

NAEYC 2024: “Pick Me Up!” Strategies to Elevate Your Impact – Insights and Tips from DAP to Strengthen Infant and Toddler Teaching

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Let’s Talk!

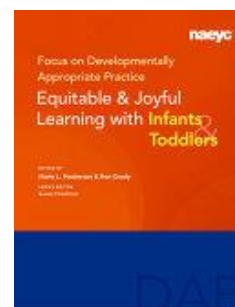
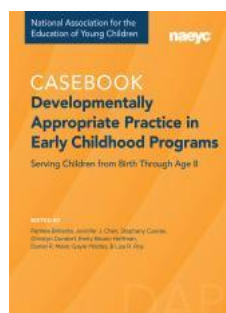
1. What do you enjoy most about teaching infants and toddlers?
2. What are some struggles you want to address?
3. Has DAP provided practical support? How have you made changes?

What are some key shifts with DAP?

- Knowing what’s best for the group as whole.
- Valuing and teaching each child individually.
- Expanding understanding of child development.
- Viewing differences as strengths.
- Building on family, community, and cultural contexts.
- Connecting children’s identity and well-being to meaningful teaching.
- Interrupting bias and removing barriers to access and equity.
- Developing a more complex, yet strength-based view of teaching.

Six Guidelines

1. Creating a caring, equitable community of learners
1. Engaging in reciprocal partnerships with families and fostering community connections
2. Observing, documenting, and assessing children’s development and learning
3. Teaching to enhance each child’s developing and learning
4. Planning and implementing an engaging curriculum to achieve meaningful goals
5. Demonstrating professionalism as an early childhood educator



Culturally Responsive Teaching

Bias infiltrates the work of infant and toddler teaching in a **unique way**, because ways of caring for children, beliefs about teaching, staff communication, perceptions of families, and expectations are **culturally determined**.

Implicit biases can be seen through deficit-oriented language that conveys beliefs about what is normal, who is capable, and attitudes about families’ economic status, mental health, and other lifestyle choices (Spence et al., 2022).

What do we need to know about culturally responsive teaching?



Developmental skills depend on context and vary in timing and sequence.

Child development must be considered in context, including cultural, linguistic, racial, ethnic, and social contexts. Each child develops on a unique time table, with some skills moving ahead of others.



Strengths-based teaching does not label what children cannot do as a weakness. Instead, it builds on what children *can do* and accomplish with support, using language that communicates what children can do and building on each child's unique funds of knowledge.



Why may teachers fail to actively address hidden norms and expectations?

Teachers may fail to address hidden norms and expectations actively because families often do not speak up and ask questions due to fear of retaliation or embarrassment. Teachers may not identify hidden issues. Teachers should actively talk with families about norms and practices both at home and in the program.



Why is bias so prevalent in infant and toddler teaching?

- Teacher perceptions about families are often unexamined.
- Culture often guides teaching at the unconscious level.
- Teachers tend to think bias is present elsewhere rather than in their own practice.

Bias may remain prevalent in infant and toddler teaching because perceptions about families are unexamined. In addition, culture often guides teaching at the unconscious level. Teachers are more likely to think bias is present elsewhere, but not in their own practice.

How can bias be missed? Differences are attributed to personality or choice. Teachers miss children's and family members cues. Assumptions and expectations are not accurate. Communication differences lead to misunderstanding. Co-teachers vary in understanding and approach.	Families may not speak up because of... <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Not recognizing hidden norms▪ Embarrassment▪ Fear of retaliation▪ Fear of leaving children▪ Can you think of others?
What is culturally determined? <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Sleeping routines2. Feeding approaches3. Diapering and potty training4. Clothing practices5. Responses to illness	<ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Emotion support, verbal, physical, anticipation7. Socialization goals, independence vs. dependence or individual/group8. Views about play, risk, control, restriction, exploration9. Ideas about learning, respect for teachers, creativity vs. structure

Let's Take Action!

1. Describe a cultural barrier or conflict you have experienced. What happened and what was the result?
2. What have you learned from families that has helped you better care for children?

Relationship-Based Teaching

Let's Talk!

1. What have heard teachers say about families that is positive?
2. What are some comments you have heard teachers say about families that may reflect judgement or misunderstanding?

What are three relationship models? Use a co-caring model, primary caregiving, and continuity of care.

Co-caring models of care are present when caregiving decisions are shared by families and teachers. Teachers know family's ways of nurturing and ensure consistency between home and program. Authentic communication reflects and honors language, culture, and values. Children feel secure, and families feel included in the decisions that relate to children's development (Lang, Tolbert, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Bonomi, 2016).

Primary caregiving means one teacher takes the main responsibility for a small group of children. They facilitate caring routines, individualize teaching, maintain records, and take the lead role in communication with families. This ensures children experience security and teachers establish deep and rich bonds with families (Lee, Shin, and Recchia, 2016).

Continuity of care means that young children and their teachers stay together as a group for two to three years, with the goal of ensuring stability through the third year (Polk & Bogard, 2016; Benson McMullen, 2017). Results in:

- More secure attachment and fewer behavior and emotional adjustments for children (Sosinsky et al., 2016; Ruprecht et al., 2016)
- More security and connectedness (Horm et al., 2018).
- Greater affirmation of children's identity and assistance managing stress (Child Care State Capacity Building Center, 2020).

What do we need to know?



Teaching with infants and toddlers is primarily relationship-based.

What does relationship-based teaching look like? What are the three types of relationship-based teaching approaches? A cocaring model of care, primary caregiving, and continuity of care.

Let's Take Action!

1. How do you currently divide caring and teaching responsibilities with your coteacher?
2. What steps can you take toward a more complete relationship-based approach to teaching?

PRIORITIES AND HIGH-IMPACT STRATEGIES

1. Relationships with Families

***Caution:** We do not always see at least two family conferences a year happening. Make this a priority!

True family engagement means listening to families to learn about their goals and priorities for children. It requires:

- **Cultural humility** recognizes the unique cultural experiences of others and the ways these impact their lives:
 - Learning about another’s culture, starting with own beliefs and cultural identities.
 - Exploring the dynamics that impact one’s own emotional reactions and choices.
 - Reserving judgement and actively bridge cultural divides.
 - Using sensitivity and openness, eliminating power imbalances, supporting others.
- **Cultural safety** is the “acknowledgement of and attendance to a child’s needs and cultural frames of reference, even if they are not fully understood” (Fulcher, 2002).
 - Embraces the life values, knowledge, and social networks of families.
 - Honors personal stories of families through authentic engagement and deep listening.
 - Uses a strengths-based lens with attitude of curiosity, empathy, and respect.
 - Promotes family relationships with children and others.

Learning from families: Families need to describe and demonstrate the ways they care for their children.

See my website for Family Survey Handout.

- Family priorities** – What do you want us to know about your child? Who are the most important people in your child’s life? Are there any recent changes in your family routine that may impact your child’s needs?
- Cultural coherence** – What special traits, skills, and qualities do you see in your child? What emerging skills would you like us to notice and encourage? What beliefs, cultural practices, and childrearing routines are valued that you want supported?
- Favorite activities** – What are the child’s favorite interests and activities? What make-believe play does the child enjoy? What are your child’s favorite books and how do you read them to your child at home? What active play does your child enjoy?
- Emotional and physical support** – How is your child comforted or reassured when he/she is upset? Does your child use a transition object (a blanket, stuffed animal, etc.)? Are there any stresses or unpredictable changes the child has experienced? Do you wait and let your child self-soothe or step in right away to minimize frustration? Are there unique words or techniques you use to comfort or soothe your child? How do you help your child be successful supporting or learn new skills?

What do we need to know?



What strategy is most important for family engagement with infants and toddlers?

The most important family engagement strategy is listening to families to learn about their goals and priorities for children. With that approach, families will be partners in making decisions and setting goals for children.

Let’s Take Action!

1. What is the most rewarding part of working with families?
2. What is the most challenging part of working with families? What steps do you want to take to incorporate family ways of being?

2. Learning from Children

***Caution:** We do not always see screenings happening. So make this a priority!

What we see in the field: A critical need for training and focus on screening, observation, documentation, and assessment – recording notes, taking photographs, using videos, and collecting samples over time.

Important approaches for learning from children

- **Attunement:** A two-way transaction, as both the teacher and child contribute (Walbam, 2023). Mindful of children’s thoughts and intentions and attribute meaning and agency to the child’s behaviors – responding appropriately in meaningful learning and relationships. Awareness of the child’s feelings, focus, and thinking (Gitz-Johnsen, 2022).
- **Intersubjectivity:** Entering the feeling states of the child. Affirming child’s experiences are worthy as sharable with others. Creating a space for culture-sharing - belonging and caring anchors responsibility for self and others (Fleer, 2018).

What do we need to know?



Most important strategies for observation, documentation, and assessment include recording notes, photographs, videos and samples over time.

Infants and toddlers must be observed and evaluated over time in a variety of daily settings to ensure an accurate picture of overall progress. Because of rapid development, variability day to day, and personal factors (sleep, illness, changing patterns), multiple sources of evidence should teachers should not rely on verbal responses, as language and multilingual development vary.

Let’s Take Action!

1. Do you use strategies other than TSG or another commercial assessment? What strategies do you use?
2. How does observing, documenting, and assessing change the way you plan for teaching?

3. Purposeful Play

See my website for Purposeful Play handout.

***Caution:** What we see in the field – Structured play like reading Pre-K books, craft type art, circle time for toddlers. Lack of challenge and meaningful learning to deeply engage children.

Key Challenges

- ✓ Little meaningful talking, with no talking during diapering and meals
- ✓ Little personal conversation, replaced by group directions
- ✓ Low level of challenges, without purposeful learning goals and play
- ✓ Little to no book reading of any kind
- ✓ Extended waiting times in cribs and high chairs, without interaction.
- ✓ Lack of supervision – within arms’ reach.

Talking During Play and Caring Routines

Replace pronouns with specific words.

Typical response:

- “Put that over there.”
- “Put them in there.”
- “Please put it down.”
- “Let’s do it.”
- “Here you go.”

Much better:

- “Put the red truck on the box.”
- “Put the red shapes into the sorter box.”
- “Please put the ball in the basket.”
- “Roll the ball to me. I will catch it in my hands.”
- “We have beans, potatoes, and chicken for lunch.”

Add meaningful information to what children say (extension).

- Child: “I got a big piece.”

Typical response: “Yummy, yummy!”

Much better: “Yes, you have a big square of graham cracker. It sounds crunchy. Do you hear the cracker crunch when you bite it?”

What do we need to know?

 **The primary benefit of play is that children interact with others, test developmental skills, and demonstrate self-agency.**

Play is the primary source of learning for infants and toddlers, because they enjoy relationships with others, test developmental skills, and demonstrate self-agency. Play, while unstructured, has specific goals that are matched to children’s emerging skills through intentional teacher planning. Toys should be open-ended so children can play as they like.

4. Caring Routines

One size does not fit all. Children may come to your program having never slept in a crib or fed themselves independently. Your idea for diapering may be much different than those used at home.

Let’s Talk!

1. What are some practices you have observed?
2. What practices are non-negotiable? What practices can be accommodated?

What do we need to know?

 **How should teachers manage routines like diapering, feeding, and napping?**

Invite families to discuss and model routines. Practices differ by family and culture. Teachers should work to align practices in the program with those in the home.

Tips:

- Use a white board to record schedule and tasks to coordinate with co-teacher.
- Talk with children during diapering and toileting to encourage and connect.
- Prepare food and snacks ahead of time, and make this time like a family – by talking personally.
- Give reassurance. “You can do it!” “You are figuring it out!” “You are making progress.”
- See from the child’s point of view. What is done in the family? What will make each child feel safe?
- Monitor supervision. Always be within reach of children, so coordinate with your coteacher.

5. Behavior Guidance

See *Behavior Guidance Handouts* on my website.

The Goal: The definition of behavior guidance is strengthening and supporting emerging skills through assisted regulation.

***Caution: What do we often see?** Stopping behavior. Frustration about repetitive behavior. Misunderstanding about children's capability to self-regulate. Waiting for a child to self-correct. Coregulation is a caring, gentle, encouraging partnership.

First, set up for success:

1. **Model the behaviors you want children to use.** Use a reassuring, gentle tone and actions. Spend time with undivided focus on the child's eye-level.
2. **Respect boundaries.** Respect boundaries for children's bodies, belongings, feelings, space, wants, needs, and words. When a child says, "no," honor "no." This is the child using words to communicate. For example, if a child says, "My shirt itches," find something else that feels more comfortable.
3. **Remove power struggles.** When you make demands or threats, children may appear to be compliant, but they are simply dependent on you to make the behavior happen.
4. **Be prepared.** Planning ahead allows you to be physically and emotionally present for supervision, play, and caring.
5. **Stay in close proximity.** Close proximity allows you to attend to individual children who are more active and those who are quiet or need additional stimulation. You will be able to step in and assist before frustrations escalates, as well as to problem solve and assist.
6. **Maintain consistent rituals, self-care routines, and schedules.** Consistency is the greatest teaching tool. Children learn to trust what will happen in the moment and what will happen next.
7. **Prepare children for what is coming next.** Only say what you plan to do.

Second, keep it simple.

- Notice and narrate what works.** "You are a good problem solver. You found another ball for Jack."
- Keep instructions simple.** "Naptime. I will pat your back." "Book on lap. Let's read together."
- Ask instead of tell.** "Where are your feet?" "Where does the wastepaper go?"
- Model self-talk.** "Tell your hands to be gentle." "Tell your brain, 'I can stop myself.'"
- Use effective redirection.** "You can throw the balls into the basket." Offer the basket.
- Offer choices.** "Do you want to pick up the cars or bears?"
- Ask the children.** "What do you think we can do?" "How can we fix it?"

What do we need to know?



What are the goals of behavior guidance with infants and toddlers?

The goals are to strengthen and support emerging skills through assisted regulation. Infants and toddlers are not able to manage behavior and emotion regulation independently.

Let's Take Action!

1. What one new skill can you use that will make a positive difference with your behavior challenges?

6. Trauma-Informed Teaching

The Goal: Trauma-informed teaching practices are healing, warm, and welcoming and help children feel safe and secure (Child Care State Capacity Building Center, 2022).

Trauma-informed teaching is “a profound paradigm shift in knowledge, perspective, attitudes, and skills that continue to deepen and unfold over time” (The Pyramid Model Consortium, 2021, para 2).

Tips for getting started:

- Work closely with families and other professionals to help children manage stress, handle emotional reactions, and experience security and safety
- Provide a network of support, including connecting families to professional and therapeutic resources in the community.
- Create safe learning environments, calm, predictable transitions
- Help children regulate their emotions and express feelings appropriately.
- Be sensitive to emotional changes and ready to comfort, soothe, and encourage.
- Use predictable and calming routines.

Key consideration: What do infants and toddlers need to grow and thrive? Nutrition, active play, outdoor play, protection from and mediation for stress.

- ✓ Toddlers need 3 hours of active play: Running, jumping, climbing, twirling, moving fast!
- ✓ Infants and toddlers need time outdoors daily – and experiences with nature.

7. Professionalism for Self-Agency, Leadership, and Advocacy

- Use reflective practice.** Talk with colleagues about what’s working well and new steps you want to take.
- Start a community of practice by Zoom or at your program.** Read a book. Identify new areas for growth. Try new strategies. Talk about what happened. Grow together.
- Set goals for your professional journey!**
 - Find a mentor and be a mentor.
 - Stay connected to updates, trends, and research.
 - Apply for scholarships to support additional training or coursework.
 - Share your story and the impact of your program with others.
 - Connect with others through community, state, and national organizations.
 - Learn about policy and legislation. Write a letter. Call a congress person. Sign a petition.
 - Manage your health and well-being.
 - Keep growing!

Let’s Take Action!

1. How do you see stress and trauma in the children and families you serve? What approaches have you used to honor, address, and support children?
2. What steps are you taking to protect your own well-being and monitor stress? What are your greatest challenges? What would help?
3. What is one strategy you want to use with families, in routines, during play, or during behavior guidance that will create positive change? What first steps will you take?