

# Approaches to Learning

- Initiative and Curiosity

- Sensory Exploration and Problem Solving



For young children, growing and learning begins with each child's personal experiences, and their openness and curiosity about new discoveries. With consistent environments and trusting, responsive adults, children have the emotional security necessary for exploring, growing and learning.

A child's learning style is nurtured in an environment of trusting exploration, and is reflected in their ability to use persistence, initiative and the motivation to learn new skills.

Infants and toddlers gain new knowledge by taste, touch, smell, sight, sound, feelings, and through their physical actions. They begin to develop an awareness of themselves and others through their social interactions.

Adults need to identify children's current knowledge and understanding of their world, and use it as a basis for making new experiences, ideas, and concepts meaningful. The learning experiences for young children need to focus on concepts that are related to the child's everyday life, and that encourage the child to try new things and experience success.

## Strategies to support inclusive learning environments:

- ❖ Use appropriate verbal, visual, and physical cues in interactions and activities to meet the special needs of individual children
- ❖ Whenever possible, use words and phrases in the child's native language when introducing new ideas/concepts
- ❖ Provide opportunities for interaction with typically developing peers

Some general accommodations to support children with special learning or developmental needs can be found on page 9 of this document, and in NDE Rule 51.

# Initiative and Curiosity

## Infants (Birth to 18 Months)

### Widely Held Expectations

- Child uses initiative, curiosity and persistence to learn about the world
  - Explores the environment through movement and the use of senses including mouthing toys, kicking legs, waving arms, etc.
  - Learns through discovery, imitation, and repetition
- Child communicates through sounds, gestures, and beginning oral language
- Child chooses from a variety of materials and methods of exploration

### Learning in Action: Examples

#### The Infant

- Observes other children and adults
- Engages in a variety of methods of communication (cries, uses sounds, points to desired objects, begins to use one word statements or signs, etc.)
- Imitates the actions of adults and other children (sounds, facial expressions, gestures, self-help skills, etc.)
- Explores using movement, space, and materials (looks towards sound, mouths toys, kicks or swats at mobile, bangs on table or floor, etc.)
- Shows interest in stories, rhymes, songs, or simple games

#### The Adult

- Provides a reliable routine designed to meet each child's individual needs
- Describes to children what they are experiencing (feeling, hearing, touching, seeing, etc.)
- Asks questions and helps children find answers through active, hands-on exploration
- Provides a variety of materials and experiences that encourage exploration, movement and hands on discovery (rattles, activity boxes, soft books, etc.)
- Responds to children's exploration and discovery with enthusiasm and encouragement

#### THE ENVIRONMENT INCLUDES

- A safe, natural space for children to explore (minimal use of playpens, cribs, car seats and other confining spaces, etc.)
- A variety of sensory experiences (mirrors, rattles, bells, open containers to fill and empty, lightweight blocks, etc.)
- Safe materials of cloth, plastic, rubber in a variety of shapes, textures and sizes (large enough to not be a choking hazard)

# Initiative and Curiosity

## Toddlers (18 Months to 3 Years)

### Widely Held Expectations

- Child uses initiative, curiosity and persistence to learn about the world
  - Explores the environment through movement and the use of senses
  - Learns through discovery, imitation, and repetition
- Child learns through imaginative and interactive play
- Child uses oral language or other alternative methods of communication to ask questions or find solutions
- Child chooses from a variety of materials and methods of exploration

### Learning in Action: Examples

#### The Toddler

- Explores using movement, space, and materials (rolls or kicks a ball, manipulates shape sorters, builds creations with blocks, etc.)
- Engages in an activity alongside another child
- Imitates the actions of adults and other children (sounds, facial expressions, gestures, self-help skills, etc.)
- Makes choices about which stories, rhymes, songs, simple games, etc. to read, sing, play; which clothes to wear, etc.
- Asks questions repeatedly ("Why?", "How come?", "What's that?", etc.)
- Engages in pretend play around familiar events (arranges a row of chairs to become a bus, creates a tea party, talks on a toy phone, etc.)

#### The Adult

- Describes to children what they are experiencing (feeling, hearing, touching, seeing, etc.)
- Asks open-ended questions to engage children's imagination (require more than a one-word answer), including questions asking why, what, how, etc.
- Asks questions and helps children find answers through active, hands-on exploration
- Provides a variety of open-ended materials, opportunities and choices (water play, art materials, stacking and sorting materials, etc.)
- Responds to children's curiosity and questions with enthusiasm and encouragement

#### THE ENVIRONMENT INCLUDES

- A safe, natural space for children to explore with duplication of favorite toys and materials
- A variety of sensory experiences (boxes, large colored beads for stringing, water play materials, dress-up clothes, materials from nature, etc.)
- Safe materials of cloth, plastic, rubber in a variety of shapes, textures and sizes (large enough to not be a choking hazard)

# Sensory Exploration & Problem Solving Infants (Birth to 18 Months)

## Approaches to Learning

### Widely Held Expectations

- Child notices and shows interest in and excitement with familiar objects, people and events
- Child explores environment and persists when facing challenges
- Experiments with cause and effect

### Learning in Action: Examples

#### The Infant

- Looks for and finds an object or person that disappears from sight
- Tries one or two ways to reach an object or person (pulls on a blanket to bring a toy closer, rolls over, moves around obstacles to reach a desired object, etc.)
- Explores using materials and movement spontaneously (puts fingers/toes in mouth, rolls toward a toy, plays peek-a-boo, presses key or button to make noises, etc.)
- Uses repetition to discover materials and new skills
- Looks to the adult for help when trying to accomplish a task (makes eye contact with adult when experiencing difficulty, hands a toy to an adult, etc.)

#### The Adult

- Watches closely and describes to children what they are experiencing (feeling, hearing, touching, seeing, etc.)
- Asks questions and helps children find answers through active, hands-on exploration
- Provides opportunities to increase the child's ability to make independent choices
- Gives children ample time to problem solve without intervening
- Responds to children's exploration and discovery with enthusiasm and encouragement
- Arranges the environment to encourage problem solving and minimize "No's"
- Understands that 'getting messy' is part of the child's learning experience
- Shows excitement when child attempts new activity

#### THE ENVIRONMENT INCLUDES

- Materials that encourage discovery, imitation, and repetition (mirrors, books, music, wind up toys, etc.)
- Stacking blocks, activity boxes, containers to fill and dump, squeaky toys, outdoor play time, etc.
- Musical toys, materials of various textures, things to push, roll, swing, etc.



# Sensory Exploration & Problem Solving Toddlers (18 Months to 3 Years)

## Widely Held Expectations

- Child tries multiple ways to solve a problem and is highly involved and persistent
  - Uses active exploration, trial and error, and words to solve problems
  - Demonstrates persistence in problem solving
  - Increases ability to find more than one solution
  - Uses previously successful methods to solve a problem
- Experiments with cause and effect
- Child shows increasing ability to identify similar objects from a variety of materials

## Learning in Action: Examples

### The Toddler

- Demonstrates increasing control in manipulation of materials and movement
- Manipulates materials to cause an action (winds up a toy to make it go, hits the drum to make a sound, etc.)
- Attempts a task for a minute or two before asking for assistance
- Tries several methods to solve a problem (moves obstacles to reach a desired object, twists, pounds and pulls to take an object apart, etc.)
- Uses an object as a tool (a low chair to climb higher, a paintbrush to paint, etc.)
- Selects items that match (cars from a bucket of vehicles, blocks of the same color, etc.)

### The Adult

- Asks questions and helps children find answers through active, hands-on exploration
- Helps children identify people, places, and things in their environment
- Provides opportunities to increase the child's ability to make independent choices
- Encourages and provides materials for a variety of sensory experiences (to touch, taste, listen to, observe, etc.)
- Gives children ample time to problem-solve without intervening
- Responds to children's curiosity and questions with enthusiasm and encouragement
- Arranges the environment to encourage problem solving and minimize "No's"
- Understands that 'getting messy' is part of the child's learning experience

### THE ENVIRONMENT INCLUDES

- Materials that encourage discovery, imitation, and repetition (mirrors, books, musical instruments, wind up toys, etc.)
- Simple puzzles, sand and water play toys, nesting cups and containers, finger paint, wind chimes, etc.

# Resources

*125 Brain Games for Babies* -- Jackie Silberg

*125 Brain Games for Toddlers and Twos: Simple Games to Promote Early Brain Development* -- Jackie Silberg

*Baby Play and Learn* -- Penny Warner

*Childspace Infants and Toddlers: A Program Guide and Caregiver Workbook* -- Jane Warren

*Games to Play with Babies (3rd Edition)* -- Jackie Silber

*Higglety Pigglety Pop* -- Jackie Weismann

*Infant/Toddler: Introducing Your Child to the Joy of Learning* -- Earladeen Badger

*Learning Through Play: Blocks* -- Ellen Booth Church

*The Right Stuff for Children Birth to 8; Selecting Play Materials to Support Development (NAEYC)* -- Martha Bronson

*Thrifty Nifty Stuff for Little Kids* -- Dee Blose

*What's Going On In There?: How the Brain and Mind Develop in the First Five Years of Life* -- Lise Eliot

## Books for Children

*Alphabet Under Construction* -- Denise Fleming

*The Boy Who Wouldn't Go to Bed* -- Helen Cooper

*Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See?* -- Bill Martin, Jr.

*Color* -- Ruth Heller

*Corduroy* -- Don Freeman

*From Head to Toe* -- Eric Carle

*Goodnight Moon* -- Margaret Wise Brown

*I Can* -- Helen Oxenbury

*Maisey Drives The Bus* -- Lucy Cousins

*Snow Play* -- Kate Spohn

*What Does Baby Say?* -- Karen Katz