

# Developmentally Appropriate Practice with Infants and Toddlers

When you welcome an infant or toddler into your program, this child may have only weeks or months of experience in the social world outside of their family. Yet infants and toddlers are already keen observers. They are learning quickly what it means to be part of their social, emotional, linguistic, physical, and creative contexts. During times of complex change in the world, early childhood programs that are anchored in developmentally appropriate practice provide a safe and stable learning community that offers protected spaces, nurturing relationships, and rich learning environments for children to grow, thrive, and learn.

The children you teach come from unique home environments, each with its own special set of daily rituals and routines of care. Children may hear one or more languages and engage in daily interactions with multiple caregivers. Every infant and toddler develops within their own cultural contexts, and these are valuable assets to educators and to the program. Teachers attend closely to children's gazes, sounds, and movements and become careful observers of their emotions, interests, and emerging skills. They respond by preparing daily caring routines and activities that introduce children to the joy of shared exploration and learning, reading, indoor and outdoor play, music and movement, and appropriate creative and sensory experiences. When children enter your program, they will be welcomed, celebrated, and loved. They will find safe places to explore, develop positive relationships with adults and peers, and experience a sense of belonging and identity.

Families are also unique. They each have experienced a specific life journey that has led them to your program. They place immense trust in you as you teach and care for their children. They appreciate the safe and affirming relationship you offer them, where their lives and stories are valued and they are invited to contribute to decisions and participate in the life of the program. Developmentally appropriate practice provides the foundation for educators and families together to become an effective and collaborative team to nurture and teach infants and toddlers.

You are also unique. As an educator of infants and toddlers, you offer responsive, nurturing care and targeted support to the youngest, most vulnerable learners. Your own life experience and training are the starting place for self-reflection and professional growth as you apply developmentally appropriate practice to your professional journey. As you reflect with colleagues and families, you develop increasing insight about your own contexts, as well as appreciation for the experiences and contexts of others. With the framework of developmentally appropriate practice, you can use these insights to plan meaningful and joyful experiences for children.

This book invites you to discover how developmentally appropriate practice is uniquely applied to infant and toddler teaching. It highlights the six guidelines of developmentally appropriate practice and shows how, together, they provide a seamless framework of support for children's developing sense of self and others, early brain development, and language acquisition (for monolingual and dual language learners) and how this framework integrates learning in all areas through meaningful, personalized teaching. As you read about the ways other educators seek to understand the contexts of children and their families and use this knowledge in planning and decision making, you will gain valuable insights for applying this same understanding and knowledge to your own practice.

## What Is in the Book?

The six parts of this book were created with you in mind. Each part highlights one of the guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice and shares how the guideline is applied to engage children and families, respond to complex challenges, and sustain joyful learning communities. The introduction to each part highlights the guideline that anchors the chapters in that section and includes overviews of each chapter. Here you'll also discover focus questions for each

chapter and prompts for next steps that will help you dig deeper and apply strategies that fit within your own learning community.

The chapters reflect various facets of the guidelines, including equity, inclusion, and culturally responsive practice. The educators featured in the chapters are successfully implementing the components of the guidelines and applying developmentally appropriate practice in their work with infants and toddlers. Their real-life stories and application strategies will help you evaluate your own practice as you partner with families, colleagues, and the community to plan and prepare meaningful curriculum for children. You will be inspired to try new approaches, engage in bold conversations, and jump-start new practices for communication and teaching.

Each chapter includes sidebars (identified by an icon) that connect to one of the position statements on developmentally appropriate practice and advancing equity. Focusing on a certain aspect of developmentally appropriate practice and equity, these sidebars are intended to support your reflection on how that particular focus relates to the chapter.

Throughout the book, we note the use of the principles of child development (discussed on pages x–xi) in action to illustrate how teachers can apply what is known about child development and learning to their actual classroom practice with infants and toddlers. You will, however, want to spend some time reading more about the principles in the fourth edition of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8*. This will give you a richer understanding of child development as you consider what is best for all the children and for each specific child, using the *both/and* thinking that is the hallmark of developmentally appropriate practice.

**Part 1: Creating a Caring, Equitable Community of Learners** features stories from classroom communities centered on care and equity and grounded in nurturing, meaningful relationships. For infants and toddlers, the first communities outside of the home are extremely influential in development. To create an equitable community of learners, educators make sure that each member is valued for the strengths they bring and for their contributions to physical, psychological, and learning environments that are conducive to the learning and well-being of all. The chapters in this part showcase strategies to

support healthy brain development through caring, responsive relationships. The educators also reflect on their ideas and practices to combat bias and promote belonging and inclusion. In addition, you will read about how educators address and remove bias by honoring and including family contributions. You will see how educators use physical, psychological, and learning environments to foster social and emotional learning and include families as advocates to create caring, equitable communities.

**Part 2: Engaging in Reciprocal Partnerships with Families and Fostering Community Connections** digs deep into principles and strategies for building strong, respectful, two-way family-teacher relationships. It shows how the strengths and assets of families and the contexts of their communities, languages, and cultures are essential foundations for infants' and toddlers' developing sense of identity as they explore and learn. Through reciprocal partnerships, programs offer families multiple opportunities to provide information about infants' emerging development and toddlers' current explorations and interests, weigh in on decisions, share their preferences and concerns, and participate in day-to-day activities. Educators build connections with the community as a resource to strengthen program impact. In this part, you will see family engagement practices that honor family stories and invite safe and equitable communication. You will discover many ways to collaborate with families to advocate for children in the program and community, share coordinated support for development and learning, use strengths-based and trauma-informed practices to address early adversity and stress, and employ culturally aligned teaching approaches.

**Part 3: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing Children's Development and Learning** invites teachers to consider the benefits of consistent, intentional observation of infants and toddlers. In this part, you will read about the ways that observation contributes to assessment and helps teachers support and scaffold children's growth and development across all developmental domains. Educators use observation, documentation, and assessment strategies to learn about children. They use what they learn to plan learning experiences that match and build on the cultural and linguistic strengths of children. Strategic planning and reflection with colleagues and families ensures high expectations and individualized support for each child. By observing

infants and toddlers, educators develop a deep appreciation for children's abilities and their ways of being, thinking, and relating to others. In this part, you will read about intentional and reflective practice, using observation and documentation to include creativity and personalization in planning. You will see how educators use strengths-based, individualized scaffolding to support each child's unique paths of development and safe experiences to learn about themselves and others.

**Part 4: Teaching to Enhance Each Child's Development and Learning** discusses the importance of nurturing, responsive relationships with infants and toddlers as the foundation for learning and development. Developmentally appropriate teaching builds on each child's multiple assets and actively counters bias. Educators use their knowledge of each child and family to make learning experiences meaningful, accessible, and responsive to each child. They prepare the setting, schedule, and activities to support learning across all domains of development. In this part, you will find a range of creative, playful learning strategies that foster infants' discovery and engagement and that promote toddlers' active agency, curiosity, and joy in discovery and exploration. Educators use active listening and responding and provide explicit language modeling through personalized play and caring routines. They focus on cognitive growth, social and emotional skills, emergent literacy, and physical development. Educator stories in these parts share the journey of self-reflection, collaboration, and the use of anti-bias approaches to teaching.

**Part 5: Planning and Implementing an Engaging Curriculum to Achieve Meaningful Goals** focuses on the importance of educator knowledge of individual children, child development, and individual contexts to plan experiences that promote optimal opportunities for learning. Educators design a comprehensive curriculum that is culturally and linguistically responsive to the children and their families. Infants are introduced to songs, stories, and activities that encourage pride in their developing sense of self. Toddlers celebrate family experiences and are introduced to new people, places, and ideas. In this part, you'll see how educators connect with dual language learners and their families and encourage the development of expressive and receptive language. You'll also read about strategies to collaborate with specialists and other adults committed to children's

well-being in inclusive classrooms. Educators introduce early science and nature activities and focus on thinking skills, problem solving, cause and effect, and the importance of incorporating outdoor play.

**Part 6: Demonstrating Professionalism as an Early Childhood Educator** explores some of the many ways families, educators, programs, and communities work together as a coordinated network to promote quality teaching and advocate for comprehensive systems to support infant and toddler programs. Educators use the guidelines of developmentally appropriate practice, grow as professionals, and serve as informed advocates for young children and their families as well as the profession itself. In this part, you will learn about the systemic and policy supports that strengthen the workforce and professional development systems of infant and toddler teachers. You will identify important steps you can take to become an influential advocate on behalf of children, families, and your profession. Inspiring stories will help you plan your own next steps in your professional journey.

Reflection is critical to your daily practice. As you read and reread these chapters, use the reflection questions in each part's introduction to engage in conversations with colleagues and families. Consider how your work is developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate for each child in your learning environment. Then use the prompts for next steps in the part introductions to act on what you learned. In what areas do you excel? What areas can be improved? How? As a lifelong learner, use the many tools and resources NAEYC offers and encourage others to do the same so that you support each and every child to achieve their full potential. To help you extend what you learn from this book, many chapters have additional material that can be accessed at [NAEYC.org/books/focus-infants-toddlers](http://NAEYC.org/books/focus-infants-toddlers). References for the book can also be found online at [NAEYC.org/books/focus-infants-toddlers](http://NAEYC.org/books/focus-infants-toddlers).