

A High-Quality Program for Your Infant

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Your baby coos and kicks when you speak softly to her. Her eyes follow your movements. With every interaction you have with your baby, her developing brain makes lots of new connections. Your baby might not use words to tell you that she's hungry or needs a diaper change, but she sure finds other ways—sometimes very loud ones!—to communicate. She makes sounds and moves her face and body to tell you how she feels.

You might be thinking, She has so much to learn! But don't worry—little by little she'll develop the skills and gain the knowledge she needs. In a high-quality infant program, caregivers help your infant grow up healthy and ready to learn new things.

Caregivers make sure children are safe and comfortable. They create close, trusting relationships with infants and families. They understand how unique your child and family is, and they respect every family's culture.

You probably have questions about whether a program is the best one for your child and your family. This brochure has a lot of information you can use to find the best place. You'll find out how infants learn and develop, how caregivers support their learning and development, and what you want to see in a high-quality program. Let's get started!

How Infants Develop and Learn

Infants—babies from birth to 18 months—learn so much in a short time. While each child develops at a different rate, here are some tried-and-true practices that help all infants learn best.

Through relationships with caring adults. It's important for your child to have nurturing relationships with the adults who care for her. A primary (main) caregiver works with the same few babies. She gets to know them well and forms close relationships with them so the babies feel confident and secure.

Through active, hands-on play. Grabbing plastic rings, rolling on a soft blanket, making a toy squeak—what fun! Babies look, smell, hear, taste, and touch their way to understanding the world around them. Moving around freely in a safe space, babies can reach and explore objects—a key to learning. Caregivers offer infants safe, interesting materials that spark their curiosity and invite babies to discover what they can do with their own bodies and with the things around them.

By connecting new ideas to what babies already know and can do. All of us learn best when we can link new information to what we already know. Caregivers help babies do this so that they build knowledge. Caregivers also connect learning to whatever your child is interested in, whether that's wheels or music or faces!

By exploring and making sense of their world. High-quality programs give infants plenty of time to play and explore. Babies need lots of experiences with objects and people to begin figuring them out. Caregivers help by telling babies the names of objects and describing what your child is doing. Over time, your infant begins to understand what things are and how they work.

With support from caregivers. Working with infants involves so much more than caring for their physical needs. Caregivers interact with children and offer them enjoyable experiences that lay the foundation for learning. Some of the ways they support babies are by

- Noticing your child's signals to learn what he's saying through his sounds and actions
- Building trust by responding quickly to babies' needs
- Setting up schedules and following familiar routines (for example, lunch or bottle time is usually followed by naptime). Babies learn better when they feel secure and know what to expect.
- Talking to your child during caregiving times, like feeding and diaper changing. This makes your child feel valued and helps her build a strong bond with her caregiver.
- Describing to your infant what's happening throughout the day. Regular communication helps him build lifelong language skills.
- Creating safe spaces for your baby to move comfortably and freely, with interesting materials for her to explore
- Asking about routines you do at home with your child so the caregivers can do some of the same things at the program

- Keeping you up to date on what your child knows and is learning so you don't miss a thing
- Offering lots of active playtime. Caregivers give babies plenty of space to play and build their muscles and coordination.
- Giving infants the chance to explore outdoors every day if possible. Spending time outside helps children's health and brain development. Caregivers take babies on walks and also let them move freely in a secure outdoor space.

Audience: *Family*

Age: *Infant/Toddler*

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A High-Quality Program for Your Toddler

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Your toddler is growing so quickly! He's learning by touching, seeing, and exploring the world around him. Little by little, he'll gain all the skills and knowledge he needs.

All families want their children to be happy, healthy, and successful. High-quality toddler programs have the same goals. These programs are warm, caring places that support your child and respect your family. Teachers make sure that children are safe and ready to learn. They form close, trusting relationships with you and your child.

You might have questions, like What goes on in a toddler program? or How do children learn when they can't say many words? This page is here to give you some of the answers. You'll find out how toddlers learn and develop, how teachers support their learning and development, and what a high-quality toddler program looks like. Let's get started!

How Toddlers Develop and Learn

Toddlers—children ages 16 to 36 months—learn a lot in a short time. Each child develops at a different rate, but there are practices that help all toddlers learn best.

Through relationships with caring adults. Teachers help your child feel secure and important. They create strong, positive bonds with your toddler that help her gain confidence so she can explore and learn.

Through active, hands-on play. Young children learn best when they can see, hear, taste, touch, and smell objects safely. Through exploration, they start to see how the world works and how to solve problems.

By connecting new ideas and skills to what toddlers already know and can do. All of us learn best when we can link new information to what we already know. Teachers help toddlers do this so that they build knowledge. Teachers also connect

learning to whatever your child is interested in, like balls, animals, or trucks!

By exploring and making sense of their world. Toddlers need a lot of experiences with objects and interactions with people to begin understanding them. Play is an important way your toddler explores materials, tests ideas, and starts figuring out why something happens.

With support from teachers. Working with toddlers involves so much more than caring for their physical needs. Some of the many ways teachers help toddlers develop and learn include

- Asking questions to help children think more deeply about what they're doing.
- Encouraging children so they'll keep trying when they face a challenge.
- Acknowledging children's efforts: "You tried many times to stack three blocks, Anya!"
- Providing information so toddlers learn new skills, how things work, and about the world around them.
- Offering suggestions that help children try new things: "Edikan, using both hands to carry that basket might be easier than using just one hand."
- Adding small challenges to activities so that children's skills keep growing.
- Observing children to discover how they learn and what they know and enjoy. Teachers use this information to extend children's learning: "Finn, I remember you telling me all about the fun you had at the beach with Grandma. I brought in some picture books about seashells and fish you might like."
- Documenting what toddlers are doing and saying through photographs, videos, notes, assessments, and recordings.
- Evaluating the information they collect about children to decide what experiences to give children next.

Audience: *Family*

Age: *Infant/Toddler*

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A High-Quality Program for Your Preschooler

A High-Quality Program for Your Preschooler

On a class nature walk, Matias notices that the leaves, which were once green, are now red, orange, and yellow. He asks his teacher why the leaves are changing colors.

Anna and Xavi build a ramp for their toy cars and test how fast the cars go when the ramp is at different angles.

At the dramatic play center, Megan, Ima, and Luciana set up a pretend doctor's office. They take turns role-playing as the doctor, receptionist, and patient.

These preschoolers are having fun and learning a lot through their play. Children who succeed in school and in life know how to find solutions to problems. They can communicate and work well with others. They are curious, creative thinkers, and they continue to learn and adapt. High-quality preschool programs help your child build these skills.

You might have questions like, What goes on in a preschool program? or Should my child be able to read and write at this age? This page will give you some of the answers. You'll find out about how preschoolers learn and develop, how teachers support their learning and development, and what a high-quality preschool program looks like. Let's get started!

How Preschoolers Develop and Learn

Your child is growing up so fast! One minute he's begging you to read his favorite book with him, and the next he's drawing a spaceship he and his friend want to build. Let's look at how your child builds his skills and knowledge at this age.

By interacting with caring adults. Teachers help your child feel secure and important every day. They listen to your child and get to know him well. When children feel safe and cared for, they grow in all areas of development.

Through active, hands-on, “minds-on” play and learning. As your preschooler plays, experiments, and interacts with children and caring adults, a lot of learning happens. She develops skills that will help her think, question, and explore the world.

By connecting new ideas and skills to what they already know and can do. All of us learn best when we can link new information to what we already know. Teachers help preschoolers do this to build knowledge and connect learning to what interests your child, like bugs or machines!

By exploring and making sense of their world. As your child explores materials, he comes up with ideas about why things happen and tests them out. Teachers help him make sense of his experiences by asking him to explain his thinking, encouraging him to try something different, and adding small challenges.

Through teacher-guided learning. Teachers plan small- and large-group experiences that stretch children's learning. Some strategies they use during these times include

- Giving children many opportunities to practice new skills, like finding and making patterns
- Offering choices so children become more independent and take responsibility for their learning
- Asking questions that lead to more than one right answer: “Why do you think that happened?”
- Giving hints to help children figure out something
- Providing information and directions
- Adding challenges when children are ready for them, like reading aloud slightly longer books with more complex words
- Commenting on what children are doing to call attention to their efforts, not just what they accomplish: “You thought about that really hard before you answered.”
- Giving them time to find their own solutions, and offering help if children seem stuck or frustrated

- Encouraging your child to keep trying and to judge his own efforts:
“How did your idea about making a maze with blocks turn out? What do you think you could do differently next time?”

Teachers also think carefully about when, how, and where to help children learn. When they read a book to a small group, they might discuss the characters and point out specific parts of the book, like the title and cover. They might use puppets to help children talk about their feelings. Teachers use every moment to help children learn—including mealtimes, cleanup, and outdoor playtime.

What Does “High Quality” Mean?

No two preschools look or feel exactly the same. But all high-quality programs have some things in common.

Teachers in high-quality programs build on what your child already knows and can do. They provide materials and experiences that are challenging, but that children can do with a little help. This is called developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). Developmentally appropriate practice means

- Teaching based on each child's age and stage of development
- Helping each child meet goals that are just right for that child
- Valuing and including each child's family, language, and culture

When teachers choose materials, activities, and strategies to use with children, they think about many things, including

- What most preschoolers need—like materials for creating and pretending
- What individual children might need—such as a quiet space for Thalia, who's sensitive to loud noises
- Ways to support each child's family, language, and culture—like learning several words in Spanish to speak to Carlos and Yasmina

Using what they know about your child, teachers set goals for her. They keep track of her learning so they know what she's ready to learn next.

Audience: *Family*

Age: *Preschool*

Topics: *Other Topics, Educational Settings*

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