Learning Environments
For Infants and Toddlers

This chapter is an introduction to the basics of furnishings, room layout, and scheduling for infants and toddlers. For more details on any of the topics in this chapter, ask your local child care resource and referral agency or a technical assistant if one works at your center. You also might check the books in the Recommended Reading section at the end of this chapter.

The Caregiver as the Center of the Baby’s World

You are the most important thing in the young child’s environment! As a caregiver, you help the infant or toddler learn and grow in every developmental area just by being attentive and affectionate during routine activities such as changing diapers, going to sleep, and eating. The main ways to do this are:

- Talking with the baby
- Reading with the baby
- Supporting positive behavior

Talking with the Baby

Before they begin to talk, infants and toddlers communicate through their actions. When you respond to their actions, you show them that you are paying attention, you care, and they are safe. The baby’s actions and your reactions are the beginning of communication.

Follow the Baby’s Cues

To help the infant develop communication skills, follow her cues or signals.

- Go to the baby and talk to her as soon as she cries or makes some sounds of need.
## What the Baby Means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When the infant does this ...</th>
<th>He probably means ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turns head and opens mouth</td>
<td>I am hungry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has quivering lips</td>
<td>I am getting used to new stimuli.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sucks on hand, fist or thumb</td>
<td>I am calming myself because I am too stimulated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks away from you</td>
<td>I am tuning you out because I am too stimulated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yawns</td>
<td>I am tired or stressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks wide-eyed</td>
<td>I am happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coos</td>
<td>I am happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appears dull with unfocused eyes</td>
<td>I feel overloaded or too stimulated. or I am tired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waves hands</td>
<td>I am excited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moves tongue in and out</td>
<td>I am upset or irritated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows food to run out of his mouth</td>
<td>I am satisfied or not hungry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pouts</td>
<td>I am displeased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushes nipple from mouth with tongue</td>
<td>I am satisfied or not hungry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushes an object away</td>
<td>I don’t want that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaches for an object</td>
<td>I want that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smacks lips or sticks out tongue</td>
<td>I am hungry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smiles and holds out arms</td>
<td>I want to be picked up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sneezes excessively</td>
<td>I am wet and cold.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squirms and trembles</td>
<td>I am cold.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squirms, wiggles and cries during dressing or bathing</td>
<td>I don’t like this. or I want down so that I can explore.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reference**

• Always take care of her needs for food, diapering, and comfort.
• Feed the baby when she is hungry rather than making her wait until a group feeding.
• Help the baby to sleep when she is tired rather than making her wait for a group nap time.
• Talk to the baby as soon as possible when she makes sounds or gestures with her hands. If you do not understand what the child wants to communicate, use words to help her express herself: “Are you trying to tell me that you are hungry?”
• Talk to the child about how you think she feels: “It looks like you are very tired.”
• Talk about what will happen next: “It’s time to get ready for a nap. We are going to change your diaper before I put you in your bed so that you can lie down and rest.”

Share the Baby’s Experiences

As infants begin to observe their surroundings and make sounds, or vocalizations, show them that you are interested and supportive.

• Respond to the baby’s babbling sounds by making the same sounds: “Baa-, baa-, baa-, bottle! Buh-, buh-, buh-, ball! Ma-, ma-, ma-, Mamma!”
• Name the objects that the baby sees throughout the day, emphasizing how the words sound: “Let’s have some cereal for breakfast. Ce-e-e-e-real. Let’s use your spoon. Sp-, sp-, spooooooon.”
• While rocking, talk about the things that the child can see in the room or through a window, using as many object words as you can. You might say, “Look at the big tree. There is a bird by the tree.” Add other words so that he hears more words that describe objects or the scene: “It flew up in the sky.” Move the glider or rocker around the room to offer the baby new views.
Use Words to Show Respect for the Young Toddler

Like infants, toddlers learn that they are loved and that you will take care of their needs because you talk with them, hold them, hug them, pat them, and listen to what they are trying to say to you.

- Use the child’s name when you talk to him. This will let him know that you are talking to him personally.
- Use a soft, quiet tone of voice. If you speak softly, the child will mimic you and learn to speak softly.
- Hold, cuddle, and touch. Toddlers still need that personal touch even though they are more active.
- When you have to guide a toddler’s behavior, talk calmly and reasonably about the situation: “I can’t let you take that truck away from Taylor because he is playing with it. Let’s find a different truck for you.”
- Look right into the toddler’s eyes when you talk with him. Bend down, squat, or sit in a small chair so that you are at his eye level.
- As you care for the child, describe everything that you do: “I’m going to help you with your shoes now. Let’s untie this knot first.”
- Praise the older toddler for the many things he is learning to do himself. Each time you praise him for a specific effort or accomplishment, you will encourage him to continue trying new things.

Guide Older Toddlers to Use More Words

Guiding children from first naming objects to later speaking in sentences is an important part of teaching toddlers. You can help young children learn to speak in sentences by talking with them, not to them.

- Listen to what the child is trying to say to you and offer more words for the child to learn. For example, if a toddler says,
“Me go,” respond with “Yes, you are going outside.”

- Ask children open-ended questions like “How do you feel today?” instead of yes/no questions such as “Do you feel good today?”
- Talk with small groups of children during meals, circle times and while they work and play. “Boys and girls, we have some new big crayons to use today.”
- When children use single words or short phrases, respond in their words and then expand on what they say. For example, if a toddler reaches for a ball or says “ball,” respond “Ball. Yes, here is a red ball. Can you say red ball?” Then hand the ball to her.
- Encourage children to talk more about what they are doing: “Here is the red ball. What are you going to do with it?”

Because you respond positively to their early attempts to communicate, children will gradually learn to speak in simple complete sentences.

**Changing Diapers and Clothes**

Routine care-giving activities such as changing the infant’s diaper are the best times for helping babies hear and learn language. Take every chance to talk affectionately and softly to the baby as you care for her.

- Before picking up the child, say, “It is time to change your diaper.” Give her a little time to finish what she is doing. For example, ask “Can you put your toy dog down next to you while we change your diaper?”
- Use words and show respect for the child as you care for her. Ask, “May I have your foot so that I can take off your shoe?” and “I need to take off you pants. Would you lift your bottom so that I can pull them down? Thank you!”
- Praise the child for any help she gives. Say, “You really helped me change your diaper.”
- Use words to describe body parts and clothing: “I am going to pull your pants back up your legs. Let’s put your red shirt back on.”
Meals as Social Times

Meals are times for conversation and language development as well as times to enjoy healthy food. To turn meals into teaching and learning times, sit with the children and eat some of the same foods that they are eating.

• Use words to name the foods and dishes: “I put some applesauce in this bowl for you. I put the cracker on your plate.”
• Encourage the children to communicate with you as you share a meal: “Do you like the banana? Can you show me the bread?”
• Use meals to communicate about the child’s day, too. Sing a bit of a song or chant a nursery rhyme and say something like, “I liked it when we sang that earlier today.” Talk about what will happen later in the day: “After this, we can wash our hands and then we can play with the blocks.”
• Allow plenty of time for meals so children do not feel rushed.
• Allow children to eat as much or as little as they wish so meals are pleasant times.

Reading with the Baby

After talking with the infant or toddler, and truly responding to the child’s attempts to communicate, the most important way you can help children learn language skills is to read with them. Very young infants will enjoy Lap Time with a book. As they grow, toddlers will continue to benefit in many ways from frequent experiences with books, poems and songs in small groups or one-on-one with a caregiver.

This curriculum includes books for daily read-aloud times plus many teaching and learning activities that relate to the books. Later in this chapter, you will find ideas for creating a library or book center in classrooms for infants and toddlers.
• With very young infants, do not read books line for line. Instead, point to familiar objects and situations in the pictures and talk with the baby about them. “Look, here is a baby like you.” Talk in simple sentences about the pictures. “What is that baby doing? He’s drinking his milk, isn’t he?” Talking about pictures is an important pre-reading skill that infants enjoy.

• Put life and joy in your book talk. Vary your tone. Give voices to different pictures and characters. Make animal sounds. Have fun reading to the baby.

• When you read a passage of a book, move your finger across the page to show that reading is taking place. This will help the child learn the left-to-right progression, an important pre-reading skill.

• Turn the page before children’s interest lags. Don’t worry if children lose interest before you reach the end of the book. Later, they can learn that the events in a story unfold as you turn the pages.

• End your reading when child begins to show a lack of interest. Forcing a child to read after his interest is gone will only hinder his love for reading.

Supporting Positive Behavior

An effective learning environment prevents most behavior “problems.” Other behaviors that may seem like misbehavior are simply the result of children practicing social-emotional skills that they have not mastered yet. For example, a child who is tired or over-stimulated may cry or even scream and kick because he has not yet learned how to soothe himself. Enough affectionate individual attention from primary caregivers; a calm and orderly schedule and room; activities that are interesting without being too difficult; and physical health and comfort – these are the basics that young children need in order to learn social-emotional skills.

You can help infants and toddlers learn those skills and regulate their own behavior.
• Give praise and attention for positive behavior.
• Provide duplicates of popular toys.
• Redirect children to other activities when they become agitated.
• Demonstrate proper social behavior for the children. For example, say “Jeremy, may I please play with you?” and “Thank you for letting me join you, Antoine.”
• Never use time-out with children under two years of age or with children who have experienced trauma.
• Help children find solutions to problems by talking the problems over.
• Show affection to all children through smiles, hugs, and pats on the back.
• Tone of voice affects children. If you are calm the children will be calmer; if you use a loud voice the children will use loud voices; if you speak in an angry tone the children will use an angry tone.
• Show respect and kindness to children and praise them when they do the same.

Spaces for Teaching and Learning

As infants begin to reach, pull up, crawl, and walk, it is important to create space where they can safely explore. Look at your classroom to make sure that it is working. Think about what you need to change to make the classroom work for you and the children. The world where infants and toddlers spend their days should include spaces for:

• Greetings and Farewells
• Meals and Art Activities
• Naps
• Diapering and Toileting
• Learning Centers
Space for Greetings and Farewells

Arrivals and departures can be stressful for infants and toddlers and their parents. Familiar greeting and farewell routines that take place in a predictable area of the classroom will make children and their parents more comfortable.

- Provide enough open space, in the hallway and in the classroom, for parents and children to come and go without feeling rushed or crowded.
- Provide a clear view from the doorway to the classroom so that arriving children can see the appealing new activities of the day.
- Install coat hooks or storage bins near the door.
- Install a poster or bulletin board near the entrance, at children's eye level, with snapshots of recent activities in the classroom to help toddlers remember the good times they have had in the room.
- Display photographs of the children and their families. Seeing pictures of familiar people often reassure the child that his parents are never far away.

Space for Meals and Art Activities

Arrange highchairs or low tables and chairs, on a washable floor if possible, so that children can see you and each other as they eat. This area can serve as an art center at other times of day.

- To encourage children to talk with you and with each other, you might create a surprising or interesting centerpiece for the lunch or snack table. For example, during this curriculum’s unit on animals, you might arrange a toy bird in a toy car and ask the children, “Do birds really drive cars?” If they laugh and answer “Noooo!” extend the conversation with other funny questions: “Do dogs drive cars? Do cats? What about people?”
- Display children’s artworks on nearby walls at children’s eye level.
• Clean and sanitize high chairs, tables, and chairs before and after every meal or art activity.

**Space for Naps**

Safe, quiet, comfortable spaces for resting and napping are crucial for infants and toddlers.

• Use curtains over windows or add a dimmer switch to reduce the light in the nap room. Make sure there is enough light for you to see all of the children.
• Use a comfortable glider chair to hold and rock infants before laying them down to sleep.
• If children nap in a separate room, make sure one adult remains in the nap room at all times.
• Provide a crib or cot, with his name on it, for each child. Sanitize the cribs and cots at least twice a week.
• Place cribs at least 36 inches apart unless they are separated by solid barriers.
• Wash crib sheets at least twice a week and replace them immediately if they are soiled.
• Do not use pillows, bumper pads, or other materials that could smother sleeping infants.

**Space for Diapering and Toileting**

The area where you change children’s diapers and clothes should be well lit and ventilated and near the bathroom or a sink. The diapering and eating areas should not be side by side.

• The changing table should have a 6-inch lip around all sides so that children cannot accidentally roll off.
• Use a changing table with steps so that heavier toddlers can, with your help, climb up on the table.
• Hang a mobile from the ceiling above the changing table to provide an interesting view for infants.
Learning Centers

Young children learn through play. As a teacher, you create learning opportunities by providing enough space for various kinds of play. Create separate areas for mobile and non-mobile babies:

- Infants and toddlers need to practice movement in order to master new skills.
- Non-mobile infants need a carpeted area where they can strengthen their muscles and begin to crawl.
- Crawlers need plenty of space to crawl and pull up in order to strengthen leg muscles for walking.
- Walkers need enough space and opportunity to walk or they will not master running or balance.

Open space affects behavior. Too much open space in a room encourages children to run indoors, which can be dangerous. Use sturdy low bookcases (no more than 2 feet tall, with rounded or padded edges), tables, and chairs to create separate open and partly enclosed areas.

- Provide enough comfortable, child-sized furnishings for all of the infants and toddlers. Keep all furniture, equipment, books and toys clean and in good repair.
- Wash and sanitize toys each day.
- Store blocks, manipulative toys, and other learning materials on open shelves, in clear, open bins, so that children can find and reach. Create picture labels for the bins so that children can learn where to replace items.
- Hang children’s artworks, posters, and photographs at children’s eye level or where children can be held up to see. Hang small laminated pictures or lightweight objects from mobiles attached to the ceiling. Tape pictures to the floor and cover them with clear contact paper for non-mobile infants and crawlers. Change these displays often to give infants and toddlers interesting new views. Display vinyl books, cloth books, and board books around the play areas so children can reach and examine them.
• Use carpet, floor pillows, or upholstered chairs to create small areas where individual children can take breaks from the group.

The classroom needs several learning centers for important teaching and learning activities in this curriculum. These centers can be as simple as a corner or a table.

**Block Center**

If possible, choose a carpeted area for your block center to soften the noise of tumbling block towers. Create a block center with one or two sturdy low bookcases (no more than 2 feet tall, with rounded or padded edges) where toddlers can reach and replace blocks themselves. The top of a bookcase can be a work surface where children can sort, stack, and arrange blocks.

• Start the Block Center by providing at least one set of 6 blocks of one type.
• Expand the assortment so you have at least 3 sets of 10 blocks.
• Arrange the blocks and accessories by type in open containers on the shelves.
• Provide soft blocks; lightweight blocks of various sizes, shapes and colors; and large cardboard blocks.
• Provide accessories such as containers to fill and dump, toy trucks or cars, and figures of people and animals.
• Encourage girls as well as boys to play in the Block Center.

**Pretend Play Center**

Use a corner of the room or use low bookcases (no more than 2 feet tall, with rounded or padded edges) to create a separate area for pretend play. Start the center with basic props such as a toy kitchen set and a few toy hats. Add props such as dolls, toy telephones, and toy tools. Allow children to play in small groups at the Pretend Play Center through much of the day.

• Add and remove some props each day so the variety remains interesting for toddlers.
• Include 3-5 of these props for infants:
  ▪ Dolls with at least 3 different skin tones and facial features
  ▪ Soft toy animals
  ▪ Toy or real pots and pans
  ▪ Toy telephones
• Include 2 or more of each of these props for toddlers:
  ▪ Dress-up clothes
  ▪ Child-sized house furniture
  ▪ Cooking and eating equipment such as pots and pans, dishes, spoons
  ▪ Toy foods
  ▪ Dolls with different skin tones and facial features
  ▪ Dolls accessories (clothes, cribs, strollers, etc.)
  ▪ Soft toy animals
  ▪ Small toy buildings with accessories
  ▪ Toy telephones
• Arrange the dramatic play materials by type and put them where children can find and reach them.
• Encourage boys as well as girls to play in the Pretend Play Center.

Book Center

The book center is one of the most important areas in the classroom for infants and toddlers. You may want to keep and display books all around the room, but creating a special area for reading will encourage toddlers to look at books more often. Choose an area of the room that you can monitor from everywhere and watch for children to pick up and look at books. Seize those “readable” moments and join the children in looking at the books.

• Display books with the covers showing.
• Display at least 6-8 books for each young toddler in your room. You may want to display all of the books related to the current curriculum theme in the Book Center, even though you place other books beside the glider or sofa, in the Pretend Play Center, and elsewhere.
• If possible, display books in a bookrack. If you do not have one, you can place several books in a plastic tub or stand them up on a low table. You may want to store books in a vinyl, plastic, or fabric bag similar to a hanging shoe bag. Make sure that toddlers can get to the books they want to read.
• Put out board books, books with no words, and books with a few words.
• Add soft pillows, beanbags, covered mattresses, vinyl-covered risers, or small chairs so the center is a cozy place for quiet play.

Manipulatives Center

Manipulative toys and materials enable infants and toddlers to practice fine motor and mathematical competencies. Working to share or take turns with popular toys also helps them master social-emotional competencies. To support these important kinds of learning, provide a changing selection of manipulative toys at a table or area where children can play in small groups for much of the day.

Provide these manipulative toys for infants:

• Assorted soft toys and blocks
• Cloth, vinyl, and board books
• Rattles
• Non-breakable mirrors

Provide these manipulative toys for toddlers:

• Shape-sorting games
• Large stringing beads
• Big pegs with peg boards
• Simple puzzles (some with knobs)
• Interlocking beads
• Stacking rings
• Nesting toys
• Medium-size or large interlocking blocks
• Crayons
• Arrange fine motor materials by type. Store each type in a separate, open container on low, easy-to-reach shelves.
• Provide enough materials so children do not need to compete for items.
• Provide a sand and water table, indoors or outdoors, where pairs or small groups of children can experiment with scooping, pouring, dumping, floating, sinking, and burying.
  ▪ Children ages 18-24 months should have opportunities for sand or water play at least once every two weeks.
  ▪ Older toddlers need this experience every day.

This curriculum contains many ideas for using manipulative toys during Floor Time.

Space for Outdoor Play

If your classroom is in a licensed child care facility, the center must have a fenced area for outdoor play. If you work in a family child care home, you will need to create an outdoor play area that is safe and enclosed. These areas should be open so that teachers can supervise all activities and children are in view at all times.

• Carry infants around to enable them to explore the outdoor environment.
• Place non-mobile infants on clean blankets or quilts on a grassy or flat surface.
• Give mobile infants the freedom to explore outside by touching grass, trees, etc.
• Limit children’s exploration to safe areas.
• Provide push-pull toys, riding toys without pedals, balls, and age-appropriate climbing equipment.
• For older toddlers, provide spaces for:
  ▪ Running
  ▪ Climbing and sliding
  ▪ Sand and water play
  ▪ Using riding toys
  ▪ Playing on the ground
This curriculum includes particular outdoor play activities for some days but children should have time to play and explore outside every day unless the weather is severe.

Times for Teaching and Learning

Infants and toddlers learn throughout the natural events of the day. As a teacher, you can support their learning and development by planning a schedule and “lessons” that match their ages and needs.

The Daily Schedule

Infants and toddlers love routine. They like to do the same things, at the same time, over and over. Changes in their schedule often cause fussiness, tantrums, and extreme discomfort so it is best to follow a consistent routine. This is not to say that each day will go as you have planned, but it will be more consistent than if you do not use a schedule.

Infants need as much one-on-one time with their primary caregivers as possible. It should include at least three separate read-aloud periods as well as Lap Time and Floor Time activities. This curriculum includes specific activities for each day. However, the daily lesson plan for infants must be very flexible so that you and other teachers can respond to individual babies’ needs.

Toddlers need plenty of time to play and learn independently and in small groups, so the daily schedule in a toddler classroom should include periods when they can choose their activities.

The key parts of the daily schedule in classrooms for infants and toddlers are:

- Routine Care
- Transitions
- Teaching and Learning Activities
Routine Care

Meals, diapering and toileting, and helping children to sleep – routine care – take up much of the day for infants and toddlers. These are all important learning experiences for very young children because they learn that they can trust their caregivers to respond to their needs. The first section of this chapter, “The Caregiver as the Center of the Baby’s World,” discusses the importance of routine care.

Transitions

Transitions are brief activities that help infants and toddlers move from one period or activity to another. A transition can be as simple as your telling children shortly before they need to change: “We’re almost ready to look at books so we will need to put away our toys when you finish with the stacking ring.” With older toddlers, you can use a visual cue like a puppet that announces an upcoming activity.

Greetings and Farewells. Greetings and farewells are the transition activities that help children adjust to the biggest changes in their days: the arrival at the early childhood program and the departure for home. These transitions also are crucial for strengthening the very important bond between each child and his primary caregiver.

• Greet each infant or toddler by name as she arrives. Take her into your arms or stoop to her level to look in her eyes as you say something like “Good morning, Tyra. I’m happy to see you today.”
• Be ready to change children’s diapers or help them back to sleep if necessary.
• Older toddlers may be able to get to the business of play and learning right away, so set up 2 or 3 simple, eye-catching activities for children to choose when they arrive.
• At the end of the day, again provide a few simple activities that will engage older toddlers before it is time to go home.
• Speak to each infant or toddler as he leaves, saying something like “Henry, I enjoyed being with you today. Have a good evening at home and I will see you tomorrow (or in a few days).”
## A Typical Daily Schedule

### In a Classroom for Infants or Toddlers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>0-24 Months</th>
<th>25-36 Months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:00 – 8:00 A.M.</td>
<td>Arrival</td>
<td>Arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00 – 8:15 A.M.</td>
<td>Lap Time</td>
<td>Lap Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Floor Time</td>
<td>Floor Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:15 – 8:45 A.M.</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:45-10:00 A.M.</td>
<td>Lap Time / Floor Time</td>
<td>Morning Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00 – 10:30 A.M.</td>
<td>Diapering and Toileting</td>
<td>Toileting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lap Time / Floor Time</td>
<td>Midday Circle / Floor Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30 – 10:45 A.M.</td>
<td>Classroom Clean-Up</td>
<td>Classroom Clean-Up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45 – 11:20 A.M.</td>
<td>Outdoor Play and Learning</td>
<td>Outdoor Play and Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(or Lap Time / Floor Time)</td>
<td>(or Art / Blocks / Pretend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:20 – 11:30 A.M.</td>
<td>Prepare for Lunch</td>
<td>Prepare for Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30 A.M.– Noon</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 – 12:15 P.M.</td>
<td>Diapering and Toileting</td>
<td>Diapering and Toileting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:15 – 2:15 P.M.</td>
<td>Nap</td>
<td>Nap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:15 – 2:30 P.M.</td>
<td>Diapering and Toileting</td>
<td>Diapering and Toileting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30 – 2:45 P.M.</td>
<td>Snack</td>
<td>Snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:45 – 3:45 P.M.</td>
<td>Lap Time / Floor Time</td>
<td>Floor Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Art / Blocks / Pretend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:45 – 4:00 P.M.</td>
<td>Diapering and Toileting</td>
<td>Diapering and Toileting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00 – 4:30 P.M.</td>
<td>Outdoor Play and Learning</td>
<td>Outdoor Play and Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(or Lap Time / Floor Time)</td>
<td>(or Art / Blocks / Pretend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:30 – 4:45 P.M.</td>
<td>Lap Time / Floor Time</td>
<td>Afternoon Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:45 – 5:30 P.M.</td>
<td>Lap Time / Floor Time</td>
<td>Art / Blocks / Pretend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Departure</td>
<td>Departure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Circle Times. Circle times for small groups of toddlers are good for helping children feel a part of a group and as transitions from home, back to home, or to the next child care setting. With children this young, circle times should be spontaneous. Think of the “Stop, Drop, and Roll” rule for clothing on fire, but make your rule “Stop, Drop, and Circle Around!” When you observe several children who are ready for a small-group activity, join them and gather them around you in a comfortable way. These periods should be very brief and focus on books and encouraging children to talk about topics they choose. Encourage toddlers to sit and participate in the “circle” but do not require them to do so. (Your “circle” does not have to be round.) Provide alternate activities for children who are not ready or able to participate in the circle.

- Begin your Morning Circle when several children have arrived. This can be a helpful transition from home to school. Repeat circle activities with 2 or more groups of 2-4 children.
- A Midday Circle can be a transition from free play to lunch and a time to talk about what has happened during the morning. Midday Circle also is a good time for a poetry activity. Gather 2-4 children while a co-worker takes care of diapering, clean-up, or other tasks.
- Gather your Afternoon Circle as children are ready to depart. Read one of the books in the daily lesson plan, invite children to talk about what happened during the day, and offer them a choice of simple activities for while they wait to depart.
- For younger toddlers, limit circle times to about 5 minutes. Read the first few pages of a new book or a favorite part of a familiar book.
- For older toddlers, circle times can be up to 10 minutes long. You probably can read an entire book during this period and engage children in talking about it. This curriculum includes a book related to the theme for each morning and afternoon circle. Circle time for older toddlers can be one of the most important language learning time of the day, if the teacher encourages children to talk about the things going on in the classroom, outside, at home, or in their world.
Teaching and Learning Activities

Providing a variety of new and familiar learning activities, plenty of individual attention, and support for children to learn how to play together is like a complicated and beautiful dance. Like a ballet dancer, the early childhood teacher practices and performs throughout her career. There is always more to learn and improve. You can use the daily lesson plans in this curriculum to provide a variety of teaching and learning activities.

The Daily Lesson Plan

A lesson plan for infants and toddlers includes teaching and learning activities that match the needs and developing abilities of very young children. For infants, most play and learning occurs in one-on-one experiences with a primary caregiver.

If you think of the lesson plan as a ballet dance, the relationship between you and the very young child is like the strong muscles that dancers need to reach and leap and even lift each other up. Books are like the music that inspires and guides teachers and children in the dance.

You can use books throughout the day, not just as a resource for one or two periods in the daily schedule. Infants and toddlers should have at least three separate book experiences each day. Each thematic unit in this curriculum introduces several new books and includes several that will be familiar from other units. The daily lesson plans include two books for use during Lap Time, Floor Time, Circle Time, meals and snacks, and other moments throughout the day. The third book can be one that the children choose.

During infancy, children need as much close contact with their primary caregivers as possible. These lesson plans include one-on-one and small-group activities in these categories:

- Lap Time
- Floor Time
During the toddler stage, children still learn best during natural give-and-take with their primary caregivers and with other children. As a teacher, you can provide a variety of experiences during Floor Times with small groups of toddlers and at learning centers around the classroom. This curriculum includes activities for toddlers in these categories:

- Floor Time
- Art Activities
- Block Activities
- Pretend Activities
- Outdoor Activities

**Lap Time**

Lap Time is the most important part of the day for infants. Hold individual babies as much as possible, instead of leaving them unattended in cribs, playpens, or on the floor. When you hold an infant, you give her one-on-one attention that strengthens her feeling of security. You can talk with her in a natural way, supporting her earliest development of language competencies. This curriculum includes many specific Lap Time activities.

**Floor Time**

Floor Time is valuable because it allows you to interact with several children at one time in a way that is natural and at their eye level. Floor Time also encourages infants and toddlers to try new gross motor skills. This curriculum includes many ideas for Floor Time activities for infants and toddlers.

**Art Activities**

From the age of 12 months, children should have art opportunities at least three times per week. Older toddlers need art experiences every day. However, art activities, like the other activities in this curriculum, should be optional for children and should be open-ended. Children should be free to experiment with art materials in
their own ways. By encouraging children to create their own artwork without direction from you, you can make a few basic art activities work over and over with different results each time. This curriculum includes several basic art activities with lots of variations.

- Use non-toxic materials.
- Watch children to make sure they do not put art materials in their mouths.
- Allow children to get messy – no one can make real art without making a mess!
- Label, date, and display children’s artwork where they can see it and take pride in it.
- Save children’s artwork in work sample portfolios to show and give to parents.

**Block Activities**

Blocks are as important as books and art materials for infants and toddlers. Allow children to play in small groups at the Block Center through much of the day. Playing with blocks is a sensory experience for very young children. They enjoy looking at the colorful blocks, feeling the texture and weight of the blocks, carrying the blocks, and then putting blocks into a box or bucket as well as emptying blocks from the container. Block play is also the first experience in learning geometric shapes.

- Make blocks available much of the day.
- Organize the blocks and accessories by type in open containers on sturdy shelves.
- Provide soft blocks, lightweight blocks of various sizes, shapes and colors; large cardboard blocks; and accessories such as containers to fill and dump, toy trucks or cars, and toy people and animals.
- The Block Center should be out of traffic paths, separated by shelves, and have a steady surface.
- Encourage girls as well as boys to play in the Block Center.
Pretend Activities

Pretend activities are crucial times for adults to interact with infants and toddlers and encourage their development in all of the domains, including language, mathematical, scientific, social-emotional, physical, and self-help development. When an infant first pats a toy dog or holds a toy telephone to his ear, he is pretending. Pretend play is one the ways that young children begin to make sense of the world. You can support infants and toddlers in this important learning by providing a variety of materials such as dress-up clothes and toy household furnishings.

You also can encourage or prompt children to think about new ideas and topics through pretend play. For example, after reading a book about a rabbit family, you might add one or two toy stuffed rabbits to the pretend play area and ask toddlers, “Do you want to tuck the baby rabbit into bed?” Some of the daily lesson plans in this curriculum include ideas like this for pretend play prompts.

With infants, you can use dolls, puppets, and simple props to act out familiar activities such as feeding a baby or saying “hi” to a friend.

For toddlers, you can provide a wide variety of props and dress-up clothes. Dedicate a pretend play area where children are free to enact their own dramas. Encourage children to develop their own pretend play ideas whenever possible. Limit groups in the pretend play area to two or three children at a time to encourage the greatest sharing of ideas.

Outdoor Activities

Placing infants in swings or strollers outside is not adequate for outdoor play. Young children need to directly experience and explore the outdoor world in some way every day. This helps children use all of their available senses more fully and is very important for later science learning. Outdoor play activities also are crucial for variety in the child’s daily life. This curriculum has many
outdoor learning activities. Of course, you will need to reschedule outdoor activities when the weather is very bad or you do not have enough adults to supervise children outside.

- Take children outside in the morning or afternoon, not between 10:00 A.M. and 2:00 P.M. when the sun is directly overhead.
- Apply sunblock to protect children from sunburn. (You will need a permission form signed by parents to administer sunblock since some children are sensitive to particular brands. Fair-skinned children will need more sunblock than dark-skinned children.)

Recommended Reading