

The Consultant Connection



A Child Care Provider's Link to Quality Care in Early Childhood

Service Delivery Area 8:

Peoria, Tazewell, Woodford, Fulton, Bureau, LaSalle, Stark, Putnam, & Marshall Counties

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New Year's Resolutions for Infant/Toddler Teachers

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Every year, at this time, many of us think about making New Year's resolutions, providing a focus for personal changes. This year, you may want to think about making some professional New Year's resolutions to focus on your work as a caregiver of infants and toddlers.



Excerpt: **Beyond the Journal** *Young Children on the Web* • January 2008 by Dona R. Britt and Linda Groves Gillespie

REFLECT- Think about the partnerships you have with the families of the children in your care. Consider ways you can strengthen those relationships. Asking questions and listening to parents' responses is one of the best ways to build a relationship. Try to stop yourself from giving advice and just listen; practice showing empathy and understanding.

WATCH- Babies need people who watch them closely, noticing and responding to their newly developing skills. Be sure to respond to their successes. Your smile and expressions of joy in the child's accomplishment help him or her build positive self-esteem while encouraging her to continue trying new tasks. When sitting with an infant or toddler, try to follow his lead by repeating the child's actions, words, and sounds. Watching, responding, and sharing power with children during play promotes their feelings of control, allowing them to direct the play while giving you an opportunity to watch and join in as they share their interests and skills.



CHANGE- As you watch and evaluate each child’s developing skills, think about changes you may need to make in the physical environment. Is the space adequate for the rapid development that occurs during this period of birth to 3? You might need to rearrange furniture so new crawlers and beginning walkers have safe places to move about, practice pulling up, and cruise. Step back and look at the overall room. Lie on your back or get on your knees to see the space from a baby’s point of view. How busy are the walls? What and how much décor is hanging from the ceiling? Is the environment over stimulating for very young children who are not yet able to regulate their senses? Are there private places where one or two children can play without being disturbed? Remember to introduce changes slowly and with the toddlers’ help—they too have ownership in the room.

ADD TOYS & MATERIALS- Is there enough variety to meet children’s developing skills? As you watch the children use their skills, think about the materials and toys you can add to provide opportunities for practice. Babies learn through their senses and love to feel different textures and materials. Toys and objects of polished wood, metal, cork, sandpaper, felt, velvet, and suede provide wonderful sensory exploration opportunities. Arrange like toys together and label shelves with both pictures and words to help the infants and toddlers put things back in their places and begin building literacy skills. Remove toys and other materials that no longer challenge or interest the children.

Include duplicates of all toys and materials, when possible, to reduce conflict and offer opportunities for parallel play. Review and update activities, replacing learning experiences and activities or adapting them to meet the changing skills of the infants and toddlers in your care.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF- Increase your knowledge about infants, toddlers, and their families by regularly reading one new book or article about an area of infant and toddler care or development—physical, social emotional, or cognitive development; brain development research; the importance of relationships in the lives of infants and toddlers.

Don’t Forget to Play: The Importance of Play In Early Childhood

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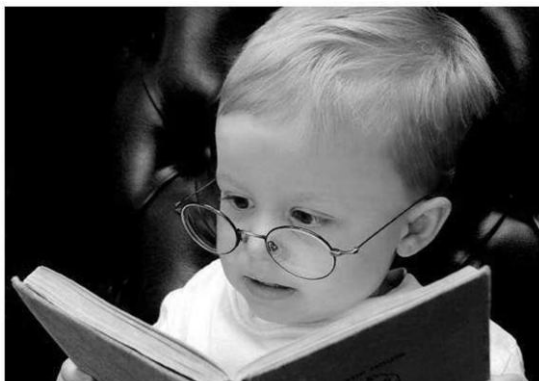
Play is so vital to optimal child development that it has been recognized by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right of every child. However, its value has been diminished by the promotion of hundreds of “smart baby products” and the misconception that the earlier children begin to master the basic elements of reading, such as phonics and letter recognition, the more likely they are to succeed in school. (Continued, Page 3)

Kindergarten education has become heavily focused on teaching literacy and other academic skills, and preschool is rapidly following suit. Our society has been led to believe that play is a waste of time. As a result, directors and teachers are feeling more and more pressure to focus on the "3 R's," and limit unstructured play.

Play is the most effective and powerful way for young children to learn. Often it is said that play is the work of children, the primary method for them to learn about themselves, others, and their world. Scientists have found evidence that play can sculpt the brain and build denser webs of neural connections. This means, when we play we literally exercise our brain cells. The nerve cells in the brain actually thicken and grow as we play.

"Knowledge arises neither from objects nor the child, but from interactions between the child and those objects."

-- Jean Piaget



Learning that Occurs During Play

- ✓ Blocks and other building materials encourage creativity, reproduce places and experiences in a child's world, develop eye-hand coordination and motor control, and encourage discovery and mastery of mathematical and scientific findings for the child.
- ✓ Cooking activities develop small motor coordination and introduce pre-math and reading readiness.
- ✓ Dramatic play encourages the child to try various roles, to interact appropriately with peers, and to practice social verbal communication.
- ✓ Play with plants, animals and other things in the natural environment, encourages an understanding of the world of nature.
- ✓ Unstructured Art activities provide a way for the child to express feelings and ideas. They assist in the development of fine motor control and skills in handling tools.
- ✓ Manipulatives encourage eye-hand coordination and the seeing of similarities and differences in color, size, and shape. They also help develop visual memory, practice in classification, and individual activity and self-reliance.
- ✓ Water and sand play provides the opportunity to develop small muscle coordination and eye-hand coordination. It also provides for cooperation and stimulates verbal communication. It helps to regulate mood.

Adapted from: *Your Active Child: How to Boost Physical, Emotional, and Cognitive Development through Age-Appropriate Activity*, Rae Pica, (McGraw-Hill, 2003)

Transitioning within Programs

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Caring for our Children recommends that caregivers and teachers should take into consideration the individual needs of children when transitioning them to a new indoor and outdoor learning environment. The transitioning child/children should be offered the opportunity to visit the new space with a familiar caregiver/teacher with enough time to allow them to display comfort in the new space. The program should allow time for communication with the families regarding the process and for each child to follow through a comfortable time line of adaptation to the new indoor and outdoor learning/play environment, caregiver/teachers, and peers. Children need time to manipulate, explore and familiarize themselves with the new space and caregivers/teachers. This should be done before they are part of a new group to allow them time to explore to their personal satisfaction.

Eating is a primary reinforcer and need. The opportunity to share food within the new space will help reassure a child and help adults assess how the transition is going. Toileting involves another level of trust. Diapering/toileting should be introduced in the new space with a familiar teacher. New routines should be introduced by the new staff with a familiar caregiver/teacher present to support the child/children. Transitions to the indoor and outdoor learning/play environment, especially if the space is different than the one from which they are familiar, should follow similar procedures as moving to another indoor space. Parents/guardians should be part of the transition as they too are in the process of learning to trust a new indoor and outdoor learning/play environment for their child. Primary needs need to be met to support a smooth transition.

Transitions should be planned in advance, based on the child's readiness. A written plan should be developed and shared with parents/guardians, describing how and when the transition will occur. Children should not be moved to a new indoor and outdoor learning/play environment for the sole purpose of maintaining child: staff ratios.



Excerpt: ***Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs • 3rd Edition***