

Infants Can Learn Too!

Early Childhood Development

- The first stage in the human lifespan: from birth to age five. During this stage, a child grows from a helpless newborn into an intelligent, curious, energetic kindergartner. In the process, the child builds a foundation for lifelong physical, intellectual and emotional development.
- We use age ranges to illustrate basic targets or milestones to be expected during various stages of development and to help caregivers plan appropriate activities. Remember, these age ranges do not provide strict guidelines as every child develops at his/her own pace.

Infancy

- Refers to the first year of life – the earliest stage of early childhood development.
- A child changes more in infancy than during any other one year period in life.
- Factors that influence infant development:
 - Genetics
 - Gender
 - Birth order
 - Prenatal care
 - Prenatal harm (injury, drugs, poor nutrition)
 - Nutrition after birth
 - Environmental stimulation (can be directly affected by caregivers)

Areas of Development:

- Physical growth
- Hand-eye Coordination
- Cognitive Development
- Communication
- Social Development

The latest research confirms the importance of what many parents and caregivers do instinctively, such as reading, cuddling, and talking to their children," says Angie Dorell, director of curriculum at La Petite Academy, the nation's second-largest preschool. The following practices will help ensure a child's healthy brain development.

- Talk, read, and sing to a child:
Communicating with a child gives him a solid basis for learning later.
 - Talk and sing about daily events.
 - Read stories in a way that encourages babies and toddlers to participate by answering questions or pointing to what they see in a picture book.
 - Repeat rhymes and refrains
- Encourage safe exploration and play:
 - While many of us think of learning as simply acquiring facts, children learn through playing.
 - Blocks, art, and pretending all help children develop curiosity, confidence, language, and problem-solving skills.
 - Let your child choose many of her own activities. If she turns away or seems uninterested, put it aside. Let her pick it up again later when she's interested.

The Infant Curriculum

Your relationship with the baby is the curriculum

Key elements to establishing a trusting relationship with the baby:

- Observe what is happening with the whole child
- Provide a safe, clean and peaceful environment
- Give one-to-one individual attention
- Stay focused on the baby
- Create constant routines of care
- Provide choice and options that support the baby's preference
- Include the baby in caregiving
- Talk with the baby about what is happening
- Provide responsive and respectful caregiving
- Wait for the baby to respond and include that response in your next action with the baby

Babies need:

- Opportunities for peaceful alone time to explore
- To be included in the caregiving process
- Opportunities to move freely and safely
- Sensitive and individualized care by a significant adult
- To experience how to solve their problems during some of their "struggles" (group care)
- To be allowed to interact with other babies in the same stage of development
- To have their physical needs met on his/her own schedule, not a room schedule
- To be observed to try to understand what is best for them at a given time (group care)

Important components of an infant's day:

- Infants interacting together
 - Infants can learn from one another through exploration and play
 - Provide a safe space and encourage babies to play together
- Gross motor movement
 - Allow babies to move freely without ambulation aids
 - Allow babies to move in positions they can assume on their own
- Play
 - Place two or three varied objects within baby's reach and encourage play with those objects
 - Objects should be of various colors, textures, shapes and function
 - Caregiver sits nearby to support play and talk with the baby about the toys
 - Avoid loud noises, too many people and unnecessary visits in the classroom, restrictive clothing, too much stimulation
 - Use pastels and soft colors, normal tone of voice, always hold head, neck and spine securely when moving the baby, play soft music for 20 minutes (3 times a day)
- Language
 - Talk to the baby about what is happening
 - Use short simple sentences
 - Tell what you are doing to the baby
 - Describe the baby's reactions
 - Acknowledge when the baby is responsive
 - Sing short songs
 - Read simple, 2-3 word books to the baby
 - Name objects for the baby (bird, doll, block, etc.)

Language Development

- 0 – 6 month babies
 - Coo, make raspberries, babble, and may say first intentional word
 - Imitate sounds and make utterances
 - Respond to their name
 - Recognize familiar and different voices
 - Respond to facial expressions, like a smile
 - Become vocal when spoken to
 - Turn toward sounds they hear
 - Mouth objects
 - Look at objects and pictures
 - Prefer contrasting pictures

At six months, their listening increases to 600 words

- 6 – 12 month babies
 - Include all of the above and imitate simple sounds
 - Respond to simple commands
 - May give object or book to adult
 - Tear paper and pages
 - Laugh, smile, point, and gesture

Literacy Checklist (0 – 15 months)

- 0 – 8 months
 - Vinyl and cloth books with different textures and sounds
 - Soothing music; tape recorder, CD player and CDs
 - Comfortable chairs for lap reading
 - Soft dolls, pet and farm animal objects
 - Toys that rattle and make sound
 - Life like real pictures (mom, dad, baby, ball, etc.)
- 9 – 15 months
 - Books with familiar objects
 - Board books with easy to turn pages
 - Theme books with pictures and few words
 - Simple stories from baby's experiences
 - Repetitive sing-along interactive songs
 - Rhyming stories and songs with simple phrases that are repeated
 - Child sized tables and chairs
 - Pictures and posters of life like objects
 - Labeled objects and photos
 - Toys such as stacking blocks, nesting cubes, shape sorters
 - Objects that encourage pretend play such as a telephone
 - Stuffed animals and life like dolls
 - Age appropriate puzzles
 - Art supplies like large crayons, paint and paper

Activity Ideas

3-6 months (15 baby activities)

- Reading – choose books with bright colors and patterns. Babies love to hear voices and bonds with adults who read to them

- Mirror play – babies love watching themselves.
- Toys with sound – cause and effect learning (push a button, makes noise)
- Singing – babies love social play – Patty cake is a classic!
- Rain bath – water play is great sensory stimulation. Strainers or cups with holes in the bottom work well
- Talking to babies – most important and simple activity of all! Helps with language and social development and creates a bond with you
- Rolling over – tummy time is so important to help build up those muscles – once they're ready, they will begin rolling over on their own (4 months?)
- Making music – while babies are in high chair, give them a music maker (spoon, cup, etc.) and dance and sing while they "Make music"
- Mimicking – say words repetitively and children will mimic your words and learn language skills
- Baby massages – soothes and calms babies – imagine how you feel when someone massages your feet!
- Tummy time – lay them on their stomach and encourage them to move or grab toys. Helps with rolling over and learning to crawl.
- Activity mat play – they will push themselves up to grab the attached mobile
- Touching different textures – texture books are great – encourage them to touch all of the textures
- Physical development – dancing! Move their arms and legs while they are lying down and dance with them when moving about the room
- Finger painting – you can spread edible fingerpaint on their high chair or put it in a Ziploc bag so that they can squish it around

6-12 months

- Balls in a box – baby sits in it
- Stack blocks or empty yogurt containers for a great knock down activity
- Treasure box – put toys in a box or basket and let baby explore
- Muffin tins with objects to put in them – balls, water toys, etc.
- Sensory bottles – colors and objects
- Who's calling me?
 - Infants love to look at human faces and eyes, bright primary colors, and simple designs. In their first few months, babies develop enough muscle control to lift their heads. A baby will hold his head higher and keep his eyes moving (or at least try to) when you do the following activities together.
 - What you need: Just you, a baby, and a brightly colored object.
 - The activity: Lie down on your back holding the baby tummy-down on your stomach. Call his name and lift your head to see him. At the same time, raise him a little, encouraging him to lift his head. You can also place the baby on his tummy on the floor. Hold a brightly colored object in front of him, encouraging him to lift his head. Turn him over and move the same object slowly in front of his eyes to encourage him to follow the object visually.
- The carpet crawl
 - Older infants delight in exploring their world through touch. Encourage their fascination by creating a floor covering of different textured fabrics and items to crawl over. It might not look like much, but it will feel like a magic carpet to the baby.
 - What you need: Use satin, a piece of fine sandpaper, a cookie sheet, some fur, a plastic placemat -- anything that is fairly flat, interesting, and safe (no sharp edges or loose threads).
 - The activity: Talk to the baby about the textures (rough, soft, cool, slippery, sticky, etc.) while she's experiencing them.