

Tip Sheets

Responsiveness to Individual and Group Needs

The Ages of Infancy

The infant/toddler period is often described in terms of **three ages of infancy**.

Young Infants: Birth to 8 months

The primary developmental task of young infants, birth to 8 months of age, is security. Young infants develop trust through their relationships with caregivers who provide sensitive, predictable, and timely responses to their needs.

Mobile Infants: 8 to 18 months

Mobile infants'—infants 8 to 18 months of age—main developmental task is exploration. Their willingness and ability to explore depends on a



foundation of security and trust. The term "mobile" refers to infants' interest in exploration rather than their ability to move.

Children in this stage of development are interested in exploring their world even if they are not yet able to move on their own or have a disability that limits their mobility. In that case, infants depend on sensitive and responsive caregivers to bring the world to them.

Older Infants/Toddlers: 18 to 36 months

Older infants/toddlers'—18 to 36 months of age—primary developmental task is identity. They often feel conflicted, or torn, between their caregiver and their emerging sense of self. At times, they assert themselves clearly ("I do it!"), and at other times they want to be reassured that they are still someone's baby. They may feel both at once!

As children grow, develop, and pass through the ages of infancy, caregivers will need to change the environment to be responsive to the changing abilities and needs of each child.

Temperament



Temperament refers to the ways that individuals respond to the world, including sensory stimuli and emotional experience. Some children are more sensitive to lights, sounds, or textures. Some are more active than others. Some children express their emotions with great intensity while others may feel them just as deeply but express them subtly.

Caregivers should communicate with family members and closely observe children to understand how temperament influences the way each child experiences the environment. Children who are more reactive to stimulation may benefit from a quiet, cozy place to which they can retreat. Children who are highly active may need many opportunities to engage in physical activity, while those who prefer to observe before entering an activity may need the presence of a trusted adult.

Disabilities and Other Special Needs

Developmentally appropriate, individually responsive environments tend to be supportive of all children, including those with disabilities or other special needs. One of the most important aspects of an inclusive infant or toddler environment is that it conveys a message of belonging.

Caregivers should partner with families and early interventionists to provide additional supports to children with disabilities and other special needs as needed, such as:

Time

All infants and toddlers need time to process information and act but some children with disabilities may need a little extra time. Sensitive caregivers will allow plenty of time for children to participate in personal care routines and other activities as fully as possible. They slow down the pace, don't rush, wait for the child to respond and follow the child's cues. The goal is to give children the message that their engagement is valued.

Positioning & Support

Some children may require special seating or other equipment for stability. Caregivers should be attuned to children's cues that may indicate discomfort or readiness for a change in position. Before shifting a child's body, let the child know what is happening and allow the child to participate as much as possible.

Positioning equipment or other assistive devices should not keep children separated from their peers; rather, caregivers should find ways for children to join their peers for meals, outdoor play, and other activity areas throughout the environment.

Play & Exploration

Modifications of toys and other materials may also be used to meet the needs of children requiring additional support and to facilitate full participation in the interactions and experiences of the group. For example, rubber pads or suction cups can hold plates and toys in place on a table or other surface.

Culture

Supportive infant/toddler environments should be responsive to cultural and linguistic diversity. One of the easiest and most meaningful ways to incorporate diversity in the environment is to include the experiences and perspectives of the families in the program.

For example, learn words that children know in their home language and use throughout the day. Invite families to share stories, songs and traditions. Incorporate materials that reflect the diversity of the families served and will expand the children's horizons (pretend foods, multi-ethnic dolls, books).

Observe and ask about the ways that parents care for their children (e.g., holding, bedtime rituals, feeding practices), and provide consistency whenever possible.

Additional Resources

Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (PDF File)

https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=050750&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary

Early Introductions to Sensory Gardens

<https://growing-minds.org/early-introductions-to-sensory-gardens-infants-and-toddlers>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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