

Infant and Toddler Resource Guide

Children’s earliest relationships and experiences directly impact their physical well-being along with their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Infants and toddlers learn about their world through nurturing, responsive relationships with people and meaningful interactions with their environments. Early experiences affect the quality of brain architecture by establishing either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for the learning, health and behavior that follow (Center on the Developing Child, 2007). “The foundation of brain development is social and emotional development grounded in caring relationships” (NAEYC, 2017). Providers can support children’s developmental milestones and emotional security with lots of positive interaction and age-appropriate activities that inspire curiosity, encourage play and exploration, and provide a critical foundation for future learning and development.










Characteristics of Infant and Toddler Development

Infants and Toddlers: relationships and attachment; actively engaged with environments; play and exploration using all senses; social and emotional development; and inquiry-based learning
















Caregivers: warm and responsive relationships; back-and-forth interactions; meaningful communications; developmentally appropriate practices; age-appropriate learning; kind and nurturing; and support development





















Early Learning and Development Standards Key

| | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|---|---|
|  | Approaches to Learning (AL) |  | Cognitive Development (CO) |
|  | Creative Development (CR) |  | Language and Literacy (LL) |
|  | Mathematics (MA) |  | Physical Development and Wellness (PW) |
|  | Science (SC) |  | Social and Emotional Development (SE) |
|  | Social Studies (SS) | Note: Domain icons in the next section indicate integrated learning throughout the day | |

Examples of Integrated Learning Throughout the Day

| How children may exhibit these skills | How early care and education providers can encourage these skills |
|--|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Daily Routine: Arrival</p> <div style="text-align: center;">     </div> | |
| <p>Reach toward caregiver while transitioning from parent using verbal or nonverbal communication and cues. For example, smile, cry, turn away or toward, reach out arms, laugh, nod head yes, etc.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Greet each child and family member joyfully. Make eye contact and respond immediately and consistently to child’s communication, cues, and needs. ▪ Gradually develop secure bonding and attachment. For example, soothe and comfort, eye contact, gentle touch, soft voice, etc. ▪ Establish welcome routines with flexible timing that encourage a sense of belonging. For example, soft lighting, quiet music, gentle greeting, hello song, etc. |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Daily Routine: Meals</p> <div style="text-align: center;">       </div> | |
| <p>Sign “more” and say “more” during snack time. Use a scoop to self-serve strawberries, attempt to count strawberries, and pass small bowl to a friend. Help clean up spilled milk.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notice verbal and nonverbal cues when children are hungry or finished eating and offer safe and secure attachment during mealtimes. ▪ Maintain sustained eye contact, smile, and engage in conversation with children during mealtimes to promote communication and connection. ▪ Provide healthy portions of nutritionally balanced meals with age-appropriate tools/utensils for manipulation. |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Daily Routine: Caregiving</p> <div style="text-align: center;">      </div> | |
| <p>Pat bottom and walks to changing table. Child says, “Ba-ba” and waits for bottle. Smiles and closes eyes while eating.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Respond immediately and respectfully to child’s verbal and nonverbal cues. For example, looking uncomfortable when wet, rubbing eyes when sleepy, crying when hungry, change in mood, etc. ▪ Engage in back-and-forth nonverbal communication with children. For example, using touch to deliver a sense of warmth, pleasure, and respect; maintain eye contact, smile, show surprise, etc. ▪ Confirm understanding of children’s communication requests during caregiving routines by asking questions like “Do you need a new diaper?” or “I see that you look like your diaper is dirty, let’s get a clean one.” ▪ Recognize caregiving routine as a crucial moment to develop secure and meaningful relationships with children. Encourage children to practice personal care and health routines daily with increasing independence. |

| How children may exhibit these skills | How early care and education providers can encourage these skills |
|--|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Daily Routine: Transitions</p> <div style="text-align: center;">      </div> | |
| <p>Infants Enjoy a few minutes of tummy time and a story before feeding. Maintain eye contact, kick legs, and coo during feeding. Push bottle away, rub eyes, and fall asleep.</p> <p>Toddlers Gather blanket, stuffed animal, and bottle/sippy cup before resting quietly on mat. Hug stuffed animal, stroke blanket, and suck thumb before falling asleep.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish clear, predictable rituals to engage children in routine activities. For example, tummy time before feeding; soft lighting and story before rest; clean-up song before tidying up. Recognize transition time as an opportunity to enhance social and emotional development and help children develop self-regulation skills. Offer verbal and nonverbal support, modeling, and assistance during a variety of transitions such as clean-up, preparing for meals and rest, going outside, etc. For example, picture schedule with simple step-by-step directions, items accessible to children, etc. |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Daily Routine: Whole Group</p> <div style="text-align: center;">       </div> | |
| <p>Gather for a variety of group activities. Enjoy conversation, songs, finger-plays, music and movement, and stories together. Children may respond verbally or nonverbally. For example, eyes track voices or sounds, kick legs or clap hands, smile and laugh, listen attentively, vocalize, sing and dance along to music, etc.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to verbal and nonverbal communication. Use daily routines to have positive back and forth (serve and return) interactions with children. Sing or play songs, nursery rhymes, and finger-plays together. Enjoy music and movement activities daily. Tell and retell familiar stories using props, puppets, etc. Engage in interactive/shared reading daily. |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Daily Routine: Story Time</p> <div style="text-align: center;">     </div> | |
| <p>Choose book from basket and touch and explore book. Attempt to turn pages and look at pictures. May respond with verbal and nonverbal cues. For example, crawl toward book, put book in mouth, put book on head, walk around classroom holding book, pat cover of book, look at pictures, smile, laugh, etc.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a variety of cloth books, board books, and fiction and nonfiction picture books for exploration. Ensure that books are accessible to children. Respond to children's interest in books and stories by engaging in interactive lap-reading daily. Show and describe pictures using rich vocabulary. Point to and talk about illustrations and print. Tell and retell familiar stories using puppets, props, etc. Ask questions about the stories, pictures, characters, and events in familiar books. Model appreciation and enthusiasm for reading, books, stories, and songs. |

| How children may exhibit these skills | How early care and education providers can encourage these skills |
|---|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Daily Routine: Outdoor Experiences</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> | |
| <p>Crawl, scoot, run, jump, and climb on small jungle gym on the playground.</p> <p>Observe changing seasons and nature (such as birds eating at bird feeder; butterflies on flowers; ducks in a puddle; rabbit in the snow; etc.)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide outside play on age-appropriate equipment where safe risks are possible in all kinds of weather. ▪ Include opportunities for walking, running, riding, pushing, pulling, and climbing to promote different physical activity skills. ▪ Take walks and enjoy nature together. Observe change in weather and seasons. |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Daily Routine: Rest</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> | |
| <p>Settle in caregivers lap for a quiet story. Turn head to notice soft lighting and classical music.</p> <p>Reach for stuffed animal and blanket before falling asleep.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage healthy sleep and rest behaviors by providing consistent, daily, and age-appropriate opportunities for rest/quiet time. ▪ Promote a restful environment with soft lighting, quiet music, a favorite story, cozy blanket, etc. ▪ Offer alternative activities for children who do not sleep, such as quiet reading or listening to books, quiet play with stuffed animals or fidgets, looking at family photo album, etc. |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Daily Routine: Departure/Family Engagement</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> | |
| <p>Reach for family member/caregiver and smile during end of day transition.</p> <p>Show family member/caregiver work from earlier in the day, such as painting, drawing, block structure, sensory experience, favorite book, etc.)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Invite families to share elements of their heritage, cultures, customs, and traditions. Ensure that the learning environment is inclusive of diverse family backgrounds. ▪ Encourage opportunities for children and families to share in learning together. For example, display children’s artwork, drawings, or writing; share photographs or videos of children engaged in learning throughout the day; allow children to bring home a favorite book to share, etc. |

Individual or Small Group Learning Experiences

(May be planned or spontaneous)

How children may exhibit these skills:



Infants

Blocks/Building

Bang wooden blocks together.
Crawl in and out of large cardboard boxes placed on the floor.
Move and sit near friends while exploring.

Sensory Exploration

Put hands in cereal, dirt, finger paint, etc.
Rub and clap hands together then pat on table to explore a variety of textures.

Writing

Hold rattle in one hand then transfer it to the other. Bang rattle on table and reach for crayons in basket.

Mathematics

Smile, kick legs and laugh when caregiver sings *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe* while bouncing and clapping to the rhythm.

Science Investigation

Look at or crawl toward object of interest placed within reach, put object in mouth and throw object on floor when finished exploring.

Dramatic Play

Crawl toward colorful scarves on the floor. Settle in caregivers lap to look at reflection in mirror while playing peek-a-boo behind scarves. Giggle and touch scarves.

Toddlers

Blocks/Building

Build a small block structure using a variety of age-appropriate materials (such as wooden blocks, Duplo, vehicles, linking cubes, rocks, etc.). Then choose to work in other play areas after knocking down the structure.

Sensory Exploration

Scoop and pour water into a variety of different sized containers at sensory table. Dunk hands in water, splash, and cry when sleeves get wet. Dry hands and hang smock when finished.

Writing

Scribble a picture using a green crayon and marker. Dictate message: *I love dinosaurs*. Fold paper and place in cubby when finished working.

Mathematics

Connect linking-cubes together in an ABAB pattern (red, blue, red, blue) and measure to see whose is longest.
Use linking cubes in other areas of the classroom for pretend play. For example, as a magic wand in dramatic play, as a tall tower or fence for zoo animals in construction area, etc.

Science Investigation

Show curiosity, engage in conversation, and experiment with a variety of natural materials in a sensory bin (such as leaves, sticks, shells, pinecones, stones, etc.)

Dramatic Play

Play dress-up using colorful scarves. For example, drape scarves on head; wrap scarves around waist; use scarf as a baby carrier. Observe friends and reflections in mirror. Say, "I look so beautiful!"

Individual or Small Group Learning Experiences

(May be planned or spontaneous)

How early care and education providers can encourage these skills:

- Provide an environment for children to explore and experience by engaging all their senses and offer a variety of familiar and new materials for open-ended, creative play.
- Provide ample amounts of materials that are readily accessible for children to explore.
- Be flexible within each activity following the children's lead regardless of the original plans and provide ample time and space for extended, concentrated play.
- Offer opportunities for individual, small and large group exploration, and meaningful peer interactions.
- Place infants next to one another to foster interest and relationship building. Encourage collaboration among toddlers and celebrate working together. *Example:* "Wow, look at the picnic you packed together! Where will you go to enjoy your picnic?"
- Engage in work/play with children to learn about their interests and take advantage of opportunities for spontaneous, authentic learning.
- Show interest in what children are doing. Encourage them to revisit familiar experiences and to try out new ideas and strategies. Support children when they are frustrated and encourage them to try again.
- Encourage sustained investigation, experimentation, problem-solving, and persistence.

Tools and Resources

[CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Information for Parents of Infants & Toddlers](#)

[ECLKC Head Start: Resources for Infant/Toddler Learning Environments](#)

[Zero to Three: How to Care for Infants and Toddlers in Groups](#)

[Zero to Three: Supporting Language and Literacy Skills from 0-12 Months](#)

[First Five Years: Brain Development](#)

[University of Missouri: Infant and Toddler Basics: Development During the First Three Years](#)

[NAEYC: Caring For and About Infants and Toddlers](#)

[Child Care Technical Assistance Network: Infant/Toddler Resource Guide](#)

[Cox Campus Emergent Literacy Training](#)

Books to Promote Learning and Development for Infants and Toddlers

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|--|--|
| <p>Language and Literacy</p> <p><i>Baby Says</i> by John Steptoe <i>Besos for Baby</i> by Jen Arena <i>Brown Bear, Brown Bear</i> by Bill Martin, Jr. <i>Goodnight Moon</i> by Margaret Wise Brown <i>Little Blue Truck</i> by Alice Shertle <i>Moo, Baa, La La La</i> by Sandra Boynton <i>Opposites</i> by Sandra Boynton <i>Peekaboo Morning</i> by Rachael Isadora <i>Peek-a-Who?</i> by Nina Laden <i>Treasury of Nursery Rhymes</i> by Lucy Cousins <i>Where Is the Green Sheep?</i> by Mem Fox</p> | <p>Mathematics</p> <p><i>Big Little and Higher! Higher!</i> by Leslie Patricelli <i>Black and White</i> by Tana Hoben <i>Dear Zoo</i> by Rod Campbell <i>Counting Kisses</i> by Karen Katz <i>Eric Carle’s 123</i> by Eric Carle <i>My Very First Book of Shapes</i> by Eric Carle <i>My First Math Book: An Introduction to Math Symbols for Babies and Toddlers</i> by Christine Kimiko Dillard <i>Ten, Nine, Eight</i> by Molly Bang</p> |
| <p>Social Studies</p> <p><i>All Kinds of People and Families</i> by Shelley Rotner <i>Antiracist Baby</i> by Ibram X. Kendi <i>Babies Around the World</i> by Puck <i>Everywhere Babies</i> by Susan Meyers Families by Rena D. Grossman <i>The Family Book</i> by Todd Parr <i>Full, Full, Full of Love</i> by Trish Cooke <i>One World, One Day</i> by Barbara Kerley <i>The Skin You Live In</i> by Michael Tyler</p> | <p>Science</p> <p><i>ABC Science book</i> by Anjali Joshi <i>Baby Anatomy</i> by Johnathon Litton <i>Hello, World! Solar System</i> by Jill McDonald <i>How Does a Butterfly Grow?</i> by DK <i>The Little Recycler</i> by Jan Gerardi <i>My Farm Friends</i> by Wendell Monor <i>Robots, Robots, Everywhere</i> by Sue Fliess <i>Rocket Science for Babies</i> by Chris Ferrie <i>Touch and Learn: Things That Go</i> by Becky Davies <i>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</i> by Eric Carle</p> |
| <p>Social and Emotional Development</p> <p><i>Baby Faces</i> by Margaret Miller <i>Baby Happy Baby Sad</i> by Linda Patricellei <i>The Color Monster</i> by Anna Llenas <i>I Can Share</i> by Karen Katz <i>Grumpy Bird</i> by Jeremy Tankard <i>Hands Are Not for Hitting</i> by Elizabeth Verdickem <i>I Like Myself</i> by Karen Beaumont <i>Lots of Feelings</i> by Shelly Rotner <i>No No Yes Yes</i> by Linda Patricellei <i>Tiger Days</i> by M.H. Clark <i>Words Are Not for Hurting</i> by Elizabeth Verdickem</p> | <p>Fun Books for Interactive Reading</p> <p><i>Dear Zoo</i> by Rod Campbell <i>Hug</i> by Jez Alborough <i>More, More, More Said the Baby</i> by Vera B. Williams <i>My Car</i> by Byron Barton <i>Peekaboo</i> by Taro Gomi <i>Peekaboo Bedtime</i> by Rachael Isadora <i>Please, Baby, Please</i> by Spike Lee & Tonya Lewis Lee <i>Quick as a Cricket</i> by Audrey Wood <i>Where’s Spot</i> by Eric Hill</p> |

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National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2017). *Caring Relationships: The Heart of Early Brain Development*. Retrieved January 30, 2023, from <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/may2017/caring-relationships-heart-early-brain-development>

