

Connecting with Infants

A Curriculum for Children from Birth to 18 Months

Introduction and Tips and Techniques

Connecting with Infants, a curriculum for children from birth to 18 months, is designed to support the areas of child development and early learning identified in the *Arkansas Child Development and Early Learning Standards* adopted in April 2016. Before implementing the curriculum, it is recommended that teachers of infants review the Standards which can be found on the following websites:

- AR Division of Childcare and Early Childhood website (<http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dccece/Pages/ResourceCenter.aspx>)
- U of A Early Care and Education Projects website (<http://ecep.uark.edu>)
- Arkansas Headstart website (<http://arheadstart.org/>)

The curriculum consists of planned activities for two age groups:

- Young Infants: approximate age is birth to about 9 months
- Mobile infants: approximate age is from about 8 months to about 18 months

While the activities are divided into the two age groups, it is important to remember that young children follow their own unique timetables for development. In order for a teacher to match the activity to the child, she must first understand how infants develop and learn, be a good observer of each infant, document what she has observed, and be willing to follow the baby's lead.

Equally important to remember is that all of the areas of development and learning interrelate. For example, a child learns language through social interactions with others. Thus social and language development interrelate.

Teacher Note: *If you work with toddlers, children from about 18 to 36 months, consider the *Adventures for Toddlers* curriculum available on the on a Division website and on the U of A Early Care and Education Projects website.*

Teacher Note: *The terms experiences and activities will be used interchangeably in the *Connecting with Infants* curriculum.*

Be familiar with these developmental characteristics of infants

- **Infants** are born learners. They spend their time listening, watching, studying, exploring, and trying to figure out the world around them. It is the teacher's role to support the learning of infants in making sense of their world. This support can be called curriculum.
- **Young infants** (birth to about 9 months) need security and a sense of trust, which is a child's confidence that his/her emotional and physical needs will be met predictably and promptly by a sensitive and responsive teacher. An infant needs to know that when I am hungry, someone will feed me, when I am sad, lonely or scared someone will comfort me, and when I am wet and uncomfortable someone will change me.
- **Mobile infants** (from 8 months to about 18 months) thrive on exploration. As they become more mobile, they spend much of the day practicing and refining both their large and small muscles. They go from rolling, to crawling, to standing, to walking, to toddling through their environment. They grasp, hit, throw, drop, carry, push, pull and climb. Through exploration with all of their senses, they are making meaning of their world. While some of their exploration may be without interactions from adults or peers, they want adults to be nearby when they are needed.

A curriculum for infants contains these components:

Relationships and Interactions between Teachers and Infants

- **Responsive care** is when a teacher recognizes the needs of each infant in her care and responds appropriately to those needs. This includes respecting the child, following the child's lead, recognizing the child's feelings, and offering choices.

In order to provide responsive care, a teacher is a keen observer of each child in her care. She learns all she can about the uniqueness of each child. For example she understands individual sleeping and eating rhythms, how the infant prefers to be held for feeding or comforting, the child's responses to different kinds of stimuli such as noise or light.

- **Observing and listening** to infants and interpreting what the observations mean serve as a guide for teachers in planning curriculum for individual children. Based on observations, listening and interpreting, the teacher then plans the next steps, or curriculum, for a child.
- **Interactions** are the exchanges in words and gestures that teachers have with others – in particular, the exchanges with young children. (*Powerful Interactions*, page 1)

Interactions with infants are important. The decisions a teacher makes about how she interacts with them have the potential to positively impact what infants learn about themselves and others.

Teachers spend most of their day in one-on-one interactions with young infants. They hold, touch, pat and talk with infants. They make eye contact with them. They notice and respond positively as a mobile infant develops a new skill. The response may be a nod or a smile, or a verbal response to a mobile infant. “Jalen, you put one block on top of the other.”

“A teacher’s moment-by-moment actions and interactions with children are the most powerful determinant of learning outcomes and development. Curriculum is very important, but what the teacher does is paramount.” (*Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Focus on Infants and Toddlers*, p. 2, NAEYC, 2013)

Environment

- **Sensory Environment** offers infants a variety of opportunities to touch hard and soft things, to see things that are interesting to look at, and to experience an environment that is a mix of quiet and sounds.
- **Play Spaces** have furniture that is comfortable for both infants and adults. There are soft surfaces such as carpeting or mats and hard surfaces such as vinyl flooring. A glider for the teacher has soft padding on the seat and back cushion.

Play spaces are the right size for the age of the infants, the number in the group, and the adults in the room. While the very young infants feel secure in cozy spaces, older infants need space to move freely as they become more mobile.

Mobile infants have open areas, both indoors and outdoors, plus toys such as balls and push and pull toys to encourage them to try out their gross motor skills.

Young infants are placed on firm surfaces where they are safe and can move freely rather than be left in cribs or playpens for play.

Toys and Materials

- **Toys and Materials for Young Infants**

Mirrors

- Crib mirrors (unbreakable, firmly attached)
- Wall mirrors (unbreakable, firmly attached to wall, close to floor so infants can see themselves)

Mobiles

- Mobiles above crib or changing table (keep out of reach of infants)

- Mobiles with patterns, circles and high contrast (especially black against white)
- Mobiles with gentle, rhythmic sound

Grasping, reaching and kicking toys

- Rattles
- Soft squeeze toys
- Cloth toys
- Interlocking rings
- Crib and play gyms
- Balls – clutch and texture
- Toys on suction cups (when young infant is able to sit)

Books

- See list on page 6 & 7

● **Toys and Materials for Mobile Infants**

Mirrors

- Hand mirrors (light, sturdy, unbreakable)
- Wall mirrors (unbreakable, firmly and securely attached to wall and full length for mobile infants)

Dolls and pretend play

- Soft, washable cloth dolls
- Vinyl or rubber baby dolls (features that are stitched, painted or molded)
- Doll blankets
- Doll bed or cradle
- Pots, pans, plastic dishes, wooden spoons (sturdy, washable)
- Play telephone (lightweight, plastic, easy to clean)

Exploration and discovery

- Stuffed toys (soft, washable animals)
- Rubber or vinyl animals (soft, easy to clean)
- Teethers and squeeze/squeak toys
- Floating objects for water play
- Puzzles (2 to 4 pieces)
- Pop-up boxes
- Nesting cups (3 to 5)
- Stacking rings (3 to 5 rings)
- Bells on handles (bells securely attached)
- Plastic buckets for filling and emptying
- Boxes (small and large, some with lids)

Blocks

- Lightweight, soft cloth blocks
- Rubber or rounded plastic blocks
- Wood cubes (2 inches to 4 inches)

Vehicles

- Simple, one-piece easy to grasp
- With large wheels

- Lightweight with rounded/molded appearance
- Make noise when rolled

Active play

- Push toys with rods (on large wheels or rollers)
- Balls- plastic, inflatable beach balls, clutch and textured balls, chime balls
- Tunnels for crawling through
- Climbing platform (low padded)

Books

- See list on page 7 & 8

Toy Safety

Think safety first when selecting toys for infants. Select toys that are:

- Solid, without breakable parts, sharp or jagged edges, or exposed nails, pins or splinters
- Made of washable non-toxic materials
- Too large to be swallowed* (at least 1 ¼ inches in diameter and 2 ¼ inches long)
- Free of parts that may separate or break off and become lodged in windpipe, noses and ears
- Flexible if made of plastic
- Nonflammable or flame retardant if made of cloth
- Free of parts that could pinch or pierce children or trap their hair or clothing

Organization of Materials

- Play materials are stored on open shelves at infant's eye level and within their reach
- Materials for different activities are spaced so children can easily make choices
- Like materials such as three-piece puzzles and small vehicles to push and pull are on different shelves

Routines

Routines such as eating, diapering, dressing and feeding are special times between the infant and the teacher. This is a time for the two to get to know and enjoy each other; a unique opportunity for one-on-one interactions with the infant.

Teachers touch, smile, talk and sing with the baby during feeding, diapering and changing clothes. They talk with the infant about what they are doing. The baby may not understand what is being said, but will understand a voice tone that says "I want to be with you." Teachers are gentle with infants and handle their bodies with respect.

Planned Experiences and Activities (Refer to *Connecting with Infants Activities*)

The *Connecting with Infants* curriculum is a collection of interactive experiences and activities that focus on the areas of child development and early learning. These activities, though

planned, are intended to be introduced to a child when he or she is ready for them. The teacher can only know when the child is ready through observation of the child and interpreting what her observations mean.

Books, Music and Games

Reading Books with Infants

- Read with infants each day.
- Read books with individual infants
- Read with young infants as you cuddle them in your arms
- Prop board books so non-mobile infants can see the pictures
- Encourage mobile infants to follow the pictures in the book. Ask, “Can you find the dog?”
- Sit in a glider or on the floor as you read with mobile infants.
- Allow mobile infants to sit on your lap or next to you as you read with them
- Read favorite books over and over again.

Note: *As you begin to read a book with one mobile infant, others will often join you, thus this becomes an unplanned group reading experience.*

What to Look For In Books for Young Infants

Books for use with infants should:

- Be read often
- Include simple realistic pictures on each page (photographs are better).
 - Contain pictures of familiar objects
 - Have one or two pictures on each page. It is hard to focus when there is too much happening on a page.
- Contain (or only read) a few words on each page.
- Include naming books as well as those with rhyme and repetition.
- Reflect the child’s culture as well as expose the child to other cultures.
- Include sturdy books for children to hold, clutch, and mouth. For example, cloth, vinyl and board books should be available.
 - These books must be safe, durable, and easy to clean.
 - These books should be inspected often and removed when tattered or torn. Books were not meant to last forever when young children are allowed to play with them.
- Be read with an enthusiastic voice. Babies are fascinated with the human voice and they are learning the basics of language long before they can talk

Types of Books

(BB) Board Books
(CB) Cloth Books
(VB) Vinyl Books
(PB) Paper Books
(IB) Interactive Book

Examples of Some Books for Young Infants – Birth to 8 Months

- Bailey, Debbie. (1993). *Sisters*. Photos by Susan Huszar. Annick Press. (BB)
- Fox, Mem. (1997). *Time for Bed*. Illustrated by Jane Dyer. Orlando: Harcourt. (PB)
- Kubler, Annie. (2010). *Pat-a-Cake*. UK: Child's Play (International) Ltd.(BB)
- Kubler, Annie. (2009). *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*. UK: Child's Play (International) Ltd. (BB)
- Marzollo, Jean (2003). *Mama Mama/Papa Papa Flip Board Book*. Illustrated by Laura Regan. New York: HarperCollins (BB)
- Oxenbury, Helen. (1985). *I Hear*. Cambridge: Candlewick Press. (BB)
- Oxenbury, Helen. (1985). *I Touch*. Cambridge: Candlewick Press. (BB)
- Oxenbury, Helen. (1985). *I Can*. Cambridge: Candlewick Press. (BB)
- Oxenbury, Helen. (1985). *I See*. Cambridge: Candlewick Press. (BB)
- Wells, Rosemary. (1998). *The Itsy-Bitsy Spider*. New York: Scholastic Inc. (BB)

What to Look For In Books for Mobile Infants

Include all young infant books and:

- Read on a regular basis.
- Include books for children to hold, manipulate, clutch, carry, and mouth
 - These books must be safe, durable, and easy to clean
 - These books should be inspected often and removed when tattered or torn.
- Include books in which children can participate.
 - This may include: fingerplay books, touch and feel books, and predictable books children can learn the words to.
- Have favorite books on hand as well as introduce new books on a regular basis.
- Look for books about animals, things around the house, and naming books to increase a mobile infant's vocabulary.

Examples of Some Books for Mobile Infants – 8 to 18 Months

- Brown, Margaret Wise. (1947). *Goodnight Moon*. Illustrated by Clement Hurd. New York: HarperCollins. (BB)
- Bridwell, Norman. (1999). *Clifford's Puppy Days*. New York: Scholastic Inc. (BB)
- Fox, Mem. (1988). *Koala Lou*. Illustrated by Pamela Lofts. New York: The Trumpet Club. (PB)
- Hubbell, Patricia. (1998). *Pots and Pans*. Illustrated by Diane deGroat. New York: HarperCollins. (BB)
- Katz, Karen. (2007). *Daddy's Hugs*. New York: Little Simon (BB)
- Katz, Karen. (2007). *Mama's Hugs*. New York: Little Simon (BB)
- Kubler, Annie. (2009). *If Your Happy and You Know it*. UK: Child's Play (International) Ltd. (BB)
- Kubler, Annie. (2005). *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*. UK: Child's Play (International) Ltd. (BB)
- Kunhardt, Dorothy. (1940/1990). *Pat the Bunny*. Wisconsin: Golden Books. (IB)
- McBratney, Sam. (1996). *Guess How Much I Love You*. Illustrated by Anita Jeram. Cambridge: Candlewick Press. (PB)

Raffi. (1988). *Wheels on the Bus*. Illustrated by Sylvie Kantorobitz Wickstrom. New York: Random House. (BB) (PB)

Shaw, Charles G. (1947). *It Looked Like Spilt Milk*. New York: Scholastic Inc. (PB) (BB)

Wells, Rosemary. (1998). *Max's Bedtime*. New York: Dial. (BB)

Wells, Rosemary. (1998). *Max's Birthday*. New York: Dial. (BB)

Wells, Rosemary. (1998). *Max's Breakfast*. New York: Dial. (BB)

Wells, Rosemary. (1998). *Max's New Suit*. New York: Dial. (BB)

Wells, Rosemary. (1998). *Max's Toys*. New York: Dial. (BB)

Wells, Rosemary. (1999). *BINGO*. New York: Scholastic Inc. (BB)

Wells, Rosemary. (1998). *The Bear Went Over the Mountain*. New York: Scholastic Inc. (BB)

Wells, Rosemary. (1998). *The Itsy-Bitsy Spider*. New York: Scholastic Inc. (BB)

Music, Games and Nursery Rhymes with Infants

- Sing with infants. Infants enjoy hearing a teacher sing, no matter the quality of the voice. Some songs to sing with infants:
 - “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star”
 - “Hush, Little Baby”
 - “Itsy Bitsy Spider”
 - “Baa Baa Black Sheep”
- Play games such as peek-a-boo and “This Little Piggie” with infants
- Dance with infants. For young infants, the teacher holds the child in her arms as she dances around the room. Older infants enjoy moving to music all by themselves.
- Listen to music with infants
- Say and read nursery rhymes with children
 - *Humpty Dumpty and Other Rhymes* by Iona Opie and illustrated by Rosemary Wells (BB)
 - *My First Real Mother Goose Board Book* by Blanche Fisher Wright (BB)

Teacher Note: *Children's recording artists to consider include: Raffi, Hap Palmer, and Thomas Moore*

Relationships with Families

Although families are not with teachers and infants during hours of care, they do have input into the curriculum. From families, teachers learn the sleeping pattern for a child. They discuss and decide with families the food to be served to their child. Pictures of infants and their families are hung on the walls where infants can see them.

Teachers communicate daily with families about their child. They share some of the positive and interesting things that happened that day as well as records of diapering and feeding for the day.