

The Nurturing Nest Family Child Care Curriculum Information

Infants and Toddlers

The first three years of a child's life are more critical to a child's development than we ever imagined. Research tells us that more rapid brain development takes place during these years than at any other time of life. During this period, children are discovering who they are, how others respond to them, and if they are competent. They are also learning how to relate to others, what it means to express their feelings, and whether they are loved. Their brains are being "wired" into patterns for emotional, social, physical, and cognitive development.

In my work, I am helping to build both a foundation and a future for each child and each family. I am a family child care provider and I'm committed to offering a high-quality program for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers and their families.

Some people might say that taking care of infants and toddlers is easy - all you have to do is change them, feed them, and put them to sleep. But those of us who work with this age group know differently. "Zero to Three" (the National Center for Infants and Toddlers) provides a clear definition of the components of a quality program and the roles of the key players who interact in ways that promote children's growth and development. Their publication, "Caring for Infants and Toddlers in Groups", is filled with abundant examples of practices that are developmentally appropriate contrasted with practices that are not appropriate. There can be no question about what a quality program should provide.

Why then do I need a curriculum? The "Creative Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers" believes that the guidelines alone are not enough to help plan and implement a program for infants and toddlers. While a clear definition of developmentally appropriate practice is a vital part of quality programming, it is not a substitute for curriculum. Curriculum provides a framework for pulling all the pieces of developmentally appropriate practice together - the what, why, and how you do things. It provides a vision of where developmentally appropriate practice will take you and guides you through the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating the program.

At the same time, a curriculum helps you individualize your program. It gives you a framework for learning about each child and shows you how to respond to each child's special circumstances, abilities, and learning style, and to each family. A curriculum based on developmentally appropriate practice offers you the "big picture" of where you want to lead each child and family - and how you can grow as a professional. It is your blueprint for action.

As I said before, often when people think about caring for infants and toddlers, they only think about the routines (sleeping, eating) and activities (changing diapers) that consume a child's day. But before any routine or activity takes place, you must set the stage and provide a context for learning. According to the "Creative Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers", there are six components of quality:

- Planning and evaluating
- Individualizing

- Creating a welcoming environment
- Ensuring children's safety
- Promoting children's health
- Guiding children's behavior

What makes caring for infants and toddlers a deeply satisfying profession is our ability to appreciate and find joy in the everyday discoveries that delight a child – the sound a rattle makes, the colorful patterns on your dress, the ball that unexpectedly rolls across a child's path, the ant marching across the pavement. To help the children learn about the world around them, we focus on the following activities:

- Playing with toys
- Dabbling in art
- Imitating and pretending
- Enjoying stories and books
- Tasting and preparing food
- Exploring sand and water
- Having fun with music and movement
- Going outdoors

Preschoolers

What is a preschool curriculum? Ask this question and you'll hear many different answers. Some people will refer to a book of activities that precisely outlines what, when, and how children should be taught. Others will say more broadly that "curriculum is everything": an early childhood teacher simply needs to follow children's interests and build on what happens each day.

In my opinion, an early childhood curriculum is somewhere between these two extremes. According to the "Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood", early childhood teachers do not need to follow a prescribed course of study like an adult taking biology or history, nor can teachers simply react to what happens each day, without any goals or plans in mind. I depend on my curriculum framework that sets forth my program's philosophy, goals, and objectives for children as well as guidelines for teaching that addresses all aspects of a child's development: socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical. My preschool curriculum provides the framework for what actually happens in a planned environment where children interact with materials, their peers, and adults. The primary teaching goal is to help young children use the environment productively and see themselves as capable learners – as individuals who are developing the skills and understandings that will enable them to make sense of the world to succeed in it.

My curriculum for preschool children focuses on the following interest areas:

- Blocks
- House corner
- Table toys
- Art
- Sand and water
- Library
- Music and movement

- Cooking
- Computers
- Outdoors

In an early childhood curriculum, well-thought-out goals and objectives are important planning tools for teachers in defining and implementing the curriculum. Goals and objectives state what children can be expected to achieve and provide a way of assessing each child's growth during the year. They provide a measure for assessing the effectiveness of the curriculum itself.