship connection to, which amplifies why the “how” is very important to children’s learning. Relationships are the heart of successful interactions that lead to positive development and learning for children.

Using the CLASS tool to understand how well a classroom is interacting, and to drive teachers to improve their interactions, can be an essential step in making a good classroom GREAT. For children, teachers who promote interactions can make each day better for young children’s learning. Higher quality interactions promote greater readiness for kindergarten and better success down the road - fewer repeated grades, higher graduation rates, and more likely to attend college.

The Infant CLASS tool focuses on important interactions, Responsive Caregiving, with babies from birth to 18 months. Responsive Caregiving is the only domain for this age group. This domain includes the dimensions of Relational Climate, Teacher Sensitivity, Facilitated Exploration, and Early Language Support.

The Toddler CLASS tool, 18 months to 36 months, measures two domains. The first domain, Emotional and Behavior Support, includes the five dimensions of Positive Climate, Negative Climate, Regard for Child Perspectives, Behavior Guidance, and Teacher Sensitivity. The second domain, Engaged Support for

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Learning, includes three dimensions: Facilitation of Learning and Development, Quality of Feedback, and Language Modeling.

For each tool, the item, dimension, and the overall score is rated on a scale from 1 to 7, with scores in the 1-2 range as low, scores in the 3-5 range as middle, and scores of 6-7 as high. Certain domains and dimensions are easier to score higher on, while others are more challenging to score high on.

## Getting Started with CLASS

Your classroom can get started by having a certified CLASS observer come to complete an assessment. The Director often organizes observations, as often a program will have every classroom observed. The assessment will typically take a couple of hours, with the observer carefully watching teachers interact with children throughout the day's routine and taking some breaks from observation. The observer will take notes while trying to remain neutral (not interacting) with children and teachers.

If you haven't taken part in observations much, it can feel a bit nerve-wracking, but try your best to go about your day as naturally as possible. Be yourself. The observer is not looking for perfection from you or your children. Conversely, the observer is looking at how you handle the day and what occurs in the classroom and with children. Your children will notice and react or interact differently than you usually do.

## Receiving Your CLASS Results

The CLASS observation will generate a rating for each dimension and an overall CLASS score for the classroom. If the classroom has more than one teacher, the rating is based on all teachers, as children experience interactions from all teachers in the classroom.

Regardless of the classroom's rating, it is essential to note that having a starting point - a baseline - is vital to growth. CLASS is about observed practice, not your value. Don't take it personally, even though it can feel personal because teaching is a very personal calling.

You are on a path to improving - all professionals should continue to improve. You need to know where you are so that you can make a plan for where you would like to go - where you would like to grow.





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Remember, there are some domains and dimensions that are easier to score higher on, while others are challenging to score high on. Most importantly, though, some small improvements to interactions can have grand changes in children's outcomes. Keep focusing on how to improve your "how" by taking part in training such as MMCI (Making the Most of Childhood Interactions), or other opportunities available in person or online from Teachstone-approved trainers.

For more information and purchase of materials and professional development, start at this website: <https://teachstone.com/>.

## Environmental Rating Scales

Environmental rating scales look at the quality of a group program for a particular age of children. The Infant/Toddler Environmental Rating Scale(R), Third Edition (ITERS-3) is a tool to assess infant and toddler classrooms (birth to 36 months).

Like CLASS, ITERS-3 is observational and uses a trained observer. The ITERS-3 includes six areas - subscales that look at a total of 33 items. The subscales are space and furnishings, personal care routines, language and books, activities, interaction, and program structure.

The results of the ITERS-3 can give a teacher information about how to improve their program to benefit children's experience. It can also shed light for a director to better understand the classroom environment and workplace characteristics (e.g., dedicated break room or planning time away from children) that are important to staff longevity.

There are ERS for preschool classrooms, school-age programs, and family child care homes. Some programs use ERS and CLASS in combination to have a multifocal lens on their program's quality. More information about environmental rating scales, including the purchase of materials and professional development, can be found here: <https://ers.fpg.unc.edu/environment-rating-scales>.

## Program-Level Assessment

Program-level assessments are important to program-wide reflection and change, viewing cross-classroom inconsistencies, and gathering information from varying sources. A program-level assessment usually follows a periodic basis (e.g., annual, semi-annual) as a way to take a pulse of the program. Some program-level assessments are used in conjunction with one another, or with classroom-level assessments to give a complete picture of how the program as a whole and parts are functioning.

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## Early Education Essential Survey

The Early Education Essentials Survey, developed by the Ounce of Prevention Fund with the University of Chicago, is a newer tool developed to look at organizational conditions needed to grow quality to a level where the children benefit at the levels research shows are possible. Modeled after an elementary-age tool initially designed around the research on school improvement, the Early Education Essential Survey documents strong research.

This tool surveys teachers/staff as well as parents. The surveys, conducted with the University of Chicago, measure organizational conditions around six components or relational trust: effective instructional leaders, collaborative teachers, involved families, supportive environment, ambitious instruction, and parent voice. The resulting reports and data-use and improvement tools to make plans for change and improvement over time.

More information about the Early Education Essentials Survey can be found here: <https://www.theounce.org/early-education-essentials/>.

## Program Quality Assessments (PQAs)

The Program Quality Assessment (PQA), developed by High Scope, has several iterations (i.e., infant-toddler, preschool, family child care). PQAs have seven domains to review program quality and teacher strengths: learning environment, daily routine, adult-child interaction, curriculum planning and assessment, parent involvement and family services, staff qualifications and development, and program management.

Information about the PQAs can be found here: <https://highscope.org/our-practice/child-assessment/pqa/>.

## Program Accreditation

Early Childhood Program Accreditation is a way for your program to self-reflect on practices. When ready, an outside entity (reviewer(s)) will evaluate the quality of your program based on its criteria. If your program selects a reputable accreditation, it may attract families and high-quality staff. Program accreditation may also be used in your state to determine funding levels or other criteria related to a local, state, or federal funding stream. If so, the funding stream usually determines the accreditation bodies that it accepts, so be sure the program accreditation your program seeks is on the approved list, if such a list exists.

### NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation

The NAEYC program accreditation has been around for more than 30 years. There are four stages: enroll and self-study, apply and self-assess, candidate for the site visit, and maintain accreditation. View the ten program standards central to the current accreditation model here: <https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/>

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files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/accreditation/early-learning/overview\_of\_the\_standards.pdf.

For detailed information about NAEYC's program accreditation, please go here: <https://www.naeyc.org/accreditation/early-learning-program-accreditation>.

## **Accredited Professional Preschool Learning Environment (APPLE)**

APPLE accreditation has existed for more than 20 years and focuses on balancing quality standards and the financial impact of implementing quality standards. There are five steps: enroll, self-study, on-site verification, accreditation, and accreditation continuance. Find information about APPLE here: <https://www.facem.org/about-apple/>.

## **Family Engagement**

The family is the key to building a relationship with an infant/toddler. The child cannot speak for him/herself, and we value the family as the child's first teacher. The child's family has the information needed to provide a safe, nurturing, learning environment where the child's individual needs are met.

Engaging families builds a partnership where there is trust, respect and a common goal of positive communication to meet the child's needs. As you learn more and more about the child and family, the relationship becomes stronger and positively supports the child's growth and development.

Family engagement starts with an understanding that families are diverse and interactions and opportunities for involvement need to support individual family choices.

A partnership is when each party has the opportunity to be involved in decision making when asking for a commitment of time and involvement in program activities.



# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

## NAEYC Advancing Equity Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators Establish Reciprocal Relationships with Families

Embrace the primary role of families in children's development and learning. Recognize and acknowledge family members based on how families define their members and their roles. Seek to learn about and honor each family's child-rearing values, languages (including dialects), and culture. Gather information about the hopes and expectations families have for their children's behavior, learning, and development so that you can support their goals.

Uphold every family's right to make decisions for and with their children. If a family's desire appears to conflict with your professional knowledge or presents an ethical dilemma, work with the family to learn more, identify common goals, and strive to establish mutually acceptable strategies.

Be curious, making time to learn about the families with whom you work. This includes learning about their languages, customs, activities, values, and beliefs so you can provide a culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining learning environment. It requires intentionally reaching out to families who, for a range of reasons, may not initiate or respond to traditional approaches (e.g., paper and pencil/electronic surveys, invitations to open houses, parent-teacher conferences) to interact with educators.

Maintain consistently high expectations for family involvement, being open to multiple and varied forms of engagement and providing intentional and responsive supports. Ask families how they would like to be involved and what supports may be helpful. Families may face challenges (e.g., fear due to immigration status, less flexibility during the workday, child care or transportation issues) that may require a variety of approaches to building engagement. Recognize that it is your responsibility as an educator to connect with families successfully so that you can provide the most culturally and linguistically sustaining learning environment for each child.

Communicate the value of multilingualism to all families. All children benefit from the social and cognitive advantages of multilingualism and multiliteracy. Make sure families of emergent bilinguals understand the academic benefits and the significance of supporting their child's home language as English is introduced through the early childhood program, to ensure their children develop into fully bilingual and biliterate adults.

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/equity/recommendations-ECE>

## Beginning the Year

Starting the year on the right foot by focusing on building the relationship. This begins when the child joins your program, regardless of the time of year. It also occurs when the child transitions to a new classroom. They may have familiarity with the program, but each new set of teachers must develop or strengthen their connections with families. Getting to know each child's personality and strengths with the support of their family helps you plan better, because you can know the child, their interests, and what their family knows about how to work with their child best.



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Teachers need to develop their plan, with guidance from the program's leadership, and make it their own. One valuable strategy that many programs use is to have consistency in activities, such as open houses and conferences, sending consistent messaging to families about the class' activities, or daily processes - and also room for teachers to individualize their approach within the classroom. This way, there is some consistency for families as children advance from class to class, or for families who have children in multiple rooms - and opportunity for individual teacher personalization.

## Connecting Strategies

Here are some common, positive strategies to building a positive connection with the families of the children you teach.

- Send a Welcome letter to the family prior to the beginning of the program.
- Schedule a time to meet with the family to find out about their child's daily routines and interests.
- If you do not speak the families' language check with your Director to request a translator.
- Ask families their preferred name and how to pronounce (if needed).
- Express your goal of wishing to be a partner in their child's learning experiences.
- Ask open -ended questions to learn more about the child's schedule, needs, and interests.
- Ask families their preferred method of communication to ensure home and program information is shared daily at the beginning and end of the day.
- Introduce the family to all adults who are assigned to their child's room.
- Post pictures of room staff and provide a short biography.
- Ask the family for a picture to display on a family board.
- Smile and make eye contact as you greet the family by name.
- At the end of each day share something positive about the child that happened during the day.
- Remind families they are always welcome to visit. Authenticity

Partnering with families with authenticity is both a disposition and a belief. As a disposition, you are intentional with strategies to connect with families, and believe they are a partner who brings value to your work and into the life of their child. When authenticity is a belief, you will have a true desire to partner with the family.

For a teacher, being authentic means you continually work to build and maintain trust in the partnership and a desire to provide a quality program for the child in a safe, nurturing environment where the child's/ family's needs and interests are priority. Relationships have their ups and downs, and partnering with families is no different. As an authentic and intentional partner, you strive to maintain relationships, make changes as needed, and agree with the family to keep the child as the focus. The stronger your connection

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is with a family, the easier it is to have conversations when the topic is not as light-hearted - such as if there are developmental concerns or anything a family may be more sensitive about.

## Partnering

The following are strategies for partnering with families in an authentic and genuine way, particularly when you need to communicate with them about their little one:

- When communicating with families, make a list of points you wish to cover.
- Introduce yourself and share the purpose of the communication. Is it to share information (more one-way) or discuss a concern?
- Begin your sentences with genuine positive points about their child and use “I” statements such as “I have noticed”, “I am wondering”, “I am concerned”, this is less likely to cause defensiveness.
- Be sure to reinforce that you recognize the family is their child’s first teacher and as an educator the knowledge they can provide is important to the child’s progress.
- Listen first, maintain eye contact, and respond by restating what you believe was shared.
- Invite families to take part in decision making when discussing a concern.
- Send a follow-up email thanking the family for taking the time to meet with you summarizing decisions which may have been made.
- Reflect weekly on the ways you have reached out to families in building a positive relationship.



## Understanding Perspectives

Developing a positive relationship with families starts with empathy. Consider the perspective of a family who is dropping off their child for the first time trusting they will be in a safe, nurturing environment. Additionally, family perspectives come from the parent(s) and their unique experiences related to where and how they were raised, including cultural and religious beliefs. Sometimes, it is easy to connect with families who are similar to you in one way or another, but ALL families and children you work with deserve understanding and differences in perspectives is healthy. Remember that as a professional, you have an obligation to work well with children’s families as the child’s first - and most important - teacher.

What is empathy? Here are two definitions related to the early childhood education profession:

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**“Empathy is the ability to feel what the child or family member is feeling, understand what the child or family member is feeling, communicate that understanding to them, and then respond in ways that meet their needs.”**

Peck, Maude, Brotherson. (2015). Understanding Preschool Teachers’ Perspectives on Empathy: A Qualitative Inquiry. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 43, 169-179. Retrieved from: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10643-014-0648-3#ref-CR6>)

**“Empathy also helps us understand people whose values, views, and behaviors are different from our own.”**

(Calloway-Thomas, C. (2010). Empathy in the global world: An intercultural perspective. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Retrieved from: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10643-014-0648-3#ref-CR6>).

## Perspective-Building Strategies

- Practice “reading” non-verbal messages from families, with the understanding that non-verbal messages can be different from region to region, or based on cultural background.
- Get to know your own non-verbal messages. Sometimes, if what we hear is not similar to our own experience, our faces or body reacts in a way that sends a message of non-acceptance or discomfort. Practice keeping neutral or positive non-verbal messaging, so that there is no unintentional judgment felt by a family.
- Invite families to share information about themselves and their child by asking them to complete a survey. Ask your Director for assistance in developing a survey if the program does not presently have one.
- Ask open-ended questions to provide the family with the opportunity to choose what they wish to share about their family structure, culture, interests, hobbies.
- Create a welcoming atmosphere for everyone and celebrate who they are - similarities and differences.
- Consider families as a partner in decision making as they know their child’s strengths and needs.

A list of community agencies might be helpful to connect families to resources when families express a need. Developing a partnership with families requires an ability for the teacher and family to listen, comprehend and respond with one another. You may or may not speak the language(s) of the children and families you work with. Even if you do not, you can be open to connecting with the family, even though additional strategies and effort will be required on both ends.

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When there is a language barrier there needs to be accommodations to ensure lines of communication are open in both directions. The challenge is that you speak a different language than the family, not that they don't speak your language - an important perspective, especially if you speak the dominant language and the family does not. For example, you can say, "I speak English, and the family speaks a Mayan dialect," rather than "They don't speak English." This reframes the challenge as a need to find ways of communicating rather than a dominance for one language over another.

The United States is unique in that there is not a national language, and in the past many decades, the understanding of keeping home or cultural language, while learning the language(s) in the geographic area you reside in both have value. Home language is a part of a child's roots - a connection to the family you see as well as their ancestors.

## Teachers and Families: Many Languages

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## Language-Related Strategies

- Collaborate with agencies serving families who may not speak the dominant language to access resources for yourself as you begin your journey to develop a partnership demonstrating an authentic interest in learning about each family's culture. Sometimes, these agencies offer translation services.
- Demonstrate authenticity by creating an environment where families/children see a reflection of themselves through pictures, toys, books, learning experiences.
- Begin to learn phrases of greeting in the family's language and each day make a point to connect with the family for an informal chat.
- If you do not speak the child's language, find out some important basic words, such as hello, hungry/eat, thirsty/drink, bathroom, outside, inside, so that you can understand the child's basic needs. Write the words/phrases phonetically (how they sound) so that you can practice using them.
- Use visuals to aid communicating, and speak slower than normal pace if a family member understands some of your language. As someone is learning another language, it may be understandable to them if at a slower pace.
- Get suggestions from families of music you can play during greeting time that they find welcoming.
- Post signs in languages of the families you serve.
- Translate forms used in your classroom into languages of families you serve.
- Work with your program administrator to have a staff person who speaks a common language with families or a translator available for parent meetings, or even better, each day at drop off and pick-up times, in order to ensure clear and timely communication. If your program has many different languages represented, this becomes a bit more challenging, but it is important to coordinate with intentionality and show an effort to create equity.

Don't give up. Be open to continuing to find better and better solutions, learning more, and keeping the child's growth and development needs at the heart of things. Your intentional effort is likely to be recognized by the family, even if there are challenges or misunderstandings that may occur.

Look for resources, such as the two listed below, for different ideas to create a warm, inviting environment for your families. Resource Titles:

Look to great Making Students and Families Feel Welcome (<https://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/welcome>)

Many Languages, One Classroom: Supporting Children in Superdiverse Settings (<https://www.naeyc.org/>)

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[resources/pubs/tyc/dec2018/supporting-children-superdiverse-settings\)](#)

Infant / Toddler ResourcesEarly Head Start National Resource Center - Useful ideas for early childhood professionals working with infants and toddlers. <http://ecels-healthychildcarepa.org/resources/national-childcare-resource-centers/item/375-early-head-start-national-resource-center.html>

Lally, J. R. (2000). Infants have their own curriculum: A responsive approach to curriculum planning for infants and toddlers. <https://ccrnj.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Infants-Have-Their-Own-Curriculum.pdf>

California Department of Education Infant/Toddler Curriculum Framework - The Infant/Toddler Curriculum Framework is to provide early childhood professionals with a structure they can use to make informed decisions about curriculum practices. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/itframework.asp>

Community Playthings - Resources and articles on Early Childhood Developmentally Appropriate Practice [http://www.communityplaythings.com/resources/Information on Milestones & Schedules for Parents with Infants & Toddlers \(Ages 0-3\)](http://www.communityplaythings.com/resources/Information%20on%20Milestones%20&%20Schedules%20for%20Parents%20with%20Infants%20&%20Toddlers%20(Ages%200-3)) articles/2005/infants-have-their-own-curriculum

Center for Disease Control and Prevention - Information on Milestones & Schedules for Parents with Infants & Toddlers (Ages 0-3) <https://www.cdc.gov/parents/infants/milestones.html>

West Ed. Center for Child and Family ServicesInfant and Toddler Reflective Curriculum Planning, Part I - An archived webinar translating research into teacher practice to improve program quality for infants and toddlers. <https://vimeo.com/88925780>

National Training Institute for Child Care Health Consultants - Useful links for child care health consultants and early educators regarding health / health consultation. <http://ncemch.org/child-care-health-consultants/index.php> .



For additional helpful information and links, visit the "Resources" section of the Teacher's Guide online.

