



10 Components of High Quality Child Care for Infants and Toddlers

National experts have identified 10 research based components that are essential to high quality child care. Using these 10 components as a guide, The NYS Infant and Toddler Resource Network is helping child care programs improve the quality of care for our babies, toddlers and their families. Programs often start with tangible changes to the environment and the structure of the program and then advance towards changing practices that promote relationship based care between children, caregivers and families.

1. **Child Care Programs Following Appropriate Health and Safety Practices**

New York State ensures that basic health and safety requirements are met by licensing child care centers and registering family day care homes. With standards among the highest in the nation, New York's child care regulations address everything from hand washing procedures and sanitation practices for minimizing the spread of infection, to policies for administering medications and guidelines for safe sleeping. The full set of regulations can be found at www.ocfs.state.ny.us

2. **Staff Well Trained in Early Childhood Development (0-3)**

According to research, staff education and training is one of the best ways to rate child care quality and predict long term success. The last decade's findings about early brain development tell us that baby and toddler caregivers need to study early care and education rather than pre-school or elementary education. Early care and education focuses on the unique learning abilities of babies and toddlers and trains caregivers how to plan appropriate activities, how to use daily routines to bond with babies, and how to provide cognitive stimulation through conversation, interaction and responsive relationships.

3. **Age Appropriate Environments**

Children under 3 learn through continuously exploring and interacting with their environment, which includes the emotional climate of a child care setting as well as the physical space. Babies and toddlers need safe spaces for quiet and active play (both inside and outdoors), safe spaces for sleeping, and spaces to interact one-on-one with individual caregivers. Within the environment they need toys and activities selected primarily for individual interests and abilities rather than one-size-fits-all group play.

4. **Small Groups with Optimal Ratios**

Group size and adult child ratios determine the amount of time and attention each caregiver can devote to each child. Infants need individualized care and one-on-one time for interactions and routines. As they grow, they can play more independently and can handle small group activities. NY State regulations require:

- a) 1 caregiver for every 4 infants (6 weeks to 18 months) – group size no larger than 8
- b) 1 caregiver for every 5 toddlers (18 months – 36 months) – group size no larger than 12
- c) A family child care provider may care for no more than 2 children under age two
- d) While these standards are among the best in the nation, the National Association for the Education of Young Children and Zero to Three recommend 1 adult to every 3 babies or 4 toddlers.

5. **Primary Caregiver and Continuity of Care**

Assigning each child a primary caregiver promotes the caring one-on-one relationships that help babies thrive. A baby develops trust as her primary caregiver learns to respond appropriately to her unique temperament, her needs and her interests by being the one who almost always diapers her, feeds her, puts her to sleep, and communicates with her family. The child's security deepens as her primary caregiver develops a positive relationship with her family and comes to know their values and wishes for their child.

This holistic relationship provides the security and trust that enables the child to explore and flourish in group care. Ideally, a child has the same primary caregiver until age three, which spares her the trauma of leaving someone to whom she is securely attached and having to adjust all over again to someone who does not know her. Stability is important for healthy emotional development, which provides the underpinnings for all other areas of development.

6. Active and Responsive Caregiving to Support Children's Development

The active and responsive caregiver takes cues from each child to know when to expand on the child's initiative, when to guide, when to teach and when to intervene. She recognizes signs of stress in the child and takes appropriate action to adapt to the child's needs. Responsive caregiving requires careful observation, knowledge of child development and respect for each child's temperament, interests and capabilities. The primary caregiving system encourages responsiveness.

7. Emerging Language and Literacy

The path to literacy begins with conversations between caregivers and young children. Research tells us that a caregiver is laying the foundation for language and reading when she talks aloud to a baby throughout the day, repeating back his babbling, asking him questions, reading him books, and singing him songs. A caregiver promotes language development when she uses simple words and keeps a balance between listening and talking with the child and provides a childcare environment rich with age-appropriate books, interesting pictures and photos to talk about, labels, and other printed material.

8. Curriculum, Observation and Individualized Programming

The 0 – 3 curriculum is based upon a sound understanding of child development and appropriate practices while taking into account the individual needs and temperaments of each child in care. The curriculum includes:

- a) the goals for children's development,
- b) the experiences that will be provided,
- c) the role for caregivers and families,
- d) the materials used.

Caregivers plan for each day, individualizing activities, materials and schedules according to the routines of each child and his or her developmental stage. Observation and discussion among caregivers and families provides deeper understanding of each child and a basis for documenting developmental progress towards stated goals.

9. Family Involvement and Cultural Continuity

New York's children come from a huge variety of ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds. High quality programs incorporate practices that reflect the values and beliefs of the families and the cultures of their communities. In their work with families, caregivers respect differences and strive to become more culturally competent. Caregivers welcome parents into their child's classroom, use the child's home language whenever possible, and organize special events that include the child's family members.

10. Comprehensive Support Services

In addition to providing a protective and enriching environment for children, high quality child care serves as a source of support for families. Child care can become a family's connection to essential community services including a medical home, mental health and social services, and therapeutic interventions. Open communication among child care and service providers creates a more holistic and accessible system for families.

Adapted from Florida State University Center for Prevention & Early Intervention Policy.

Based on the original work of:

Bredenkamp, S. & Copple, C. (eds.) (1997) *Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Childhood Programs*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Lally, J.R., Griffin, A. Fenichel, E. Segal, M. Szanton, E. & Weissbourd, B. (1995) *Caring for Infants & Toddlers in Groups: Developmentally Appropriate Practice*. Washington D.C.: Zero to Three.