

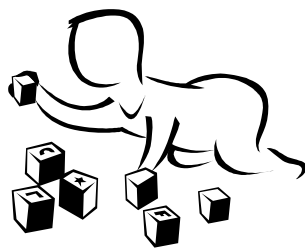


# Before They

# Are

# TWO!

*Creating Appropriate Learning Experiences*



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# **Before They Are Two**

*Creating Appropriate Learning Experiences*

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**Introduction**

Caregivers working with infants and toddlers have a most challenging job. Although many of their tasks are repetitive, they must be attentive and respond to each child, answering their first sound and words; delighting in their physical achievements; encouraging them and providing a safe environment for them to explore. Competent caregivers of young children promote feelings of security and trust through warm, supportive and dependable contact with each child. Competent caregivers provide a safe, loving, readily available home environment for mobile infants, supporting their growing confidence and competence. Competent caregivers provide experiences and opportunities for toddlers that build feeling of creativity, individuality and belonging in an atmosphere of loving attention. This can be done by proper planning of the classroom environment.

Preparing the Environment

One of the first things we consider when planning the environment for infants and toddlers is, the area must be safe; the caregiver must be warm, affectionate, responsive and permanent; communication between school and home must be good and open.

Some suggestions for proper planning are:

- Keep your attention on the children at all times. Keeping your eye on all children is essential to ensure their safety at all times.
- Check toys daily to make sure that they are in good working condition. Remove any that are unsafe immediately!
- Keep electrical outlets covered.
- Install latches on low cabinets and drawers.
- Store toys in open containers. Avoid toy chests with lids because a child could become trapped inside.
- Provide toys that can be washed easily.
- Wash toys throughout the day. Babies put everything in their mouths.
- Use a Small Object Tester to determine that toys are large enough that they cannot be swallowed. Remove any object that is too small immediately.
- Check equipment daily to identify items that may need repair, such as cribs with loose sides, feeding tables with loose straps, and so on. Check outdoor equipment for sharp edges and splintered wood.
- Provide plenty of space for crawling, creeping, and toddling. Avoid using walkers and carriers.
- Keep diaper pails, trashcans, and other inappropriate items out of the reach children.
- Check the sides of cribs and trays of feeding tables to be sure they are locked in place at all times.

Early Brain Development Research

An infant is born with about a billion brain cells. As the brain develops, these cells must connect with each other to share information. The brain "connectors" are called synapses. The synapses join together to form vast networks. These connections, sometimes up to 15,000, form complex pathways that ultimately result in an immense, interconnected "wiring system" or "brain circuitry". As a child grows and develops, his brain creates many more synapses than he will ever use or need. As these synapses are used in everyday experiences through play, in interactions with caring adults, and by exploring environments that are safe and healthy, they are reinforced. The more often that synapses are reinforced, the more permanent they become. If they are not reinforced often enough, they are eliminated in a "pruning" process used by the brain to maintain efficiency. (Use It or Lose It)

In the first years of life, up to age three years, children's brains are forming connections furiously. A newborn has relatively few. By age three years, the child has twice the number of connections when compared to the adult brain and the synapses or connections create three times the brain activity of an adult. Scientific test are showing that as a baby plays, looks at his mother or listens to language, the brain responds to new information and the baby readily learns. Without the stimulation provided by appropriate activities and a nurturing family and/or caregiver, the connections begin to be "pruned" and are lost.

To enhance learning and development, caregivers must:

- Have an enriched environment based on safe, age appropriate activities.
- Allow enough time in the context of learning for brain synapses to grow and strengthen.
- Provide emotionally and physically healthy places to learn.

- Give and honor individual choices.
- Create activities for learning that are meaningful to the child.

### Windows of Opportunity

A new advance in brain research has helped us to determine when specific areas of the brain are wired and how that wiring can be reinforced for positive outcomes. This information provides the optimum opportunity to give children a healthy and strong foundation for lifelong learning. Care for infants and toddlers require careful planning, influenced by knowledge of early childhood development and the desires of the primary caregivers, the parents. The quality of care that children receive at the early stages of life deeply influences the rest of their life. High quality care enhances children's learning, supports their families and helps them to develop healthy social and emotional bonds. The special needs of babies help us to understand why infant care is so different.

- Babies come into the world primed to communicate.
- Babies need adults who love them.
- Each baby is unique.
- Babies and toddlers are avid learners.
- Babies are social beings.
- Babies are particularly vulnerable.
- Early disorders and delays can have long-lasting consequences.

Infants and toddlers also differ from older children in four main areas.

- The intensity of infants' inborn inclination to learn and develop in particular areas.
- The holistic nature of infant learning.
- Infants' rapid move through three major developmental stages in their first two years.
- Development of a first sense of self.

Notes:

Caregiver Role

As the caregiver, you are a major component of the infant environment. The caregiver in this area has to be loving, caring and responsive. You are responsible for understanding children's stages of development; communicating with children, families and other staff; and creating activities and experiences that maximize opportunities of optimum growth and development.

Infants are at the most dramatic and dynamic stage of development of their lives; mentally, physically, socially, and emotionally. An infant caregiver plays a major role in each child's development. Knowing what is appropriate at each stage of development, staying informed with the latest information from early brain development research, and watching for cues from infants that indicate where they might be on the growth and development continuum are the basics that determine your interactions with each child.

Good communication is vital to your relationship with both infants and their families. Each infant needs to know that you are the primary source of support when family members are away. Your interactions with infants and your attention to their needs will help them learn this. Families, too, must be able to trust that you are standing up for them while they are away from their child. You will gain this special trust as they watch your relationship with their baby develop. It is also essential that you communicate effectively with fellow staff members. Good communication enables the classroom routines and transitions to run smoothly. Transferring information effectively between yourself and other staff members, between yourself and families, and between yourself and the children will prevent turmoil later.

Babies experience relationships through their senses - vision, hearing, touch, smell and taste. They read the way you look

into their eyes, they see the expressions on your face, they hear you cooing, singing, talking and reading and they feel you holding or rocking them. Touch is especially important, as holding and stroking stimulates the brain to release important hormones necessary for growth. An infant/toddler caregiver's role is to lend support, acknowledge children's efforts, and facilitate each child's development. These are some ideas for supporting children's development.

- Be warm, loving and responsive. Children who receive warm and responsive caregiving and are securely attached to their caregivers cope with difficult times more easily when they are older. They are more curious, get along better with other children, and perform better in school than children who are less securely attached.
- Talk, read and sing to the child. Infants learn from "conversation" even when they cannot understand what you are saying. When babies hear the same words over and over, the parts of the brain that handle speech and language develop. The time used to change a diaper or feed an infant can be an opportunity to spend some individual time with that child, talking, singing and expanding on their own coos and gurgles.
- Establish routines. Daily routines associated with pleasurable feelings are reassuring for children. Repeated positive experiences provide for a sense of security. It helps a child learn what to expect from his environment and how to understand the world around him.
- Encourage safe exploration and play. Play is an important learning experience. Look around the environment you are providing for infants. Make sure there are enough interesting things for them to look at - not too many, but that there are things for the infant to focus on one

at a time. Put the infants on the floor in safe areas that encourage them to move about. Keep things in containers that the infant can dump and fill. Adults should encourage exploration, and then also be receptive when the child needs to return to them for security. By providing consistent and responsive caregiving, you can ensure that a child will have the best opportunity for healthy emotional and social development. Every infant caregiver has the potential to help shape a young child's future.

### Planning the Daily Routines

Routines are the daily events that take place in your program.

They include:

- Arriving and leaving
- Eating
- Sleeping
- Changing diapers
- Going outdoors
- Cleaning up
- Active play

For infants and toddlers, daily routines are the major part of the day. They are wonderful opportunities for developing relationships. Being changed means more than just getting a clean, dry diaper. It is a chance to look closely at your face, hear your voice, and have a conversation of sorts. In time, the infant will come to learn the meaning of wet and dry. Later they will be able to lift their legs as you pull off the diaper.

Repeating the same activities again and again helps toddlers' master new skills. It takes a lot of practice to learn to pull up pants, buckle overall straps, and zip up coats. When toddlers can do these things for themselves, they feel

competent.

When you wait patiently for them to practice zipping up their coat, you show your respect. You are saying, "You are learning something important. I will give you the time you need."

Routines are also a major part of a caregiver's day. You may find routines more interesting if you remember that as you change diapers or ask toddlers to help you wipe up some spilled apple juice, you are teaching children very important things about themselves and the world.

Here are some guidelines to help make daily routines valuable learning experiences for infants and toddlers.

- Keep group sizes as small as possible. Being in smaller groups is more relaxing for both children and caregivers.
- Treat children as partners. Talk with infants and toddlers about what you are doing as you dress and feed them. Observe what they are doing. Let them participate as much as possible.
- Develop a system for each routine. It is easier to focus on a child if you aren't jumping to find a missing toy or clothing.
- Don't rush. Take time to talk, snuggle, tickle a tummy, or sing a song as you change a diaper or feed an infant. Give toddlers plenty of time to practice new skills.

Keeping these things in mind will make daily routines more enjoyable for you as well as for the children in your care.

Notes:

### The Daily Schedule

The schedule defines the events of the day. It shows how you

expect the day's activities to flow, in what order, and for how long.

When you care for infants, you are likely to have as many schedules as you have infants. Each one has a personal schedule. For toddlers, you can plan how the day will go-but even so, you need to be flexible. The schedule will have to accommodate those unexpected occurrences that come with young children.

Why is a schedule important?

A schedule helps children learn that their world is predictable. Knowing what comes next gives children a sense of predictability and helps them develop a sense of trust in the world.

Having a schedule gives you a sense of order, which is important when you take care of very young children.

A schedule gives each parent a picture of what their child's days are like. You can give parents a copy of the daily schedule or post it in the room where they can read it.

Keeping in mind the variables that you have working with young children, what would be a good schedule? There is no one size fits all in planning a schedule for infants and toddlers. These are some guidelines to help in planning a good schedule.

- Sufficient time for daily routines.
- An overall daily plan that is flexible to meet the individual needs of children and caregivers.
- Outdoor and indoor play times.
- Opportunities to be in small groups or alone with special caregivers.
- A balance between free-choice activities, caregiver directed activities and small group activities.
- Time for cleaning up and other household chores.
- **BE CONSISTENT!**

Consistency does not mean that the schedule should not be flexible. If it turns out to be too windy for a walk outside or a movement activity has lasted longer than originally planned for, you can adapt the schedule accordingly. It is appropriate to completely abandon your original plans in order to take advantage of "teachable moments," such as the appearance of a rainbow during a walk or the arrival of a new piece of equipment at the center. A daily schedule is a tool to help you; you should use it and bend it to meet your needs and the needs of the children.

Let's take a look at your schedule.

Does it include these routines?

- ✓ Have sufficient time for routines
- ✓ Balance between active and quiet times
- ✓ Times for children to play alone
- ✓ Times for children to play together
- ✓ Time for children to interact with caregivers
- ✓ Caregiver-directed activities
- ✓ Time for free play
- ✓ Outdoor activities scheduled twice a day
- ✓ Do the major events of the day occur in the same order every day?
- ✓ Sufficient time is allowed for transitions from one activity to the next.

## Designing Developmentally Appropriate Activities

### Physical Development

Physical development refers to the gradual gaining of control over large and small muscles. It includes acquiring gross motor skills such as sitting, crawling, walking and running, and throwing. Fine motor skills such as holding, pinching, and flexing fingers and toes. Coordinating movement is also an important part of physical development. A tremendous amount of physical development takes place during a child's first three years of life. During this time children learn to control their body muscles and practice the physical skills they will use for the rest of their lives. These skills may be refined during adolescence and adulthood. It is crucial for young children to have many opportunities to learn and practice basic physical skills. Young children do not have to be told to practice physical skills. Most infants gleefully kick their legs and reach for objects. Toddlers love to push, pull, shake, dump, and pour. They delight in running and climbing as well as in building and knocking down.

Promoting infants and toddlers physical development involves:

- Reinforcing and encouraging physical development;
- Providing equipment and opportunities for gross motor development; and
- Providing equipment and opportunities for fine motor development.

Reinforcing and Encouraging Physical Development

- Schedule time for active play every day.
- Help and encourage children when they are learning new skills.
- Encourage children to use their large and small muscles in coordinated ways.
- Help children develop an awareness of rhythm so they can coordinate their body parts.
- Step back to give children the time and opportunity they need to practice new skills.

### Providing Equipment and Opportunities for Gross Motor Development.

- Set up the room so that infants have freedom and opportunities to explore in a variety of safe places.
- Use a variety of materials and equipment that require children to use their large muscles.
- Play indoor and outdoor noncompetitive games with children.
- Encourage the development of self-help skills using large muscles.
- Plan and implement increasingly difficult activities in which large muscles are used.

### Providing Equipment and Opportunities for Fine Motor Development

- Use a variety of materials that require children to use their small muscles.
- Provide infants with opportunities to develop small muscles by grasping, dropping, pulling, and fingering.
- Encourage the development of self-help skills using small muscles.
- Plan and implement increasingly difficult activities in which small muscles are used.

### Promoting Physical Development

Because infants and toddlers learn by doing, their physical development is closely connected with every other aspect of their development. Infants feel good about themselves when they gain new skills, such as rolling over or crawling. Toddlers learn to relate to other people when they do physical things together - jumping on a bouncy pillow with a friend or waiting for a turn on a riding toy. By promoting the physical development of infants and toddlers, you are helping them learn about themselves, about other people, and about their

world. Here are some suggestions of ways to promote physical development as you interact with the children:

- Pay attention to what children are doing and encourage them.
- Use your knowledge about child development and about the individual children in your care to decide when to intervene directly and when to let a child work out a problem.
- Set clear limits to help children begin learning how to use their large muscles safely.
- Move yourself. Show children that moving is an enjoyable part of life.
- Take advantage of daily routines. Dressing, toileting, eating all provide rich opportunities for developing large and small motor skills. Don't rush through the day; take time to allow the children to practice the skills they are learning.

#### Encouraging Self-Concept through Interactions with Children

Physical development plays an important role in helping children feel good about themselves. You are important by the way you respond to them as they are learning new skills will influence how they feel about themselves. Here are some suggestions on how you can help children feel good about whom they are as you encourage their new skills:

- Respect children's individual differences in terms of physical development.
- Help children sometimes by teaching directly.
- Verbally reassure a child who is reluctant or frightened.
- Know when to stand back.
- Encourage children to try new activities.
- Follow children's leads about what they feel comfortable to try.
- Suggest how a child can overcome an obstacle.

Keys terms to know:

Eye-Hand coordination - the ability to direct finger, hand, and wrist movements to accomplish a fine motor task. (Fitting a peg in a hole, piling blocks, or picking up a piece of dry cereal.)

Fine motor skills - movements that involve the use of small muscles of the body, hands, and wrists. (Picking up puzzle pieces or cutting with a pair of scissors, or using a spoon to feed themselves.)

Gross motor skills - movements that involve the use of large muscles of the entire body or large parts of the body. (Running, hopping, or climbing.)

Physical development - The gradual gaining of control over large and small muscles.

Sensory awareness - the gaining of information through sight, sound, touch, hearing, and smell. (Smelling spices or turning in the direction of a voice.)

Spatial awareness - the knowledge that the body takes up space and can move in space. (Crawling inside a box.)

Notes:

### Cognitive Development

Cognitive development is the process of learning to think and

to reason. It is through their play and interactions with real objects that children come to understand the world around them. Children develop their cognitive skill in everything they do. They are continually exploring and investigating everything around them. It is not only measured by what information the child knows, but also whether a child has the self-confidence and skills to explore, to try out ideas, to solve problems, and to take on new challenges. Helping children to develop and use their cognitive skills is a major part of being a caregiver. Helping children to see themselves as successful learners, will prepare them for school and for life.

In caring for infants and toddlers, you have many opportunities to promote their cognitive development. Young children are eager to explore the world around them, to find out how things work. They want to learn what they can do with things they see in their surroundings. You can help children feel good about expressing their ideas and solving problems on their own. You can help children develop new concepts and acquire thinking and reasoning skills appropriate for their age and stage of development.

Promoting young children's cognitive development involves:

- Providing opportunities for infants and toddlers to use all their senses to safely explore their environment;
- Interacting with infants and toddlers in ways that promote their confidence and curiosity; and
- Providing opportunities for infants and toddlers to develop new concepts and skills.

**Providing Opportunities for Infants and Toddlers to Use All Their Senses to Explore Their Environment**

- Include children in simple food-preparation activities, letting them see, touch, taste, and smell a variety of foods.
- Call attention to sensory experiences in the course of daily routines with children.
- Take a "listening walk" with a group of children to discover different sound.
- Provide musical instruments so children can make various sounds and explore the meaning of loud and quiet.
- Make matching games. "You put two circles in the box! Can you find any more circles?"
- Hang interesting things to touch over infants' cribs such as a vegetable brush and a piece of velvet.
- Provide pillows covered in different textured fabrics for infants to crawl on.
- Give infants finger foods so they can squish bananas, smell a slice of peach, and taste cooked green beans.

### Interacting with Infants and Toddlers in Ways that Promote Their Confidence and Curiosity

- Show respect for and interest in a child's ideas.
- Share children's curiosity about the world.
- Stretch children's thinking by asking questions.
- Extend dramatic play.
- Comment on an infants' successes, such as holding on to a toy, rolling over, or sitting up.
- Wear beads, scarves and colorful clothes of different textures that infants can explore while you hold them.
- Include children in solving problems.
- Encourage children to ask questions by answering the many questions they ask.

### Providing Opportunities for Infants and Toddlers to Develop New Concepts and Skills

- Offer children simple, clear choices when the decision can be theirs.
- Provide everyday materials to extend children's dramatic play.

To introduce the idea of cause and effect, talk with children about what they are doing and why.

- Provide basins of water and objects so children can discover what sinks and what floats.
- As you hold a baby securely, lift her up into the air and bring her down as you say "up" and "down".
- As you change and dress infants, name parts of their bodies.
- Join games of "peek-a-boo" to help children begin learning that things exist even when they are out of sight.

### Planning Activities to Promote Cognitive Development

Infants and toddlers learn to think through everyday activities. They also enjoy new activities, new toys and new experiences. In planning appropriate activities for infants and toddlers, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Give infants and toddlers hands-on experiences because they learn through active use of their senses.
- Be clear in your own mind about what you think children can learn from an activity.
- Organize materials you will need ahead of time so you can focus on what the children are doing instead of running around looking for paper or crayons.
- Make the activity appropriate to the developmental stages of the children you are working with. Try to look at the activity through the eyes of the child. Ask yourself if it makes sense and if the child will be able to learn from it.

- Plan to do the activity more than once. Learning takes time and practice. By experiencing the same activity over and over, a child really learns to understand what is happening.
- Briefly explain to children, step by step, what you are going to do.
- Choose the right time to present your activity. If you are planning a special food activity for the afternoon and an unexpected fire drill and visitor have you and children feeling unsettled, wait until tomorrow.
- Be aware that what children take from an experience may be different from what you had planned. Be flexible when a walk to play on the grass turns into watching a road crew fix a hole in the road.

Notes:

### Language Development (Communication)

Language means expressing and sharing ideas, desires, and

feelings with other people. The need to communicate is very strong and begins at birth. Infants learn they can communicate their needs by crying. They learn to communicate joy by smiling and cooing when they see a familiar face. Soon followed by saying a few words. All forms of communication - gestures, facial expression, body language, touch, pictures - are important. Language allows us to communicate an endless range of feelings and ideas. Cognitive development depends on a child's ever-growing ability to understand spoken or signed language and eventually to read and write in ways that others can understand. Social development, too, depends on language. The child who has difficulty expressing himself or herself well is often less able to develop friendships. Language is also an important factor in emotional development. Children's self-esteem is enhanced by their growing ability to put into language how they feel. Children learn thousands of words, their meanings, and the rules for using them simply by being around caring adults who communicate with them and respond to their efforts to communicate. They are born with the urge to communicate. By responding to their cues and showing encouragement, their interest in expanding their communication skills is virtually limitless. You can promote communication as you care for infants and toddlers throughout the day. You can talk about daily routines and experiences. The activities you plan and the materials you offer infants and toddlers can encourage them to communicate. You can help children develop listening and speaking skills through the use of storytelling, books, poems, finger plays, songs and records.

Some examples would be:

- Respond to an infant's cooing sounds and imitate them.
- Encourage children to talk to each other.
- Follow an infant's gaze and talk about what you both are

seeing.

- **Accept a child's way of speaking while at the same time modeling correct speech.**
- **Help children talk about their thoughts and concerns.**
- **Name and talk about a child's feelings, behaviors, activities, body parts, and families to help expand the child's understanding of words.**
- **Attend carefully to what children are telling you verbally and nonverbally and help them express their ideas.**
- **Play "peek-a-boo" or "look-away" with infants who enjoy these games.**
- **Use puppets to help a shy child talk.**
- **Create small activity areas where a few children can play together.**
- **Comment on what children are doing and experiencing.**
- **Comment on what infants are observing.**
- **Pose questions at snack or meal times to encourage children to talk.**
- **Put out real props that encourage make-believe and dramatic play.**
- **Give older infants "conversation opportunities," such as seating two of them facing one another at snack or meal time.**
- **Make picture labels for toys and materials, and tape the labels on the shelves where those things are displayed.**
- **Write children's dictation and label their drawings when they go along with your idea to write.**
- **Talk often, in a normal tone of voice and using adult English/Spanish, to infants as well as toddlers.**
- **Encourage children to identify pictures in a book.**
- **Encourage children to hear different sounds in their environment.**
- **Make books about topics that are important to children.**

- Familiarize yourself with some expressions of children whose home language is different from yours.
- Teach older toddlers short poems and finger plays.
- Share your pleasure in a story as you read to individual children or small groups.
- Take advantage of the different languages spoken by children's families to enrich your language environment.
- Recognize possible delays or impairments that might affect a child's communication, and report these to your supervisor.
- Listen to children even if you have trouble understanding what they are saying.
- As children learn new words, show your excitement and pleasure.
- Name things.
- Use your normal tone of voice.
- Use words with interesting sounds.
- Talk with children about their feelings.
- Play with language.
- Be quiet sometimes. If you are always talking, you can never be listening.

Notes:

### Social Development

Social development refers to the way children learn to get

along with others and to make friends. As children develop socially, they learn to share, cooperate, take turns, and negotiate with other children and adults. Their social development is strengthened when they have secure relationships with their parents and caregivers, when they have many opportunities to play with other children, and when they feel good about themselves.

Social development begins when an infant responds to a familiar voice or the special touch of a parent or caregiver. It continues as toddlers first enjoy playing alongside each other. Dramatic play gives children the chance to explore living with others as they try out different roles, practice their social skills, and learn to take turns being the cook, the firefighter, or the baby.

As a caregiver, you play an important role in promoting infants and toddlers' social development by letting them know that they are loved and accepted; meeting their needs as consistently and promptly as possible; provide an environment where they can play alone or with others and help them begin to understand their feelings plus learn acceptable ways to express them. Infants and toddlers first develop relationships with their parents and caregivers and then begin to make friends with their peers. The development of a social being takes a long time. As you help children feel good about themselves and others, you are helping the growth of social skills that will serve children throughout their lives.

Here are some suggested ways to promote social awareness:

- Respond to infants' sounds and gestures to help them learn how people communicate.
- Encourage children to help each other.
- Model cooperation to help children learn what cooperating feels like.
- Encourage children's awareness of others by talking

about what they are doing.

- Model positive ways to interact with others.
- Identify some of your own feelings when appropriate.
- Respect children by listening to their feelings and responding appropriately.
- Encourage children to be aware of how their peers are feeling.
- Accept children's feelings while helping them control their actions.
- State what you think children are feeling when they are having trouble expressing their emotions.
- Give children words they can use to express how they feel.
- Plan activities that encourage cooperation.
- Provide activities for two or more children to enjoy together, such as playing in a sandbox, at a water table, or in a rocking boat.
- Include infants at mealtimes even if they have already eaten.
- Extend children's dramatic play by joining in for a while.
- Make sure there are enough duplicate toys so that children who cannot yet share can play together peacefully. (Remember, our ideas of sharing and a toddler's idea are not the same.)
- Help children see how they are the same and different.
- Divide up the whole group so that children have the opportunity to be in small groups.

## The Importance of Play in the Early Childhood Classroom

*Play* is the work of childhood. *Play* is how children begin to understand their world. *Play* is the means by which children develop muscle strength, emotional understandings, knowledge about things and processes, feelings they have and relationships with other children and adults. Simply defined, *Play* is:

Plenty of appropriate, interesting, safe play materials available to use.

Lots of work space provided.

Ample, uninterrupted blocks of time to permit them to engage deeply and,

You, to support, protect, appreciate. Keep play meaningful and keeping play safe.

One of the most effective measures of Play is in Learning Centers/Areas/Stations.

Purpose of Learning Areas:

- They offer a variety of skill levels.
- They provide opportunities for children to try new things.
- They provide children opportunities to practice skills.
- They support social interactions between children.
- When children play, they make choices, freely direct their activities with one another, practice, experiment and learn.

The types of Learning Areas used depend on the age of the children.

Infants use lots of sensorimotor play. They experiment with bodily sensations and movements. They touch, feel, mouth, smell, watch, and listen to learn how things work and what people will do. Crawlers add to their knowledge, venturing over, under, and into, exploring with their whole bodies.

The infant classroom is arranged in the areas for the babies'

needs; sleeping area, eating area, active play and diapering area. The infant skill areas are cognitive, gross motor, fine motor, language and self-help. Large climbing mattresses, large balls, safe climbing toys, infant walkers, mobiles, infant slides, infant swings, infant break-resistant mirrors, keys, pots and pans, large spoons, containers with lids, stuffed animal toys, toys that make noise, push and pull toys, textured toys and fabric, pictures and infant books, infant clocks to stack, stacking rings, form boards, pegboards, music and other miscellaneous music toys, pop beads, infant toys, tub with cereal, etc, in it to be used as a sandbox, and cups, bowls and spoons to be used as sandbox tools.

Toddlers continue these processes, using materials in intended ways and also in imaginary ways. Toddlers and Twos have four areas; Dramatic Play; Blocks/Manipulatives; Sensory and Motor.

Dramatic Play which includes Home Living, Dress Up, Dolls, Puppets, Animals and Telephones. This area focuses on language, cognitive, fine motor, gross motor, social and self-help.

Blocks and Manipulatives such as puzzles, pegboards and beads, works on the fine and gross motor skill areas.

Sensory such as the sand and water areas focuses on the fine and gross motor skills. Sand and water activities are by no means all of the sensory activities that can be done, since young children learn by their senses, you will find sensory activities all thru the day.

Motor activities include activities that allow the toddler to climb, explore increasing their fine and gross motor as well as self-help skills.

Sensory Integration

Sensory integration is the processing and converting of sensory information into learning and functional behavior. The brain receives sensory information, interprets its meaning, and organizes that information based on prior memories, knowledge, and information. We know that young children learn through their senses - see, hear, touch, smell and of course, taste. As caregivers, it is our task to ensure a learning environment that promotes sensory functioning.

This can be done by providing:

- Auditory - young children need the opportunity to listen to different sounds. The human voice is more attractive and interesting than recordings. It is important for children to have quiet time as well, so they can appreciate the uniqueness of different sounds. Playing music in the background can be soothing to some. Done too often, it can be irritating or simply lose its appeal. If caregivers want infants and toddlers to really listen, remove other distracting sounds. Caregivers' gentle voices directed to children are best.

Tactile - Human babies thrive on touch. The nurturing, loving physical contact that occurs as a caregiver cuddles a baby while she feeds or rocks a child to sleep makes the child feel warm, secure, and loved. Cultural norms often dictate what kinds of touch are acceptable, so learn about each child's culture. Some children are more sensitive to touch. If children seem resistant to direct holding or hugging, respect their wishes. Handle these children in sensitive ways that cause minimal discomfort and offer physical reassurance at the same time.

Visual - Young children need to see interesting things. One of the most interesting things is the human face. Right from birth, infants prefer the complexities, emotions, and messages that are unique to the human face. Hold young

children close, look into their faces, and talk and sing to them. A variety of materials that are brightly colored and textured add to visual stimulation, but caregivers should be wary of setting up environments that are over-stimulating.

Olfactory and gustatory - An environment rich in smells and tastes can provide many enriching experiences. Even adults recall fond memories associated with certain smells (the aroma of baking bread) and taste (apple pie). These senses can be evoked through activities such as cooking and eating, which are intricately tied with family rituals and cultures. Offering foods with varying tastes can encourage young children to try different nutritious foods and set the foundation for a healthy lifestyle.

Vestibular - During infancy and toddlerhood, sensory functioning is strongly connected to motor experiences. As babies are swayed and rocked, they gain vestibular input that aids in balance and coordination. From observations, parents and caregivers learn what types of movement soothe a child, what helps to put the baby to sleep, and what makes a child alert and ready to play.

Notes:

## The Importance of Tummy Time

When babies are on their tummies, they lift and turn their heads which in turn strengthens the neck and back muscles, as well as the muscles of the shoulders. They also use their arms to achieve head turning.

This is very important for any baby. Many babies don't like this position at first, but you can encourage the baby, by joining him or her, on the floor, for playtime. Remember, babies only need to be on their back when sleeping! When awake, we need to hold them and play with them and love them. These are some simple guidelines for a healthier baby, and ways to enjoy the loving interaction you will share.

- Parents should be encouraged to give their infants supervised tummy time-even during the newborn period.
- "Tummy Time" can include short intervals several times throughout the infant's waking time.
- The parent/caregiver should strive to make this fun time by providing toys or even better, the parents' presence as distraction for the infant. Get down on the floor and interact with the baby!
- Infants often tolerate tummy time more easily in a slightly upright, slanted position.
- Parents/caregivers should honor the babies' cries, but continue to provide tummy time. If the baby is really upset, try for short periods, several times a day.
- Infants that are not yet rolling over can be supported in the tummy position by a towel roll placed under the baby's arms. Make sure to remove the towel and put baby on his/her back if/when they fall asleep.
- When baby is sleeping, parents/caregivers should be encouraged to frequently alternate the position of the baby's head; one time facing right, the next time facing left. Also, restrict the use of the infant carrier. Babies need to be held in your arms to help strengthen

their upper body muscles and parents/caregivers can help work the leg and back muscles.

Notes:

References:

*Activity suggestions for this session were taken from the following resources:*

*The Complete Resource Book for Infants; by Pam Schiller.*

*The Complete Resource Book for Toddlers and Twos; by Pam Schiller.*

*Making Toys for Infants and Toddlers: Using Ordinary Stuff for Extraordinary Play; Linda G. Miller and Mary Jo Gibbs.*