Questions about 
Developmentally Appropriate Practice

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has just updated *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8*. This is exciting news for everyone who works in the field of early childhood education. Want to learn more about developmentally appropriate practice? Read on to learn what it is, why it is important, and how it can help you enhance your teaching skills.

**What is developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)?**

Early childhood educators must make many decisions in their everyday work, from selecting a book to read to deciding how to respond to a child’s questions. DAP means that when teachers make these (and other) decisions, they keep in mind

- age appropriateness (what most children of a given age can do)
- individual appropriateness (each child’s skills, interests, and characteristics)
- social and cultural appropriateness (children’s families, cultures, and communities)

DAP is an approach to early childhood education that means teachers meet individual children where they are and help them reach challenging but achievable goals that will support their development and learning.

**Where does DAP come from?**

DAP comes from the work of thousands of early childhood professionals and is based on years of research. NAEYC’s publications about DAP were first published in 1986, expanded in 1987, revised in 1997, and have now been updated in the 2009 edition.

**What’s different about the newest versions of the DAP materials?**

While the basic ideas have remained the same, the revised versions of the DAP position statement and book reference new research, knowledge, and
developments in the field of early childhood education. In particular, the new version discusses what can be done to close the achievement gap for children growing up in poverty and those who are dual language learners. It also covers ways to maintain joy in learning and to improve teaching, curriculum, and assessment.

As a teacher, do I have to remember all the DAP guidelines?
While you do not need to memorize all the DAP guidelines, you should be familiar with them and apply them in your classroom. You can use the DAP materials as a professional resource that you refer to when you have questions.

What do teachers do in developmentally appropriate classrooms?
Teachers do five things to put the principles of DAP into practice. They create a caring community, teach to enhance children’s development and learning, plan a curriculum that meets the needs of the children, assess children’s development and learning, and partner with families. There’s more detail to it than that, but this is the basic idea.

What do children do in developmentally appropriate classrooms?
All the children (including those with special learning needs) are part of a community of learners in which everyone considers and contributes to one another’s well-being and learning. Children can choose to play and work in different learning centers (such as blocks, water table, and dramatic play). They also learn in small groups, listen to stories, meet as a whole group, explore their interests through projects, solve problems, take part in routines, and engage in many other intentional and spontaneous learning experiences.

In a DAP classroom, there is a predictable (but flexible) schedule for the day. You might see children building a block tower, helping to set up snack, taking a class walk around the neighborhood, or telling a teacher about their creations.
I think DAP makes sense, but the families I serve have different ideas about how children should be taught. What can I do?

Have a conversation with families about learning goals for their child. Once you and the family can define the goals, you should be able to find common ground. Be open to learning from family members and willing to expand your view of effective, developmentally appropriate practice based on what you learn. Teachers and families can learn from each other and come up with a plan that works for both.

How can I learn more about DAP?

Pick up a copy of Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8, edited by Carol Copple and Sue Bredekamp. It is available through the NAEYC Online Store (www.naeyc.org/shoppingcart) and includes a CD featuring additional articles and video clips. You might also like the book Basics of Developmentally Appropriate Practice: An Introduction for Teachers of Children 3 to 6. And continue to read the articles and features in TYC—they give examples of developmentally appropriate practice in action.