Growing, Learning, & Caring (GLC)

Playgroup Facilitator Guide

Care. Connect. Grow.
Strengthening California's Home-Based Child Care

CCIP Child Care Initiative Project

PUBLISHING INFORMATION

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PREFACE

Child Care Resource & Referral programs (R&Rs) are located in every county in California. R&Rs help families find child care; conduct outreach, recruit, and provide technical assistance and professional growth opportunities for child care providers; and collect information from parents and child care providers to improve the quality of early care and education in California. R&Rs provide a range of services and resources to families looking for child care; to child care providers seeking connection, information, and training; and to communities working to support children and families.

CCIP has been implemented by R&Rs since its inception in 1985 as a public/private partnership. Since 2002, CCIP has been conducted statewide. CCIP is the predominant entry point into California's quality improvement system, serving as a professional pathway for individuals interested in operating a state-licensed Family Child Care (FCC) home. Additionally, CCIP supports already licensed FCC providers and Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) caregivers. The project builds capacity by increasing the number of child care spaces, and improves the quality of care with an emphasis on infants and toddlers through:

- Assessment and analysis of child care supply and demand
- Recruitment of home-based child care providers
- Technical assistance, by assisting with the family child care application process, conducting pre-licensing visits, and providing training and information about health & safety requirements, etc.
- Educational opportunities, including: two-generation playgroups, caregiver cafés, training, and conferences using curricula that is multilingual, strength-based, culturally relevant, and trauma-informed. All learning activities are grounded in best practices for health and safety, and the California Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Competencies.

CCIP places an emphasis on recruiting, supporting, and providing professional growth opportunities to home-based child providers who care for infants and toddlers and children whose families receive CCDF subsidies.

The California Child Care Resource & Referral Network (Network), in collaboration with the State of California, provides CCIP program orientations, training of trainer events, training materials, and technical assistance to all R&Rs, as these community-based organizations are CCIP contractors responsible for conducting the project at the local level.

To find your local CCIP/R&R: Call 1-800-KIDS-793 (1-800-543-7793) or visit www.rrnetwork.org/find_child_care.

CCIP TRAINING FACILITATOR GUIDES

Child Development and Learning (CDL)

Culture, Diversity, and Equity (CDE)

Relationships, Interactions, and Guidance (RIG)

Family and Community Engagement (FCE)

Dual-Language Development (DLD)

Observation, Screening, Assessment, and Documentation (OSAD)

Special Needs and Inclusion (SNI)

Learning Environments and Curriculum (LEC)

Health and Safety (HS)

Leadership in Early Childhood Education (LECE)

Professionalism (P)

Administration and Supervision (AS)

Growing Learning & Caring (GLC)

- Training Guides
  - The Vital Role of the Caring Provider
  - Discipline, Guidance and Family Support
  - Character Education
  - Play is Learning
  - Family Literacy
  - Caring for Babies and Toddlers
- Growing, Learning, & Caring (GLC) Playgroup Facilitator Guide

INTRODUCTION

Audience

The Growing, Learning, & Caring (GLC) Playgroup Facilitator Guide was developed for use by playgroup facilitators who work with family, Friends and Neighbors (FFNs) at R&Rs in California. The information and resources in this guide will be utilized during playgroup activities conducted by facilitators for Family, Friend, & Neighbors (FFNs) who primarily take care of children birth to five years of age. It is designed to be flexible so that playgroups can be adapted to meet the needs of participants, a large and diverse group of individuals.

Purpose

This Facilitator Guide is a companion to the 12 CCIP Training Facilitator Guides. It covers the following GLC Playgroup Modules:

- Module 1: Introduction
- Module 2: Play!
- Module 3: Anti-bias Education
- Module 4: Our Image of the Child
- Module 5: Our Image of Families
- Module 6: Wellness

The content in this guide has been written to address the needs of Family, Friend, & Neighbor caregivers and the children and families they serve. The guide has been developed to support the learning of playgroup facilitators at Resource & Referral (R&R) agencies in California. The intent is to build capacity and increase the availability of playgroups for children and caregivers. This Facilitator Guide was developed to complement the Growing, Caring, and Learning Curriculum, CCIP Training Facilitator Guides, and may also be used for stand-alone playgroup activities facilitated by R&R staff.

Organization

There are six modules in this Facilitator Guide (see “Table of Contents” at the beginning of this document). Each module includes: an overview, personal reflection, defining our terms, skills practice, the environment, you, and planning related to each module topic, and a section on further learning. Additional details about the organization of this guide are provided in module one.

Overview

The overview introduces the topic, defines the scope of work, and focuses on increasing an understanding of why it is relevant to the work of a playgroup facilitator.

Personal Reflection

The personal reflection is an opportunity for the facilitator to practice their reflection skills and to connect new learning to things they already know. Facilitators can type their answers or write them in the space provided.

Defining Our Terms

This section is where we will define and explain how we are using key words and phrases from each module. Having a shared vocabulary is important to understanding one another.

Skills Practice

Each topic will relate to skills that will support your work facilitating playgroups. You will have an opportunity to practice those skills here.

Appendices

The appendices are found at the end of the Facilitator Guide.

Appendix A: Playgroup Health and Safety Checklist

This checklist serves as a guide to assist in planning and developing a playgroup based on health and safety best practices for playgroups.

Appendix B: Disaster Planning

The California Child Care Disaster Plan provides information and resources that may be helpful when developing policies, guidelines, and overall plans for a playgroup.

Terminology

Child care provider: includes family child care providers (licensed) and family, friend, neighbor, and nanny (license-exempt) caregivers. Licensing requirements are outlined in state regulations found in Title 22, Div 12, Chap 3, for Family Child Care Homes. Here is a list of exemptions to licensure in California:

(1) Any family day care home providing care for the children of only one family in addition to the operator's own children.

(2) Any cooperative arrangement between parents for the care of their children where no payment is involved and the arrangement meets all of the following conditions:

(A) In a cooperative arrangement, parents shall combine their efforts so that each parent, or set of parents, rotates as the responsible caregiver with respect to all the children in the cooperative.

(B) Any person caring for children shall be a parent, legal guardian, stepparent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or adult sibling of at least one of the children in the cooperative.

(C) There can be no payment of money or receipt of in-kind income in exchange for the provision of care. This does not prohibit in-kind contributions of snacks, games, toys, blankets for napping, pillows, and other materials parents deem appropriate for their children. It is not the intent of this paragraph to prohibit payment for outside activities, the amount of that may not exceed the actual cost of the activity.

(D) No more than 12 children are receiving care in the same place at the same time.

(3) Any arrangement for the receiving and care of children by a relative.

(4) Any child day care program that operates only one day per week for no more than four hours on that one day." (Health and Safety Code Section 1596.792)

Family: to reflect the diversity in family structures the term "family" is used instead of "parent(s)".

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Module 1: Introduction

Overview

A playgroup is a safe place for children, caregivers, and families to learn and grow. They are designed to reduce isolation and engage those involved in a child's life in their development, providing caregiving support, early screenings and referrals, and leadership skills that extend beyond the playgroup. Playgroups come in many forms, but one thing they have in common is that they center around children and the best interests of those children.

A child's brain is undergoing an amazing period of development. In the first few years of life, it is producing more than a million neural connections each second.[1] Each interaction and experience that you expose the child to is impactful. This rapid growth period is both precious and vulnerable. It is a time for the foundations of intellectual, emotional, and moral growth to be laid down.[1] And it is also sadly the time when children are more likely to be victims of abuse or neglect, than any other age group.[1]

Playgroups can be a safe and healthy environment for children to enjoy and strengthen their developing brains and bodies while working with the adults in their lives to reduce child maltreatment and promote bonding, secure attachment, and the simple delight in being together. Caregivers bring many strengths and playgroups can use those strengths as a springboard to healthier, happier families and communities.

Welcome to a curriculum to support your learning as a facilitator of a playgroup. This first chapter introduces how you can work with these lessons. It will clarify our goals and methods and how you can use them. We built this curriculum for you because play is critical to human development and to how communities develop.

Here you will find the same sections that will be used in each chapter and you can begin to practice the skills that will support your learning and your work as a playgroup facilitator. There are many topics because your work includes many parts of the human experience. This curriculum will introduce relevant information in a meaningful way, invite you to learn from your own experience and to choose what you'd like to investigate further. Every chapter will have an overview like this one to get you started.

Learning Goals

- ☐ Shared vocabulary
- ☐ Orient you to the curriculum
- ☐ Get started!

Personal Reflection

What was the last new thing you tried? (Big or small!)

What was hard about it?

What helped you learn?

Defining Our Terms

This section will always define some key words for the module. Some of these words may be unfamiliar, or they may be familiar words that we are using in a specific way. For example, “Environment” can mean the surroundings, or it can mean the natural world, but in this case, we are using the word to mean the spaces where playgroups take place.

Defining our terms this way:

- supports clarity
- helps us communicate across culture or language differences
- requires us to reflect upon our goals and our actions

Environment	This refers to the play space. It may be a room, a yard, or even a virtual space. It is inclusive of the physical, social and emotional environments, and is a powerful way for you to promote play.
Facilitate	Literally “to make easier”. Facilitating is different from being a leader or a participant of a group. Facilitators priority is to smooth the way for others. Facilitating play is very particular because sometimes more challenge is more fun than less.
FFN	Family, Friends, and Neighbors who care for children 0-5 years old. FFNs comprise the larger family umbrella and as such, may be referenced as “caregivers” or simply as “family” throughout the curriculum.
Plan	Facilitators plan for playgroups to help them become more welcoming and playful. This planning may not look like planning for other events, so we’ll talk about planning in each module.
Play	Describes so many various activities; all of which are essential for healthy development and learning in early childhood. One definition is that play is: free
Playgroup	A safe communal space for children, caregivers, and families to play and build relationships. An opportunity for time and space to play in community with children and adults that they may not have otherwise.
Playgroup Facilitator	You make play easy and available. Your work is crucial to your community. You are an ambassador for play. You design safe and healthy environments for children and families to play in. You welcome people and play.

Skills Practice

Remembering and Reflecting.

As a playgroup facilitator, it will be helpful for you to be able to remember your own childhood, and your own play. This can take practice, but it is an indispensable skill that supports our own creativity, empathy and reasoning so it is worth practicing.

You'll have an opportunity to practice both of these skills in the "Introducing You!" section below.

Why This Curriculum?

This curriculum has been designed for facilitators who work with Family, Friends, and Neighbors (FFNs) who take care of children 0-5 years old. **FFNs comprise the larger family umbrella and as such, may be referenced as "caregivers" or simply as "family" throughout the curriculum.** As a facilitator, you have one of the most important jobs of being a nurturer, brain architect, researcher, leader, and teacher. Now you can put all of your skills to wonderful use in your community. The goal of this playgroup curriculum is to support you as a facilitator in establishing and maintaining a space that is nourishing for this special time in a child's life. While many resources exist to support pre-school teachers and day care workers, your role is unique. As such, you will have unique needs. There are many questions that arise when implementing playgroups and we want you to have answers to those questions at your fingertips.

What can I expect to learn?

We'll share vocabulary with you so that you and other playgroup facilitators will have shared language to talk about your work. In addition to the **fundamentals** of facilitating best practice playgroups, you can expect to learn about the philosophies behind them. These **philosophies** are rooted in relationships, resiliency, and attunement to the needs of the children, caregivers, and communities you are serving.

Introducing the Environment

For your playgroup, your "environment" might be a yard or park, a borrowed classroom or other indoor space, or it might even be an online "virtual" environment. This curriculum takes place here; on a screen or a page.

There are 7 modules in this curriculum. Each addresses one aspect of your work as a playgroup facilitator, but, in reality you will never encounter just one aspect at a time. For this reason, each chapter will have sections relating back to the chapters before. Each module will explain the main topic, and then relate it to the others. For example, the next module is about Play. You'll also find sections about play in each other section because in a playgroup, *everything* relates to play!

How to use this curriculum

Every chapter will have the following parts:

1. Overview

This section will introduce the topic, define the scope of your work, and hopefully help you understand why it's relevant to your work as a playgroup facilitator.

2. Personal Reflection

This is an opportunity for you to practice your reflection skills and to connect your new learning to things you already know . You can type your answers or write them in the space provided. Please find time to do this step, and look back at your answers later.

3. Defining Our Terms

This is where we will define and explain how we are using key words and phrases from the chapter. Having a shared vocabulary is important to understanding one another. This kind of curriculum also requires a number of explanations so it's our intention to organize them so that they can be useful to you.

4. Skills Practice

Each topic will relate to skills that will support your work facilitating playgroups. You'll have an opportunity to practice those skills here.

5. _____ Environment

This section is where we will consider how each topic will help you choose elements of your environment in light of the topic of each chapter.

6. _____ and You

Here you will take the information you've been given and think about how it relates to yourself. This is another opportunity to practice the skill of reflection.

7. Planning for _____

Planning is another skill. As a playgroup facilitator, you will plan for your playgroup, and this section invites you to consider how each topic will affect your planning.

8. Further Learning

Our goal in this curriculum is to give you a broad understanding of these topics. You will want to learn more about some topics, and this section will offer opportunities to do that.

“Success is liking yourself, liking what you do, and liking how you do it.”

– Maya Angelou

Skills Practice - Introducing YOU!

When we remember our own childhoods and play we gain insight into what happens in the playgroup. Reflect upon your experiences; what was meaningful about them, how they relate to your learning and to the person you are today.

Practice: Remember and reflect. Please take a moment and think about yourself, your family, and your community, then draw about them below.

Planning for this Playgroup Facilitator Curriculum

Looking at your reflections above, what helps you learn something new?

What gets in the way?

What do you hope to get out of this curriculum?

How will you use this curriculum?

Further Learning

This section will reference outside sources. We'll do the best that we can to keep the digital version of this curriculum up to date, but we don't have control over other sites. Please contact FFN Training Coordinator at: cquintero@rrnetwork.org if you find a link that's out of date. Thank you.

Module 2: Play!

"Through play we become human."

—Arthur Battram, quoted in *The Playwork Primer.*

Overview

You decide: "Is it play?"

- A teacher holds children's' hands and teaches "ring around the rosie".
- A baby pushes a ball and watches it move across the floor and crawls after it.
- Children pushing one another off of a log, pretending to be "the queen bee".

Children are born to play and this is universal throughout all cultures. Regardless of the amount or types of toys, we see the common activity of play in all children. Adults need to play, too! One benefit of spending our days around children is that we are mentored in playfulness.

All the ways in which children play are essential to healthy physical, emotional and mental development. In fact, play is so important that the United Nations Convention on the ***Rights of the Child*** states in Article 31 "Children have the right to engage in play and recreational activities."[1] In other words, it is a *fundamental human right to have access to play*. Please note: the US is one of only two nations that have NOT ratified this convention.

Learning Goals

- ☐ A shared definition of play
- ☐ Understand how children learn and develop through play
- ☐ Be able to plan for play

[1] UN Convention on the RIghts of the Child https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text

Personal Reflection

What were your favorite things to play in childhood?

Where do you remember playing? What objects did you prefer for your play?

Who were your favorite playmates ?

How did adults support your play?

What barriers got in the way of your “right to play?

Defining Our Terms

"Free play is a time for us to interact directly with... families through play, imagination, and creative activities. It provides learning opportunities that strengthen the social and emotional development of kids and brings our entire community together. Some days I'm flying around in a mask and cape rescuing dolls in danger with my little superhero team of 4-year-olds and on other days I'm sitting at a tiny table ordering food from a restaurant. Every day is a fun adventure and opportunity for me to reconnect with my inner child and reclaim those feelings of wonder and imagination."

—Playgroup Facilitator

Observe	Watch and listen to play carefully. To notice. You may write down notes, or ask families if you can make video or audio recordings.
Schema	A structure or model to support understanding. Sometimes we use it to describe a child's developing idea (Jean Piaget's meaning) but here, we are using it to describe a pattern or exploratory behavior children use to understand the world around them.
Intrinsic Motivation	Wanting to do something for one's own reasons
Nonliteral	When something represents something else. For example; a block is a phone.
Inquiry	Asking questions in order to learn
Reflection	Thinking about something in the context of our own knowledge and understanding.

Play is Learning. Learning is Play.

Play is the most important activity of childhood. During play, children make sense of the world and their place within it. It's universal; children in every culture and young non-human animals all learn everything they need through play. It incorporates mimicry, practice, innovation, communication, problem solving, imagination and children do it all by themselves without any instruction. What a resource for educators! It is now understood that moments discounted as "just play" are actually active learning.

While engaged in play, children:

- explore the physical properties of materials
- explore the possibilities for action, transformation, or representation
- experiment with and build concepts and ideas.

Play is activity characterized by one or more of these features:

- Active engagement,
- Intrinsic motivation,
- Attention to means rather than ends,
- Nonliteral behavior, and
- Freedom from external rules

Active engagement and intrinsic motivation.

Children choose their own play again and again throughout the experience; they play because they want to.

Attention to means rather than ends.

A "bubble gum factory" in a sandbox may never result in pretend bubble gum, and children will still enjoy building it and pretending to work in it for a long time. Play is about how we do it, and less about how it ends. When adults embrace this element of play, we are said to take a "Process-based approach"; valuing play rather than achieving a "product" or goal.

Nonliteral behavivor and freedom from external rules.

As anyone who loves a child knows, and Antoinette Portis famously wrote, a box is "not a box" and a stick is never just a stick. In play, children redefine materials, themselves, their playmates; things are not literally what they are; they can be anything. This is fun, and it's also an important step in our cognitive development.

Adults' Theories About Children's Play

Play is complex. It shifts from one place to another, from person to person, material to material, minute to minute. To learn about childhood, adults study play; how it works, why it happens, how it supports growth, learning and development. There is no need for children to recognize the different types of play. These artificial categories help us analyze play, but they are inadequate to hold all of play's diversity and nuance.

Children play; we watch and try to understand (sometimes we play too!). We can learn about play in very simple terms, or study it in great detail. We must know enough to:

- identify types of play currently holding children's interest
- provide a balanced "menu" of consistent and new play options
- Preserve children's rights to play

Both Mildred Parten and Sara Smilansky observed play as it changed with children's growth. Their classifications tend to be developmental; children transition from one kind of play to the "next". You can use these classifications to provide play opportunities for children across the developmental spectrum. For instance; more than one type of toy will be needed for children who are using them for solitary and parallel play.

> **"Playing: Choosing what to do, doing it, and enjoying it."**
>
> —Betty Jones and Renatta M. Cooper,
> Playing to Get Smart, 2004

Mildred Parten's Classification of Play	
Unoccupied play	Children observe their surroundings and move their bodies
Onlooker play	Children watch other children play without joining
Solitary play	Children play by themselves, perhaps with toys
Parallel play	Children are playing near other children but not with them
Associate play	Children share, borrow or lend toys and communicate
Cooperative play	Children playing and working together

Sara Smilansky's Four Types of Play	
Functional	Children explore the properties and functions of materials, using their bodies and senses. For example, children given clay may poke, smash, pinch and even taste it to understand what the substance is and what it does.
Constructive	Children assemble, create or put together objects. In the case of clay, at this stage the children will begin to roll and shape clay, to make it into something else.
Dramatic or pretend	Imitation and make believe play where children may take on a role, pretend to be someone else or use toys and objects to engage in imaginative play.
Games with rules	Games with rules are a new stage in play because they require children to be able to plan, as well as understand and follow rules. These include table games and movement or physical action games.

Play Schemas

Schemas are preferred, repeating patterns in how children explore and learn. Because schemas are primary ways of playing, children will find ways to pursue their schemas under almost any circumstances. Because of this, adults may be surprised and or annoyed by them. If a child is enjoying their play, and an adult (you or a family member) is having a negative reaction to it, schemas can provide a helpful way to understand the child's plan, and plan for it in ways that works for everyone.

Schemas are ways that children physically engage with their environment. For example:

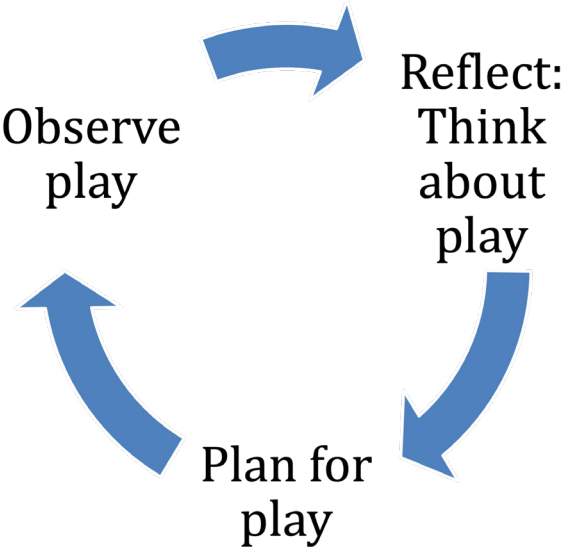
Schema	May Look Like...
Transporting	Carry all the bricks from one place to another in a bag, the sand from the tray to the home corner in a bucket, push a friend around in a toy stroller.
Enveloping	Cover themselves in a flannel when washing, wrap dolls and toys up in blankets and fabric, and cover their painting with one color.
Enclosure/ Containing	Put their thumb in and out of their mouth, fill up and empty containers of all kinds, climb into large cartons, sit in the tunnel, build 'cages' with blocks.
Trajectory (Diagonal, Vertical or Horizontal)	Gaze at your face, drop things from their cot, make arcs in their spilt food with their hand, play with the running water in the bathroom, climb up and jump off furniture, line up the cars, bounce and kick balls, throw.
Rotation	Fascinated by the spinning washing machine, love anything with wheels, roll down a hill, enjoy spinning round or being swung around.
Connection	Joining train tracks together, stick the masking tape across from the table to the chair.
Positioning	Put things on their head, prefer their custard next to their sponge not over it, and lie on the floor or under the table.
Transforming	Add juice to their mashed potato, sand to the water tray, enjoy adding colour to corn flour or making dough.2

[2] From "Examples of Schemas for Early Years Practitioners" from: https://www.dorsetnexus.org.uk/Page/9009

We must observe a pattern before we can be sure that a child is working with a particular schema. For example, a child who fills a bucket with rocks, could have an enclosure schema, OR a transporting schema; only with time and observation can you begin to see a pattern. See the resources at the end of this module for tools to work with schemas. There is also more about this in Module 4 “Our Image of the Child”.

Planning for Play - Cycle of Inquiry

As a playgroup facilitator, you will observe children’s play. Your observations will help you respond in the moment, plan for the next playgroup and have conversations with families about the learning, development and delight that you see.



Observe: You watch and listen to children’s play. What is happening? What is most important to them? What is NOT happening?

Reflect: You talk with families, colleagues, or you think by yourself about what is happening. Some of the tools in this module can help you.

Plan for Play: Based on your reflection, you choose what to offer at your next playgroup.

Observe: You watch and listen to children’s response to your offering and restart the cycle.

Skills Practice: See the Learning Embedded in Play

Free play "is critical for becoming socially adept, coping with stress and building cognitive skills such as problem solving."[3] And it's the context for all of children's learning. Let's connect children's play to the California Learning Foundations. Note: this list is not definitive or complete. Draw lines from the play to the learning that may be taking place.

Children hide "the babies" (pinecones) from "the monsters" (a child). They scream "Oh NO! The monsters will EAT our BABIES all up and they will be DEAD!"
Children hammer playdough. A. "I flatted it! Yours only flatted a little." B. "No mine is the flattiest!" C. Watches, grabs A's hammer& pounds, staring intently at A & B.
A child picks up a car and brings it to the paint table and begins to paint it.
Baby plays peekaboo on the bus.
Children pick red "gooey" berries off the nearby yew bush, and squish them with sticks
"That is not enough for a bear! That is only enough for a tiny rabbit. I need more"
Child to their pretend doggy: "No! Bad dog! Stop! No!" Pretend doggy; growls, bites, jumps up on the picnic table, and makes defiant eye contact at the other child.
A child dumps out a basket of animals and lines them up along the edge of a carpet.
Toddler presses play on mom's phone, starts dancing, seeking eye contact

Develop sense of self and preferences
Build mental flexibility by playing in a variety of places and ways
Teach and learn various cognitive skills (literacy, numeracy etc) in context
Test their own and others' boundaries
Learn about power
Practice conflict resolution (with and without adult support)
Learn new words and develop contextual language
Develop gross and fine motor skills
Strengthen relationships
Develop creativity and imagination
Build memory

[3] The Serious Need for Play (2009).

Play Theory and Observation

Watch one of these videos of children playing.

a. 15 Minutes-Observation
b. Learning About Negotiation in Play
c. Focused Observations Chapter 4 Video 9
d. (Toddlers) Focused Observations Chapter 2 Video 3

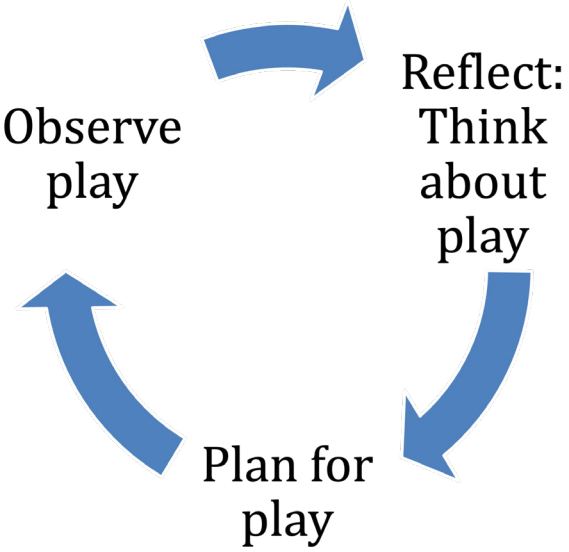
Using *Parten* and *Smilansky's* classifications, where do you see each type of play?

Mildred Parten's Classification of Play	
Unoccupied play	
Onlooker play	
Solitary play	
Parallel play	
Associate play	
Cooperative play	

Sara Smilansky's Four Types of Play	
Functional	
Constructive	
Dramatic or pretend	
Games with rules	

Planning for Play

Use the *cycle of inquiry*, to consider what you saw in the video.



Observation (What did you see and hear in the video?)	
Reflection What are you curious about? What are the child(ren)'s interests? What could support their play?	
Plan for Play What would you add to your environment?	

Playful Environments

Children play no matter where they are, and adults can support children's play when we follow their lead. As a playgroup facilitator, part of your work is to plan for play in an emergent and collaborative way. When an adult watches a child throwing a big ball at a small box, and then they suggest the child ask another child for help, or fetch a bigger box or a smaller ball, this is a (very brief) cycle of inquiry. As a playgroup facilitator, you'll slow down this same process and work with children and their families.

Play happens anywhere and everywhere, but playgroup facilitators design spaces that foster play. These spaces are:

- Fun and open-ended
- Safe and predictable
- Designed for exploration and discovery

Materials: Open-Ended and Organized

What better way to establish an environment that taps into the imaginations of children, drawing out their natural interests, than ensuring that children encounter and can play with materials that are open-ended?

Photo credit: Jamie Grill/Blend Images/Brand X Pictures/Getty Images

The box is an example of an open-ended material: an item that can be used in multiple ways and for many types of play, limited only by the scope of the child's imagination. These materials allow children to initiate play and to use things in non-literal ways (two of the characteristics of play). A box for example, can be a shelter, could be an item of clothing, could be another world, could be thrown, built on, things can be put in it, it could be the focus of a made up game. In other words, the box can become whatever toy the child desires.

Open-ended materials foster creativity, allowing for child-directed and engaging learning experiences. Loose parts are a type of open-ended materials; using them

- Encourages Curiosity
- Allows self-expression
- Supports open-ended and non-structured play

The use of household items, recycled objects and natural materials can spark children's creative play. When you choose these objects, be sure to think about how they will be used by children with different abilities (and allergies); it's critical that anything you put into your environment is accessible to *all children*. This is a place you can invite families to share their clean containers or other disgards; this is a way to make sure that a variety of languages and cultures are included in your play space. For more information on this, please check out the book "Beautiful Stuff" by Cathy Weisman Topal and Lella Gandini.

Anti-bias Reflection Opportunity: Do we choose to use food for play?

In order to offer an equitable play experience for all children, please consider whether or not you will offer food as a plaything in your classroom. While many of us may have made "macaroni necklaces" in the past, **many educators now choose not to use food for play**.

Jean Hannon describes how she learned the impact of offering food in a sensory table this way:

> "Not everyones' mealtimes look like mine.
> There will not necessarily be enough food tomorrow.
> Food is not for play.
>
> These are the lessons I learned from Ana*, and this is how she taught me…"
>
> "It was a Friday in February and the Children stood around one particular center in acute anticipation. As I removed the cover from the sensory table, Ana shrank back in horror.
>
> I had presented the class with a play area filled with rice. In it was enough to feed how many for how long? And I was encouraging the students to stick their hands into that food, to measure, to manipulate, to play! The look on Ana's face at the moment I lifted that cover has not left me in the intervening 10 years. That experience helped me to conclude that using food for art or play is misguided….
>
> I have come to realize just how confusing my use of food for play and art was, not only for Ana, but for all my young students. While we collected cans of food "for the hungry" I also facilitated a lesson where students glued beans to cardboard to outline the letters of their names. I nagged the children to eat their lunches and not throw away food, but followed it by encouraging them in tactical exploration at the rice table…. Several things were inherent in my lessons: a disconnect between consumers, food, food workers, and ultimately the earth itself, a finite resource."[4]

[4] Rethinking Early Childhood Education."Food Is Not for Play" 2008.

Further Learning

Books:

- "Beautiful Stuff" Cathy Weisman Topal and Lella Gandini. 1999. How recycled and other discarded materials can support play and learning, and describes, step-by-step, how one group of educators and families collected materials and used them in classrooms.
- Not a Box Antoinette Portis, 2006.
- Playing to Get Smart. Elizabeth Jones & Renatta M. Davis, 2004.
- Rethinking Early Childhood Education. Book. ed by Ann Pelo. 2008.

Articles and Tools

- What the Research Says: Impact of Specific Toys on Play quick and easy read about choosing play things.
- Loose Parts and Intelligent Playthings Organized by Schema, Chart by Michelle Thornhill. 2017
- "Schema Theory; Following the Threads of Children and Teachers", Blog post by Kendra PeloJoaquin. 2016
- "What is a Schema?"', Flying Start UK, 2014.
- What's the Risk of No Risk? Childcare Exchange, 2010, Deb Curtis asks care-givers to consider what risk is and the roles it plays in teaching and learning.
- Adults need recess too. Here's why you should make time to play. Tolu Ajiboye, 2018. NBC News.
- 10 Things Every Parent Should Know About Play. Laurel Bongiorno. NAEYC
- Playing is My Job. Betty Jones (1990)

Module 3 Anti-bias Educa-

Overview

"Anti-bias curriculum is an approach to early childhood education that sets forth values-based principles and methodology in support of respecting and embracing differences and acting against bias and unfairness. Anti-bias teaching requires critical thinking and problem solving by both children and adults."

—Teaching For Change

There are as many ways to care for children as there are care-givers, and it's good and right for each of us to have our own style. Anti-bias education is not a style difference; it is a necessity to promote a safe and healthy environment for all children and their families.

Note: Because anti-bias education (like any liberatory practice) is a collective undertaking, this module is best learned with at least one other person. Find a colleague or friend and work through this module together.

Learning Goals

- ☐ Introduce the goals of anti-bias education
- ☐ Choose next steps to make your playgroup more equitable

Goals of Anti-bias education:

Goal 1: (Identity) Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.

Goal 2: (Diversity) Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity; accurate language for human differences; and deep, caring human connections.

Goal 3: (Justice) Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.

Goal 4: (Activism) Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.
Excerpted from Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves by Louise Derman-Sparks & Julie Olsen Edwards, xiv. 2010.

Please watch this five-minute video.

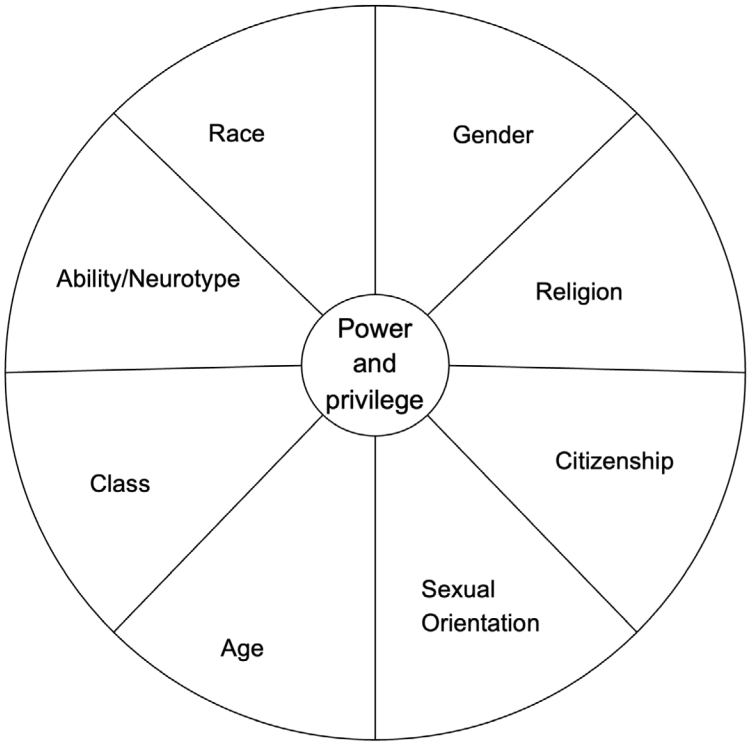
Personal Reflection

In our political, economic, cultural and educational systems, privilege and power are held by people with particular identities, and people with every other identity are marginalized. Each person is located in any context by their varying identities.

What are your identities?

With a dot, locate how close to power or to marginalization that part of your identity confers upon you in the dominant culture. *Note: If you aren't sure, that is a clue that you are likely so close to power and privilege that it is less visible to you.*

Which of these do you share with the children and families in your groups? Which do you need to learn more about?



Defining Our Terms

Implicit Bias	Refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.
Power	From the Latin root posse, which means to be able, having the capacity to make a difference, to have worth or value.
Equality	Treating all individuals and groups of people the same
Equity	Treatment that is fair and just
Race	A fluid and erroneous system of classifying human beings that was invented by Europeans, and has consistently functioned over time to concentrate power with white people and legitimize dominance over people of color.
Ethnicity	Social groups that are based on shared history, culture, and/or connection to geographical place.
Racism	A web of economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that systemize an unequal distribution of privilege, resources, safety and power in favor of the dominant racial group at the expense of all other racial groups.
Prejudice	A baseless and usually negative attitude, held by an individual, toward members of another social group. Common features include negative feelings and stereotyped beliefs.
Nationality	The status of belonging to a particular nation (whether by birth or naturalization).
Racial Identity Development	The interactive process through which a person navigates their understanding and feelings about their own racial group membership. This includes both the ways they are classified by other people and by social institutions and how they think of themselves.
Culture	The patterns of daily life learned consciously and unconsciously by a group of people. These patterns can be seen in language, governing practices, arts, customs, holiday celebrations, food, religion, dating rituals and clothing, to name a few.

Culturally Responsive Practice	According to Gloria Ladson-Billings it is an approach that empowers students (and families) intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes. The use of cultural referents in (teaching) bridges and explains the mainstream culture, while valuing and recognizing the students (families) own culture..
Gender	A social concept that reflects how individuals identify themselves. Historically viewed as a binary category of male/female linked to an individual's sex, gender identity is viewed by current science as fluid and expansive. Cisgender individuals develop a gender identity that matches their legal designation. Transgender individuals are those whose gender identity and/or expression differs from cultural expectations based on their legal designation at birth.
Stereotype	Any depiction of a person or group of people that makes them appear less than fully human, unique, or individual or that reinforces misinformation about that person or group.
Ableism	A systemic form of oppression deeply embedded in society that devalues disabilities through structures based on implicit assumptions about standards of physical, intellectual, and emotional normalcy.
Classism	A systemic form of oppression deeply embedded in society that tends to assign greater value to middle and upper socioeconomic status and devalue the "working" class.

Language Diversity and Equity

California has tremendous language diversity. In order to support all children's language and cultural development, all languages are welcome in playgroup. It is essential that children have adults who share their languages. All facilitators regardless of how many languages you speak need a strong understanding of language and cultural development as part of meeting the four goals of Anti-bias Education.

As you watch these videos, consider, what can you do as a playgroup facilitator to meet the four goals of Anti-bias Education regarding language justice?

Goal 1: (Identity)	
Goal 2: (Diversity)	
Goal 3: (Justice)	
Goal 4: (Activism)	

People primarily consider the four goals as ways of choosing materials and books. However, it is critical that facilitators and educators learn to link the four goals to every aspect of our work. You can make connections between all four goals and any part of your planning and facilitation.

Equitable Environments

Since play is the purpose of our work, we must make sure that all children have access to play. For play, children must access time, space, materials and relationships; these are not equally available to all children and families. According to the fourth anti-bias goal, we must act upon this injustice. Consider the children in your playgroup:

1. How much access do they have to time, space, materials and relationships?
2. How good are the time, space, materials and relationships provided for their play?
3. What short term changes could you make to get children better access to higher quality time, space, materials and relationships?
4. What longer term or large scale changes could you make to get children better access to higher quality time, space, materials and relationships?

Access to...	How much/how good now?	Small or immediate change	Large or longer term change
Time for play			
Space for play			
Materials for play			
Relationships for play			

Justice and You

Please, watch the film "Reflecting on Anti-bias Education in Action: The Early Years" (Directed and produced by Filiz Efe McKinny, Debbie LeeKeenan and John Nimmo. Released 2021).

How did you feel about the experiences offered in the video?

In what ways did each of the educators in the film address the four goals of Anti-Bias Education? (Please, reference the goals on page 27)

Planning for Equity

> **"This work is as much about changing your own perspective as a teacher as it is about the activities you do in the classroom."**
>
> —Rita Tenorio

As a playgroup facilitator you have a responsibility to learn more about how racism and other oppression impact the children and their families. Use all four anti-bias goals to support children's play and development in your play group.

Think: How would you address the injustices at the heart of the story of Columbus's slaughter of Taino people in an early childhood context? Our own adult perspectives can sometimes make it hard to focus on the four goals and how this story and its legacy connects to our own lived experience. Read this story written by educator Makai Kellogg, MAT about her teaching and story-telling addressing these themes with very young children.

Columbus Who? A Dialogue on Discovery with Three-Year-Olds

by Makai Kellogg, M.A.T.
October 2, 2018

Since urging my preschool to eliminate Columbus Day from the school calendar, I continuously contemplate how to teach about Native Americans and Indigenous People's Day in the most developmentally appropriate way. I've ordered board books, folk tales, and informational texts, but it always feels superficial. A curriculum that went beyond the uses of foods and plants, housing, and music was lacking. I support the growing number of teachers who share the truth about Columbus' brutal enslavement, rape, and torture of the Taíno people for gold but how does that translate into an appropriate lesson for three-year-old children?

Last October, I attended a workshop titled "Un-Columbus Day: Reframing, Rediscovering, Relearning, Retelling, Rethinking, Unlearning the Myths!" organized by the Friends Council on Education, the Race Institute for K-12 Educators, and Abington Friends School. The facilitators asked participants to examine the myths and stereotypes internalized throughout their lives. We engaged in small group discussion, participated in a sample lesson based on our student age group, and listened to a panel of Native American college students share their experiences with misinformation in the classroom.

My biggest takeaway from the workshop was "don't teach them [young children] falsehoods that they will have to later unlearn." When asked how we can bring back what we have learned into our classrooms, my thought went straight to the adults in my students' lives. If teachers and families are prepared to debunk myths, call out the fiction that has been embedded in American textbooks, and focus on true Indigenous history, young children will hopefully be exempt from learning distortions in the first place.

How can I explain the importance of Indigenous Peoples' Day to young children without centering the European narrative and victimizing Indigenous Peoples? I remembered the sample lesson at the workshop where an elementary teacher concentrated on perspective taking and defining discovery, encounter, and conflict before even bringing up Columbus. I thought about my best tool for engaging my students in a conversation about social issues: puppets. Every Friday my co-teacher and I use puppets to dramatize a problem we see in the classroom for the children to solve. Because the focus is on the puppets, my students can address a problem, consider different perspectives, and build on each other's ideas without focusing unwanted attention on specific students.

I began the dialogue as Piper, the sea lion, walking upon a beautiful shell on a beach. Piper stated how pretty it is and claimed, "I discovered this shell and I want it!" Little did Piper know that Shelly the hermit crab lived inside. Piper ignored that fact and claimed the shell as her property. Then my students were tasked with answering the questions "What should Shelly do?" and "Can Piper take Shelly's shell?" The circle erupted with "no's" and "that's not nice."

V: "Her is living in there!"

R: "It's attached to her."

L: "Piper can play with Shelly"

K: "Shelly is stuck to the shell, inside the shell, so Piper can't take it."

Piper: "But I want it. I will make her get out."

L: "Maybe they can play together."

Piper: "Sure we can play together, but I'm still taking that shell."

J: "Shelly and Piper can share the shell."

Piper: "But I want it, I don't want to share. It's pretty and it's mine."

L: Maybe they can take turns."

H: "Ask 'how many minutes?"

E: "Maybe they can make some space."

Piper: "But I want it. I discovered it."

K: “Maybe they can have the shell together.”

Piper: “But I discovered it and it’s mine.”

I jumped out of my puppet role and back into teacher mode. I asked “Should Shelly get out of her shell just because Piper wants it? Is that fair?”

At a school where compromise is valued, I wanted to push my students to recognize instances where injustice can’t be solved by sharing. The third goal of Anti-Bias Education is “Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.” My students eventually reached the point where Piper just had to find an alternative solution.

T: “Maybe Piper can find another shell.”

R: “Maybe she can buy a shell.”

M: “But Piper doesn’t have any hands!”

C: “We could make one for Piper.”

The class unanimously decided it was not fair for Piper to claim something that already belonged to someone else. While the children had a plethora of ideas on how both Piper and Shelly could be satisfied, eventually my students agreed that taking a home that belonged to someone else was unacceptable. They demonstrated their ability to be objective and work through a problem by thinking about many possibilities. I hope they continue to develop these skills as well as a social justice lens, so they can analyze and call out the dominant way of teaching European colonization when introduced in the future.

When working with young children, the exploration of feelings and values builds empathy, perspective taking, and problem-solving skills. Instead of pulling out the globe, listing dates, and sharing horrifying statistics, we examined the problem at its core.

And I never had to mention his name.

Where did you see each of the four goals?

Goal 1: (Identity)	
Goal 2: (Diversity)	
Goal 3: (Justice)	
Goal 4: (Activism)	

To address a challenging subject, Makai used a tool she felt really comfortable with; puppets. What elements of play are you very comfortable with?

You can use this type of play to address conversations or themes about identity, diversity, justice and activism that are challenging.

Further Learning

Reflecting on Anti-bias Education in Action: The Early Years: Facilitator and Viewer Guidebook

Guide for selecting anti-bias children's books

How to support young children's gender development

Equity in Parent Organizations

15 Everyday Ways to Affirm TGNC (Trans and Gender Nonconforming) Students

CA CompSat; Culture, Diversity and Equity Competence

Module 4: Our Image of the Child

Overview

"There are hundreds of different images of the child. Each one of you has inside yourself an image of the child that directs you as you begin to relate to a child....

It's necessary that we believe that the child is very intelligent, that the child is strong and beautiful and has very ambitious desires and requests. This is the image of the child that we need to hold. Those who have the image of the child as fragile, incomplete, weak, made of glass gain something from this belief only for themselves. We don't need that as an image of children. Instead of always giving children protection, we need to give them the recognition of their rights and of their strengths."

—Loris Malaguzzi, Exchange 1994

As Malaguzzi and his colleagues identified, our image of children influences all of our work with them. He wrote a poem called "The Hundred Languages of Children" that shares his image of children, and you can find it in the resources below. Our image of children is something that we have already; AND it's something we can change with new information. Reflecting upon our image of children helps us to discover our assumptions, biases, and old stories that we were taught growing up. Child development knowledge can support a positive, trusting image of the child.

Learning Goals

- ☐ Image of the child as strong, competent, knowledgeable
- ☐ Broad understanding of child development processes
- ☐ Ability to bring your understanding of child development to your playgroup planning and environment

Personal Reflection

Take some time to start uncovering your image of the child.

What do children need?
What can children do?
What words describe children, in general?

Over time, you may notice how your image of children affects how you support them, and you might change your image to match what you learn about children through your own observation, conversations with colleagues and families, and from professional learning.

Defining Our Terms

Development	The process of how people grow and learn through interactions with the world around them. This starts in utero and continues across the life span.
Social Emotional development	Growth and learning about emotions, belonging, care for self and for others. Over time, children learn to express, identify, and eventually to regulate their emotions.
Cultural and Racial Identity	"A sense of collective identity based on a perceived common heritage with a racial group". A "lifelong process that involves how a person interprets messages about racial groups" and "the significance and meaning of race in one's life"[1].

[1] Encyclopedia of Counseling (April 2008) SAGE Publications. p. 1285

Physical development	Growth and learning of the body, including all of the senses, how to move and understand how bodies feel and act.
Fine motor	Using small muscles, especially of the hands
Gross motor	Using large muscles and muscle groups
Aesthetic development	Identification, interpretation and creation of art and expression
Cognitive development	Growth and development of the mind. Thinking, understanding, remembering and problem solving are cognitive skills.
Language development	A process that begins with physically making sounds and/or signs and taking in the sounds and/or signs from others.
Spiritual/Moral development	Understanding and development of values, beliefs and moral codes.
Zone of Proximal Development	The gap between what a child can do on their own and what they can do with help. Proximal means "close". So this is the area of development that is close to what the child can already do.[2]
Attachment	Bond between two people. Infants and children develop best within the context of a secure attachment.[3]

Please note: We divide development into stages and categories to better observe, describe and support it. These categories are imperfect generalizations, thinking tools and not totally accurate because in reality these processes happen simultaneously. For instance, just greeting someone involves social emotional awareness of cultural expectations and one's own self, cognitive understanding of the words to choose, and physical skills to express and take in language.

Photo credit: Pexels

[2] https://www.simplypsychology.org/Zone-of-Proximal-Development.html

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attachment_theory

Child Development Basics

Human development is so complex and happens in so many ways at once that a person can spend their lifetime studying it. As a playgroup facilitator, some understanding of child development can help you have reasonable expectations, respond to children's developmental needs in their play and communicate with families about the learning and growth that is taking place. This is a brief summary of early child development. There are more details in the resources below.

How we use child development knowledge to facilitate playgroups.

Understanding stages of development is important because we can sometimes compare children and think ours or others' are faulty in development, when really, all children develop at their own pace.

Also, we always need to remember that these are guidelines, not hard and fast rules. It's important to pay attention to our kids and be aware of signposts along the way. But all differences do not mean there is a problem or something wrong.

Tips for working with ages and stages in playgroups:

- Keep children's personalities and ages in mind when developing activities.
- Allow a child to master one skill or activity before moving on to the next.
- Incorporate the different types of play to meet the various needs of developing children
- Draw on the experience, ideas and wisdom of the caregivers in your playgroups for various ways to play.[4]

Many of the key concepts we invite you to consider as you continue through this module are drawn from the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies, including:

- Your practice should be informed and guided by theory and research on human growth and development.
- Children learn and develop in the social–emotional, language, cognitive, and perceptual and motor domains in an integrated way across domains.
- Children learn and develop at individual rates, in various ways, and typically in a predictable sequence.
- Play is a means by which children develop and learn.
- Young children develop and learn through interactions in relationships and with the environment. This includes their feelings of connectedness with nature.
- Child development takes place within an ecological context that includes individual, family, community, and cultural influences. Physical and emotional security support children's optimal development and learning.

[4] Ages and Stages from California Department of Education https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/caqdevelopment.asp

For detail on these and additional guiding principles, please visit this CDE page.

Here's a whirlwind tour of human development, and how to support it. As you familiarize yourself with each age and stage, take a moment to brainstorm one or two ideal play-group activities for each. You might also choose to do this exercise with a colleague or caregiver.

Infancy:

Birth to eighteen months: Seeing the World through their Senses
In their first eighteen months, an infant makes miraculous progress. In this very short time span, babies gather tremendous information through touch, taste, smell, sight, and sound. To help infants mature and learn, they should be stimulated but not over-whelmed. The overall goal is not to "teach" babies but to interact and explore their world with them. Older infants are on the move, discovering what they can do with their voice, hands, feet, and toes. They practice rolling, crawling, walking, and other skills. **Example Ideal playgroup activity:** Soft, large multiple shaped toys that are safe to be put in mouths yet too large to swallow stimulate babies' senses and help their fine motor skills. Try playing "face games" with infants, with your face and also looking in a mirror to see their own faces.
Supportive playgroup materials and activities for infants:

Toddlerhood:

Toddlers Creed:

"If I want it, it's mine. If I give it to you and change my mind later, it's mine. If I take it away from you, it's mine. If it's mine it will never belong to anybody else, no matter what. If we build something together, all the pieces are mine. If it looks just like mine, it's mine."

Eighteen months through two years: Defining themselves
At this stage children are beginning to define themselves. Look for activities that spur their imagination and vocabulary. During the toddler years, children get into everything, so even in the playgroup setting, it's important to keep children safe from a potential accident. Yet, realize accidents do happen even to the most careful caregivers.
Two years: Small person, big feelings
What I'm Like: I am loving, affectionate, and responsive to others. I feel sorry or sad when others my age are upset. I may even like to please you. I don't need you so close for protection, but please don't go too far away. I may do the exact opposite of what you want. I may be rigid, not willing to wait or give in. I may even be bossy. "Me" is one of my favorite words. I may have fears, especially of sounds, separation, moving household objects, or that big dog.
What I Need: I need to continue exploring the world, down the block, the parks, library, and stores, etc. I like my routines. If you have to change them, do so slowly. I need you to notice what I do well and PRAISE me. Give me two OK choices to distract me when I begin to say "No." I need you to be in control and make decisions when I'm unable to do so. I do better when you plan ahead. Be FIRM with me about the rules, but CALM when I forget or disagree. And please be patient because I am doing my best to please you, though I may not act that way.
Supportive playgroup materials and activities for toddlers:

Early Childhood

Three through five years: Busy being me!

During the preschool years, children tend to be incredibly busy. Cutting, pasting, painting, and singing are all daily activities. Around age five, appropriate activities include learning numbers, letters, and simple directions.

Three through five years: Busy being me!

During the preschool years, children tend to be incredibly busy. Cutting, pasting, painting, and singing are all daily activities. Around age five, appropriate activities include learning numbers, letters, and simple directions.

Three years

What I'm Like: Watch out! I am charged with physical energy. I do things on my own terms. My mind is a sponge. Reading and socializing are essential in getting me ready for school. I like to pretend a lot and enjoy scribbling on everything. I am full of questions, many of which are "Why?" I become fairly reliable about using the potty. I may stay dry at night and may not. Playing and trying new things out are how I learn. Sometimes I like to share. I begin to listen more and begin to understand how to solve problems for myself.

What I Need: I want to know about everything and understand words, and when encouraged, I will use words instead of grabbing, crying, or pushing. Play with me, sing to me, and let's pretend!

Four years

What I'm Like: I'm in an active stage, running, hopping, jumping, and climbing. I love to question "Why?" and "How?" I'm interested in numbers and the world around me. I enjoy playing with my friends. I like to be creative with my drawings, and I may like my pictures to be different from everyone else's. I'm curious about "sleepovers" but am not sure if I'm ready yet. I may want to be just like my older sister or brother. I am proud that I am so BIG now!

What I Need: I need to explore, to try out, and to test limits. Giving me room to grow doesn't mean letting me do everything. I need reasonable limits set for my own protection and for others. Let me know clearly what is or isn't to be expected. I need to learn to give and take and play well with others. I need to be read to, talked to, and listened to. I need to be given choices and to learn things in my own way. Label objects and describe what's happening to me so I can learn new words and things.

Five years

What I'm Like: I'm slowing a little in growth. I have good motor control, but my small muscles aren't as developed as my large muscles for jumping. My activity level is high and my play has direction. I like writing my name, drawing pictures, making projects, and going to the library. I'm more interested now in doing group activities, sharing things and my feelings. I like quiet time away from the other kids from time to time. I may be anxious to begin kindergarten.

What I Need: I need the opportunity for plenty of active play. I need to do things for myself. I like to have choices in how I learn new things. But most of all, I need love and assurance that I'm important. I need time, patience, understanding, and genuine attention. I am learning about who I am and how I fit in with others. I need to know how I am doing in a positive way. I understand more about things and how they work, so it's okay to give me a more detailed answer. I have a big imagination and pretend a lot. Although I'm becoming taller, a caregiver's lap is still one of my favorite places.

Supportive playgroup materials and activities for early childhood:

Environments That Support Learning and Development

Creating an environment where you can say "Yes!"

Your playspace will support children's learning and development, and your image of children will come into play as you decide what materials to share with children, and what rules might be necessary for your location. Angela Elkins wrote an excellent description of what to consider to create a "Yes!" Environment: in other words, a space that is designed for children to be able to safely explore without adults having to say "no" to their behaviors. Her words are excerpted here[5]. The whole article can be found in the resources section below.

This list can help guide you in creating your own yes environment.

1. Take a "child tour" around your space. Crouch low or walk on your knees (if possible) to get a sense of the room from a child's perspective. What catches your eye? What is accessible and what is out of reach? What draws you in? Where are children's paintings hanging? Materials located? Books placed? Anything within view should be accessible to children (within reasonable limits). If you do not want children using something, move it!
2. Examine your comfort zone. Identifying the behaviors that make you uncomfortable can help you understand why you say no. Maybe loud noises rattle you—does the early morning band in your preschool room make your hair stand on end? Maybe you're a neatnik—does the sight of children rifling through the book basket make you cringe? Talk with your colleagues about the behaviors and activities that make you want to say no. Do they agree that those behaviors need to be addressed? If so, do they see ways you can redirect the children?
3. Keep in mind the "two Ds"; Before limiting and redirecting a behavior, first determine if the behavior is **dangerous** or **destructive**. If an activity is unsafe (for the child or others) or destructive to the playgroup environment, it calls for action. Stop and think about the need driving a behavior, and try to come up with an alternative action instead of just saying no.
4. Watch and wonder. After determining that a behavior is not dangerous or destructive, take a step back. Watch what is happening before you intervene. Wonder with children, asking questions as an observer—not as an intruder. Asking a child why she is doing something or why she needs a particular item can reveal her thought process. Watching and wondering also give children opportunities to find their own alternative behaviors.

[5] Creating a "Yes!" Environment. NAEYC Angela Elkins, March 2019.

5. Be active and engaged, but not intrusive. Being an active observer means you are watching what is happening as it occurs but not intervening unless necessary. This helps you see bothersome behaviors as they arise and gently guide children toward more positive interactions. Being engaged helps you understand a behavior as it occurs. Maybe that banging in the block corner stems from the need to scare away a shark. If you're working across the room, you may consider the banging disruptive rather than imaginative—and be unprepared to inspire the children to find new ways to scare away sharks. Being active and engaged makes you a partner in play and exploration with children, rather than a disciplinarian.
6. Be an investigator. Keep notes on your observations of children's play and conversations. These can be extremely helpful in determining why a child is using a certain behavior and in identifying a pattern you may need to address.
7. Have fun! In a yes environment, both the teacher and the children freely explore and play. Take pleasure in your time each day with the children and relish the wonder and excitement that come from learning together.

Play groups support social emotional development

Playgroups are a great way to support the social emotional development of children because they:

- Are rich with teachable moments
- Provide opportunities for adults to model healthy emotional expression
- Include numerous activities that allow children to explore and express emotions
- Support caregivers with their social emotional skills
- Prepare children for school readiness

There are numerous ways that early childhood educators and caregivers can infuse teachable moments into the daily routines of playgroups. For example, **story time** is often the perfect tool for exploring social-emotional themes. Another daily teachable moment is the simple act of encouraging children to play with one another and take turns. *(Image of the child; Empathetic and interested in the emotions of others.)*

Playgroups provide opportunities for caregivers and facilitators to **model healthy emotional expression**. This is done in real time by pausing and making time to acknowledge and work with emotional or triggering situations between children or children and adults as they occur. Desired behaviors can be illustrated and modeled through role-playing, coaching, and providing options. (Image of the child; They are a member of a community, and learn through relationships.)

Create a special place in the playgroup environment for kids to take a break when they are upset or angry or need to calm themselves. This space should have a peaceful atmosphere and would allow children the time to process their emotions and learn how to self-regulate with the help of a facilitator or caregiver. It doesn't have to be big; it can be a pillow, or under a tree. *(Image of the child; They have an interior life, and are sensitive to their surroundings.)*

Children think and feel things that they can't quite put into words yet. Encourage **expression through art**. Art is a great tool to allow them to explore their feelings from a different perspective and gain a better understanding of how to handle their emotions. Offer a child a crayon and paper on a clipboard if they are upset. (Image of the child; Capable of expressing their emotions; especially with scaffolding.)

Children are not the only ones to benefit from a healthy playgroup environment.

Playgroups are a great place for caregivers to have their childrearing practices validated and celebrated. Facilitators can support caregivers' development by giving feedback; name the positive interactions and connect them to the child's attachment and development.

Skilled facilitators should utilize their expertise in early childhood development and education, paired with an asset-based approach, to highlight when caregivers are doing well with their child.

When a pivotal action on the part of the caregiver -- such as being on the child's level during play, making eye contact, or speaking to the child in their home language -- is brought to their attention as supportive to the child's development, caregivers are happily surprised! This articulation from facilitators builds the confidence that caregivers need.

Your Image of the Child

How does our image of the child change our work?

Two adults, Sydney and Trey are watching a playgroup. They both love children and have worked with them before. They have different images of children described below. Read the stories and write down your answers.

Sydney sees childhood this way:

Children are “sponges” just soaking up information at an incredible speed.

Without adults to help teach and guide them, children don’t feel safe and comfortable

Childhood is something that all people get through to prepare them for life.

Children don’t know right from wrong and need adults to teach them.

It is crucial that children learn literacy and math skills as early as possible because this learning is the first step to a good education and a happy life.

Trey sees it this way:

Trey believes that children are resourceful, intelligent, strong, capable and funny.

Children learn from every experience. They are little scientists, little artists and little creators. Trey sees behavior as children’s communication of their needs and feelings.

They believe that children have an idea or an inspiration behind each of their actions, and Trey is curious about what those ideas might be.

Children must be in beautiful places and eat healthy food.

Imagine that Sydney and Trey are watching a playgroup. One child pulls out a plastic chair from the play kitchen and drags it under a low tree. She carefully puts one foot on it and tries to stand on the chair. Her knees are bent, and she seems to be checking her balance. Other children are staring at her.	
What might Sydney do or say?	What might Trey do or say?
Two children are in a sandbox digging and playing together. A third child is also in the sandbox, with his back to the group. He is playing on his own with his face close to the sand, arranging small pebbles and sticks he finds in the sand in careful lines.	
What might Sydney do or say?	What might Trey do or say?
Three children are playing store. One child puts leaves in a flower pot saying “I’m getting Oreos, & candy, & ice cream & Lucky Charms and other yummy stuff.” They offer each of these foods to the adults.	
What does Sydney say or do?	What does Trey say or do?
There is an easel, paints, brushes are smocks available next to a picnic table for today’s play group. The first child who arrives says “What’s this? What do we do here?” The next child runs to the paint, skips the smock and begins carefully painting their left arm purple with a paint brush.	
What might Sydney do or say?	What might Trey do or say?

Reflect on the things you heard when you were growing up. “Children should be seen and not heard?” “In one ear and out the other!” It may help you see the image of the child you have learned. We encourage playgroup facilitators to shift your image of the child as trustworthy, intelligent, capable and creative.

Attachment; a Context for Development

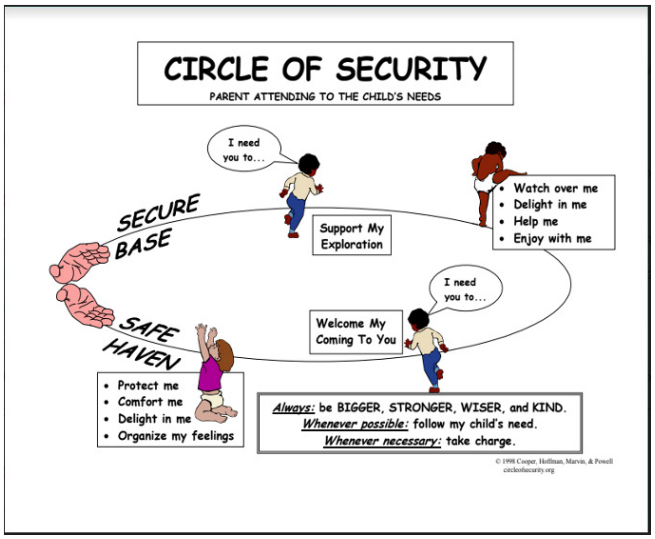
Children and their developing brains need caregivers who are emotionally available and attuned to their needs, experiences and emotions. To form **secure attachments**, children need consistent responses to their needs and affectionate, nurturing interactions. Kids with secure attachments develop a sense of trust in themselves and others, feel safe, build self-confidence, and have a healthy relationship to risking and experimenting. This is necessary for learning and social and relational growth.

Secure attachments are critical in building resilience and ability to cope with stress. Strong connections are sources of healing and repair for children who have experienced **adverse childhood experiences**, referred to as ACEs. Studies have shown that over time, children with secure attachments become adults with stronger emotional regulation, greater self-agency and higher self-esteem.

To build secure attachments, children need to be:

- **Seen** — This is not just seeing with the eyes. It means perceiving them deeply and empathically — sensing the mind behind their behavior, with what Dr. Dan Siegel calls "mindsight".
- **Safe** — We avoid actions and responses that frighten or hurt them.
- **Soothed** — We help them deal with difficult emotions and situations.
- **Secure** — We help them develop an internalized sense of well-being.

Learn more and watch a TedX Talk from Dr. Siegel



Planning with Your Image of the Child in Mind

Our first tool in planning to support children's development is our own observations. Watch children as they play, and you will see what they are able to do easily, and what they are trying to do. We don't have to "push" children's development, we can support it. Lev Vygotsky was a student of child development. He described "zones of proximal development" or ZPD. He believed that because children grow up and families and communities, it's unrealistic to only define their ability on their own; instead, we can see what a child can do unassisted and then see what they can do with a little help. Vygotsky called this support "scaffolding"; naming for the helpful platforms builders use.[6, 7]

(Left; scaffold supports builders' reach (3). Right; adult scaffolds child's building beyond what they can do alone.

If a child can put rocks into a bowl, but can't fit shapes into a shape sorter, then the sorter may be in the zone of proximal development. It's beyond the child's ability alone, but with a friend or adult saying "turn it", or physically rotating the sorter until it matches up with the shape in the child's hand, they'll be able to do it. If a child struggles to sit and play a board game with another child, it may be beyond their unassisted abilities. However, perhaps with an older child or an adult talking with them about how the game works, narrating the turns, they may be able to extend their patience, use counting skills and play the game through to the end. Here's an example of research that demonstrates how ZPD works.

[6] Optimal Workplace safety, 2014.

[7] The times and Democrat. Jan 2019

Wood and Middleton (1975 study)

Procedure: 4-year-old children had to use a set of blocks and pegs to build a 3D model shown in a picture. Building the model was too difficult a task for a 4-year-old child to complete alone.

Wood and Middleton (1975) observed how mothers interacted with their children to build the 3D model. The type of support included:

- General encouragement e.g., “Now you try.”
- Specific instructions e.g., “Get four big blocks.”
- Direct demonstration, e.g., showing the child how to place one block on another.

The results of the study showed that no single strategy was best for helping the child to progress. Mothers whose assistance was most effective were those who varied their strategy according to how the child was doing.

When the child was doing well, they became less specific with their help. When the child started to struggle, they gave increasingly specific instructions until the child started to make progress again.

Zones of proximal development were revolutionary because they recognized that children develop in communities with others, and that adults can help development along. As a learner, ZPD is helpful. In this curriculum, there are likely concepts and skills that you’ve encountered that are easy for you, and others that are a little beyond your skill. By talking with other people, and talking with families you are inviting them to scaffold your professional development. Take a moment to assess your own development; look back at the first three modules to jog your memory.

Which playgroup facilitation skills or concepts are you able to perform or understand without help?
Which playgroup facilitation skills or concepts from this curriculum are in your zone of proximal development?

If you notice children's interests and can see where their ZPD might be, you can scaffold their learning with materials, or your presence. Literally offering a helping hand, talking them through the process that frustrated them, bringing left-handed scissors, a wiffle ball or bigger crayons can make the difference in a child's development.

Using Schema Theory to Choose Materials

"There's a thread you follow.
It goes among things that change.
But it doesn't change.
People wonder about what you
are pursuing.

You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can't get lost."

—The Way It Is (excerpt) by William Stafford

Schema theory builds on Jean Piaget's theory of development and recognizes repeated patterns in children's play as threads that connect children's learning over time. Most of us have encountered a child who *throws everything* they can, who spends lots of time on the swings learning how to jump off, and who watches an airplane move across the sky. This child might have a "trajectory" schema. (There is more on this in Module 2: Play).

Children who fill buckets or bags and make deliveries may have a "transporting" schema. These two examples are physical presentations of schemas, but someone with a circular or rotational schema may enjoy spinning things (and themselves) and enjoy drawing circles and thinking about how a jet engine, a bicycle pedal or a Ferris wheel works. Someone with an envelopment schema might wrap toys in blankets or cover their whole arm carefully in paint. For some depth on schema theory, look here. For a practical chart to help you start identifying and planning for schemas, check out this chart and remember this is NOT a comprehensive list. There are as many schemas as there are children.

Thinking about children's play and work this way helps caregivers take a new look at repeated play behaviors and see them as constructive, engaged learning actions. (Sometimes adults find themselves stumped or irritated by repeated behaviors and this perspective can help us identify the learning taking place even as the child is pulling all the toilet paper off the roll, or covering their arms and hands with paint.) Playgroup facilitators can use our knowledge of individual children's schemas to carefully prepare our provocations to support the ways our children are learning. Story cubes can help a child with a trajectory schema in co-creating a narrative, adding pieces of fabric to the block area might intrigue a child who has an enveloping schema[8].

"Vygotsky's theory (1978) says that every piece of learning is based on earlier experiences for young children they must be real life experiences.

When observing young children in an early childhood centre using a child-centered curriculum, adults often think that children are like a "butterfly", flitting from area to area, child to child. That may be the case at times. However, when integrated learning is happening, another metaphor might be more appropriate - that of a "bee" which gathers nectar to integrate it into something of significance.

The way children focus their attention is to fit new experiences into patterns they have already stored in their memories. They develop schemas by behaving like honey bees; they move from experience to experience in order to gather further ingredients to encode and build a fuller understanding of that schema. In other words, children get hooked on certain patterns of behavior because they are trying to make sense of the attributes of particular features of our environment, such as "vertical" by fitting them into existing cognitive structures."[9]

[8] (Adapted from PeloJoaquin, 2016)

[9] Competent Children and Their Teachers; Learning about trajectories and other schemas by Anne Meade and Pamela Cubey.

"Schema theory is not:

- a classification system for labelling children or "stages" in their learning
- a system of stages that all children work through, in a particular order
- an aspect of personality, such as sense of humor, flexibility, adaptability to change or sociability
- an excuse for tolerating behavior that disrupts the play of others or damages equipment or hurts another person the only reason for children behaving in ways that might irritate adults.[10]"

When we look for schemas we look for *Involvement* and *Flow*.

Laever's Involvement Scale describes some behavioral indicators that we might notice when children are deeply engaged or involved in an activity. Children:

concentrate intensely and are difficult to distract

- watch or listen intently
- are alert and respond quickly to new things that connect with their thinking
- show great enjoyment of their activity
- are completely absorbed in what they are doing
- are persistent and do not give up easily
- make comments about their enjoyment and enthusiasm

Flow has the following characteristics:

- a combination of intense concentration and deep enjoyment
- being immersed in an activity so every piece or action seems to fit flawlessly
- having a sense of wonder
- feeling both relaxed and energized

"If you are interested in something, you will focus on it, and if you focus attention on anything, it is likely that you will become interested in it. Many of the things we find interesting are not so by nature, but because we took the trouble of paying attention to them."

—Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Finding Flow: The Psychology Of Engagement With Everyday Life

Here is a chart to help you choose materials once you've identified a child's schema

[10] Getting Started with Schemas, Nikolien van Wijk

[11] https://famly.co/blog/management/leuven-scales/

Further Learning

Please note: many of these resources are aimed at teachers, so they use words like "classroom". They were chosen for you because they also apply to playgroup facilitators.

Child Development:

Handy chart with milestones

Promoting Young Children's Social and Emotional Health. Jeannie Ho, Suzanne Funk. Young Children, March 2018. .
Overview of Aesthetic Development. Visual Thinking Strategies. 2021. (This brief article includes stages of aesthetic development.)
NAEYC Position Statement: Principles of Child Development and Learning and Implications That Inform Practice
Very clear, technical speech outlining early development especially brain development. TedX Talk from Dr. Siegel

Chart summarizing racial identity development. National Museum of African American History and Culture
Whole Brain Child; 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind

Image of the child:

Your image of the child; Where teaching begins. Loris Malaguzzi. Exchange March 1994.

Environments:

Environments that inspire. Susan Frienman. Young children. May 2005
Applying the Zone of Proximal development in the classroom. Sarah Winkler. Feb 2021.
Creating a "Yes!" Environment. NAEYC Angela Elkins, March 2019.
How to create a "Yes!" space outdoors (when you don't have a yard). Janet Lansbury

Schemas:

Understanding Schemas and Emotion in Early Childhood, book by Cath Arnold and the Pen Green Team

Explainer about schemas aimed at parents.
Planning to support schemas:
Learning stories about children and their schemas

THE HUNDRED LANGUAGES OF CHILDREN

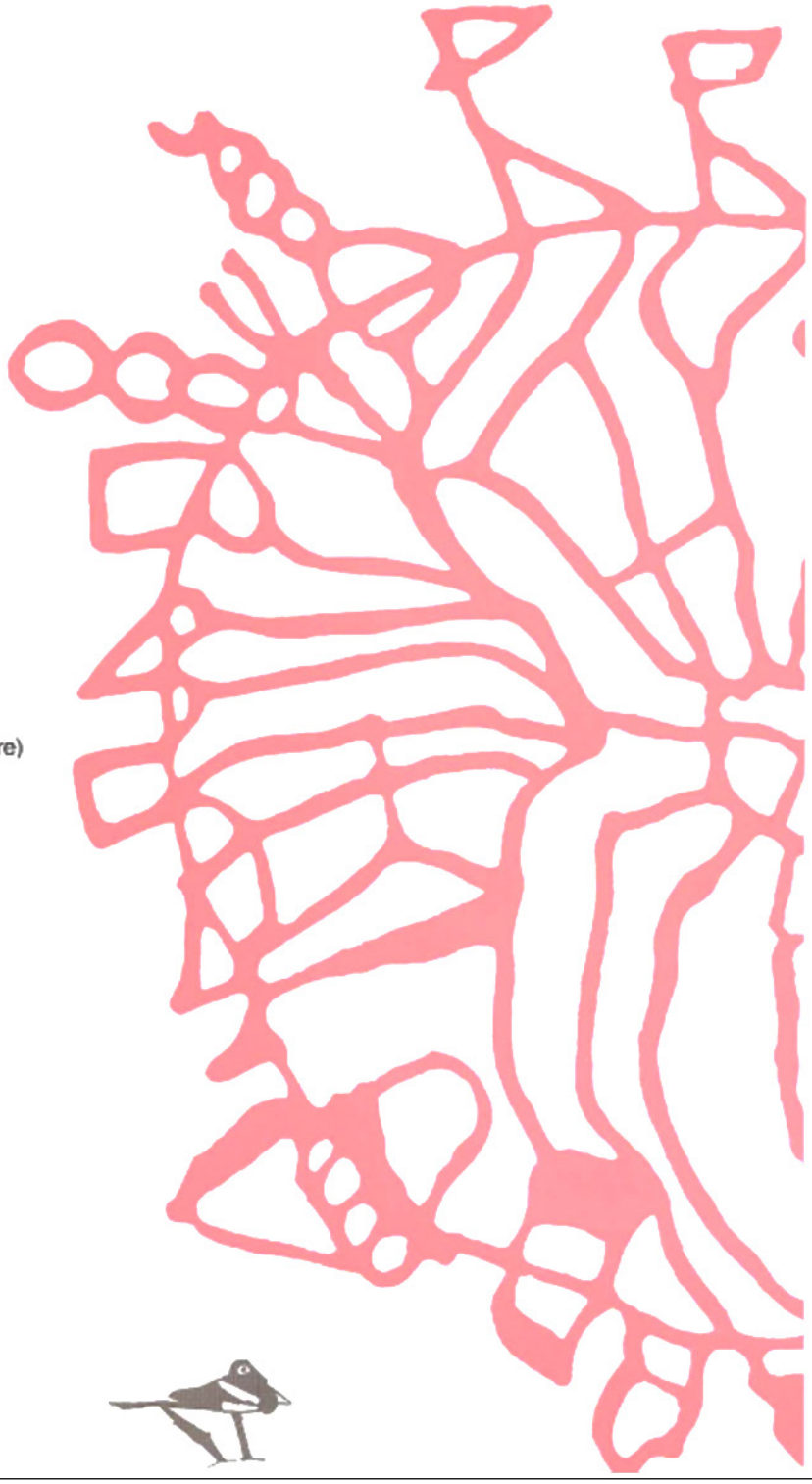
REGGIO CHILDREN

Preschools and Infant-toddler Centers
Istituzione of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia

No way.
The hundred is there.

The child
is made of one hundred.
The child has
a hundred languages
a hundred hands
a hundred thoughts
a hundred ways of thinking
of playing, of speaking.
A hundred always a hundred
ways of listening
of marveling of loving
a hundred joys
for singing and understanding
a hundred worlds
to discover
a hundred worlds
to invent
a hundred worlds
to dream.
The child has
a hundred languages
(and a hundred hundred hundred more)
but they steal ninety-nine.
The school and the culture
separate the head from the body.
They tell the child:
to think without hands
to do without head
to listen and not to speak
to understand without joy
to love and to marvel
only at Easter and Christmas.
They tell the child:
to discover the world already there
and of the hundred
they steal ninety-nine.
They tell the child:
that work and play
reality and fantasy
science and imagination
sky and earth
reason and dream
are things
that do not belong together.
And thus they tell the child
that the hundred is not there.
The child says:
No way.
The hundred is there.

Loris Malaguzzi



Module 5 Our Image of Families

Overview

Learning Goals

- ☐ Improved, strengths-based image of families
- ☐ Create environments that welcome and affirm families
- ☐ See our biases and counteract them to support families
- ☐ Understand trauma-informed practice in playgroups

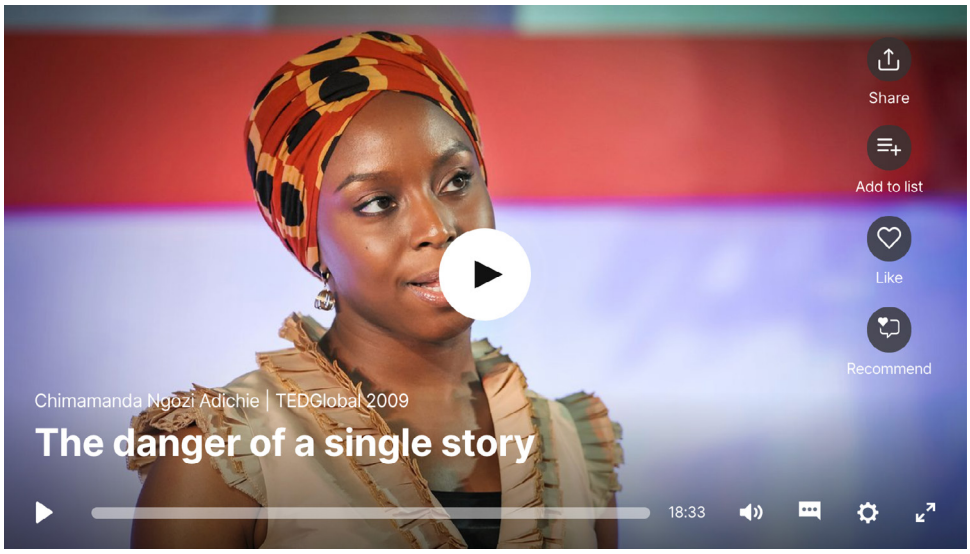
Ultimately, we want you to feel confident saying, "I have strong relationships with the children and families I work with and understand how critical families are in the lives of young children. I am good at communicating positively, and make sure to connect families to community resources when appropriate."[1]

Figure 1 Photo credit Iphoto Stock

[1] California Child Care Initiative Project, Self-Reflection Survey

Personal Reflection

Sometimes our own certainty can get in the way of us building supportive relationships. Watch Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie describe The Danger of a Single Story then answer the questions below.



"The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."

—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Go back to Module 1 and your drawings of yourself, your family, and your community. Make a list of the "single stories" people have created or could create about you. How are these similar and different than how you view yourself?

What single stories have you noticed that you hold about others? What have you seen happen when others get viewed differently than they view themselves?

What steps can you take, or have you taken, to challenge single stories in the playgroup environment?

What scenarios do you need the most support in addressing?

Defining Our Terms

Adverse Childhood Experiences	Include physical, sexual or emotional abuse, physical or emotional neglect, parental mental illness, addiction, incarceration, parental separation or divorce, death in the family and domestic violence. These are correlated with negative outcomes, and can be addressed through various supports[2].
Concrete support	Offering food, shelter, goods and services that are needed or access to these things.
Culture	The patterns of daily life learned consciously and unconsciously by a group of people. These patterns can be seen in language, governing practices, arts, customs, holiday celebrations, food, religion, dating rituals and clothing, to name a few.
Implicit bias	Refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.
Protective Factors	Are conditions or attributes in individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that mitigate or eliminate risk in families and communities, thereby increasing the health and well-being of children and families.[3]
Resilience	Capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness.

[2] Burke Harris, N., (2014). How trauma affects health across a lifetime. TED talk.

Families and You; Looking for Our Implicit Biases

Reflective Writing Exercise

List the 10 people you are closest to.

How similar or different are they to you by: race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, educational attainment, nationality, primary language, immigration status, and dis/ability status?

10 Closest People	10 Closest People	Different

[3] Child Welfare Information Gateway

What three words come to mind when you think about your community, however you define it?

Do you think these are the same words that people outside of your community would think to describe your community?

What more do you think you need to know about the communities being served through your playgroup?

Show Time! Watch and Reflect

Watch these short videos produced by UCLA's Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion:

Preface: Biases and Heuristics (5:14)

Lesson 1: Schemas (3:12)

Reflective Writing Exercise

- What were the explicit messages you got from your parents about people from other races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, religions, classes, professions, abilities, etc.?

- What do you think the implicit messages might have been?

- How did the implicit messages show up? What was on the TV? How was the news talked about? Where did you worship, if at all, and what else did the congregation look like? Where did you live and go to school? Was that by choice?

While implicit bias is one way to see how our own prejudices get in our way of building relationships, and to see our own individual racism, we must always see our biases in the context of systemic racism and oppression. Read this article for more about this connection; Don't talk about implicit bias without talking about structural racism.

Your Image of Families; Centering Caregivers and their Strengths

Figure 2 Photo credit Istock photo

Relationships are complex, and many people have thought about how playgroups can work to have healthy supportive relationships with families. This section will introduce a few ways to think about how to build relationships with families. You can find more information about each on the "resources" page.

Family Support Approach Family Support Practices can help us replace the "one story" we might have about families. Family Support is…

A set of beliefs and an approach to strengthening and empowering families and communities so that they can foster the optimal development of children, youth, and adult family members.

A type of grassroots, community-based program designed to prevent family problems by strengthening parent-child relationships and providing whatever parents need in order to be good nurturers and providers. These programs have grown across the country since the 1970s.

A shift in human services delivery that encourages public and private agencies to work together and to become more preventive, responsive, flexible, family-focused, strengths-based, and holistic – and thus more effective.

A movement for social change that urges all of us – policymakers, programs providers, parents, employers- to take responsibility for improving the lives of children and families. The family support movement strives to transform our society into caring communities of citizens that put children and families first and that ensure that all children and families get what they need to succeed.

[4] Family Support America; Practice Guidelines for Family Support (1996)

Principles of Family Support Practice

1. Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.
2. Staff enhance families' capacity to support the growth and development of all family members – adults, youth, and children.
3. Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.
4. Programs affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society.
5. Programs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.
6. Programs advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.
7. Practitioners work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development.
8. Programs are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community issues.
9. Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance, and administration.

Premises of Family Support

10. Primary responsibility for the development and well-being of children lies within the family, and all segments of society must support families as they rear their children.
11. Assuring the well-being of all families is the cornerstone of a healthy society, and requires universal access to support programs and services.
12. Children and families exist as part of an ecological system.
13. Child-rearing patterns are influenced by parents' understanding of child development and of their children's unique characteristics, personal sense of competence, and cultural and community traditions and mores.
14. Enabling families to build on their own strengths and capacities promotes the healthy development of children
15. The development processes that make up parenthood and family life create needs that are unique at each stage in the life span.
16. Families are empowered when they have access to information and other resources and take action to improve the well-being of children, families, and communities.

Strengths-Focused Feedback

Noticing positive interactions between children and their caregivers is a win-win-win move. You learn something about the caregivers' strengths, they see themselves positively through your eyes, and the child enjoys their caregiver's interaction.

As you observe daily interactions, name specific skills and dispositions that you see.

If you observe the following, you can provide feedback with comments such as:

> "I see that your child is securely bonded to you."
>
> "I notice how close in proximity you stay to your child to make them feel safe."
>
> "I like how you offered a few choices."
>
> "I notice how patient you are when reading a book to your child."
>
> "I see that your child enjoys when you read to them."
>
> "I noticed that you were able to separate from your child to attend the workshop and you both did so well!"
>
> "I really enjoyed hearing you sing during circle time."
>
> "You handled redirection like a pro - it looked so smooth."
>
> "I noticed how patient you were with your child when we had to transition."
>
> "I saw how your calming spirit soothed your child when he had a hard time sharing."

By noticing their strengths and seeing what caregivers are doing well, they are more open to hearing additional feedback of improvements, tips, or suggestions.

Equally important is encouraging the children's strengths with observations and feedback such as:

> "Thank you for helping put away the cars in the basket."
>
> "You are a wonderful helper!"
>
> "I see how patient you are while you wait for your turn."
>
> "Thank you for sharing with your friend - that is really nice of you!"
>
> "Wow! I noticed that you went potty."

Playgroups Counter Adverse Childhood Experiences

In this Tedtalk, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris provides a working understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) as severe and pervasive threats that get under our skin, change our physiology, impact our life expectancy and cause negative health outcomes. ACEs are incredibly common, occurring in families across socio-economic class, race, and levels of education or achievement.

Exposure to adversity impacts the developing brains and bodies of children and creates cascading negative results into adulthood. The higher an ACE score in children and their families, the more likely they are to experience extremely poor health outcomes. Signs and symptoms of early childhood trauma can be easily mistaken for those of other developmental issues, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder or autism spectrum disorder. These are reasons playgroup facilitators must have knowledge and skills to address and work with ACEs, as well as educate caregivers about how to address ACEs in their children and families.

Ted.com Video: How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime

When viewed through the lens of ACEs as a public health issue, then playgroups become a key component in a multifaceted community network to prevent and address ACEs.

There are five protective factors that impact outcomes for families

- **Caregiver[5] Resilience –** A caregiver's ability to manage both general life and caregiving stress and function well when faced with stressors, challenges or adversity.
- **Social Connections –** Having healthy, sustained relationships with people, institutions, the community, or a force greater than oneself.
- **Concrete Support in Times of Need –** Identifying, seeking, accessing, advocating for and receiving needed adult, child, and family services; receiving a quality of service designed to preserve caregivers' dignity and promote healthy development.
- **Social and Emotional Competence of Children –** Providing an environment and experiences that enable the child to form close and secure adult and peer relationships, and to experience, regulate and express emotions.
- **Knowledge of Caregiving and Child Development.**

The playgroup itself is a trauma-informed practice. It is a structured space with healthy rhythms and clear transitions, which support children and their caregivers. There is a focus on the development and well- being of the child and family. Caregivers can access tools and resources to learn about child development. Naming strengths in caregivers and families grows their resilience and ability to effectively cope with the stresses they face. Finally, providing space and time to play fosters multiple protective factors for the children and their families. Here are trauma-informed practices for playgroups .

Safety

- **Create physical environments** and spaces that provide comfort and safety.
- **Intentionally design spaces** to foster curiosity, beauty, learning, and serenity.
- **Provide concrete support;** appropriate resources, referrals
- **Establish and uphold clear structures and routines.** Provide a visual schedule for transitions.
- **Design an inviting, calming respite area.** Remind caregivers and children about this area when the child seems overstimulated or they would benefit from some quiet connection time.

Trustworthiness and transparency

- Establish trust with families through conversation
- Engage in honest and direct communication.
- When issues arise, be transparent. Address them as soon as possible.
- Follow-up with families. Check-in on their progress. This reinforces trust.
- Maintain healthy, consistent interactions with children and caregivers.

[5] Adapted from the Center for the Study of Social Policy, which references parents instead of caregivers.

Figure 3 National Black Child Development Institute

Peer support, collaboration, and mutuality

- Provide a platform for mutual support among the families, like caregiver meetings where stories are shared.
- Encourage caregivers to evaluate community needs and discuss ways to strengthen the program to address those needs.
- Empowerment and choice
- Provide options and a network of resources so that families can choose the best approach for their family's needs.
- Remember; facilitators' role is to guide, not to direct or tell.
- Invite families to celebrate their cultures by sharing holidays and celebrations.
- Decorate playgroup spaces to reflect the cultures of the family and the local communities. Ensure that children and caregivers are reflected in what they see.

Community Partnerships that Support Family Engagement

Playgroups are successful when they build trusting partnerships in the community. This means that familiar neighborhood organizations are often the best to partner with in a playgroup that is place-based. There can even be agreement to have a cross-referral partnership for families, which further embeds the families in the communities' resources.

1. You may find potential collaborative partners at family support and early childhood focused roundtables in your local community.
2. Seek partnerships that value play-based learning, strengths-based support for children and caregivers.

3. Communicate very clearly your expectations, standards of quality, and capacity for partnership.

When it comes to establishing ideal partnerships with community agencies, there are a few key questions you should ask.

- Do the vision, mission, and values of the partner align with those of your organization to build strong families and networks of support?
- Is the partner from this community or from a similar community?
- Do they have a trauma-informed lens?
- Are they culturally responsible to the diverse and multi-ethnic community members you serve?
- Are their staff members representative of the population you serve?
- Will the partnership be mutually beneficial?

Community Partnership Example: Local Library

"We have a great relationship with the library, dance and circle time instructors and science classes. The partnerships that we focus on for playgroup are enrichment activities that the families really enjoy and that uplifts their playgroup experience."

—Playgroup Facilitator

Partnerships with community libraries bring additional literacy emphasis into the space and reminds families of a great local resource.

Ask the librarian to come in for story time and align the storytelling or reading time to go with the theme of the curriculum for the month.

Pair the librarian experience with drumming, mini science classes, dance, and other enrichment to help stimulate different sensory input for children and caregivers, making it a fun and engaging experience for all.

As the facilitator, plan out your curriculum in advance and inform the enrichment instructors and/or librarian ahead of time, to create a wonderful integrated learning experience.

Community Partnership Idea: Field Trips

Partnerships can expand families' playgroup experience beyond your site's walls can provide opportunities that you simply cannot replicate internally.

What are the child-friendly places in your locale? Do you have a zoo? A Fairyland? A science center? Wading pools or splash parks? Places for easy nature walks or even a nature center? Farms? Museums? Consider partnering with any of these locations or your local Parks and Recreation Department for fun and inspiring field trips.

Community Partnership Idea: Concrete support

Some partnerships are required to ensure that families have basic needs met. These needs can be great, and there are other organizations already working on food, housing, employment, case management, health care etc. Aligning your organization with partners that provide resources and support strengthens families and reinforces the safety net in your community.

Partnerships with food banks, diaper programs, mental health agencies, medical services, dental screenings, wellness options, childcare resources, WIC, afterschool programs, and programs that provide giveaways are always appreciated by community members. These are excellent opportunities for ongoing needs assessments and referrals. By meeting these basic needs, families know they are cared for and are able to participate and tend to their child and their own needs.

Tips for Engaging Families through Partnerships

- Invite partners to bring enrichment programming to your playgroup on a consistent basis (weekly/monthly).
- Invite partners to facilitate a workshop relevant to the families in your group.
- Encourage partners to have culturally responsive, multilingual resource material to share.
- Partner with multiple agencies to provide a large community event for the entire family, with interactive activities at the tables and give-aways for families to take home (rather than only providing flyers). Engagement is key!

Family-friendly Environments

Consider these aspects of your playgroup space(s) and see how concrete changes in the environment can impact the physical and emotional environment.

Where can grown-ups sit or stand comfortably?

We design our spaces with children in mind, but we have to make sure we have spaces that invite caregivers to stay, play, and talk with children or adults. As you set up, think about:

- Where adults can come and participate instead of just being on the edges.
- Where can you fit adult-sized furniture?
- What is the best height to display adult-oriented information for easy reading.

How does the environment facilitate communication among adults?

Our relationships with caregivers, and their relationships are critical. With this in mind, consider...

- Are there spaces for caregivers to talk?
- Where can you have a one-on-one conversation with a family?
- Where can a caregiver get a little space if they are feeling stressed or anxious?
- Where do you notify them about classroom plans (field-trips, special events, or even which playgrounds you plan to visit)? Is it easy to see AND easy for you to use?

How can you make families visible in your environment?

- Say “Yes.” as often as you can when caregivers offer to bring a snack, toy or plaything to share with the group.
- Can you display photographs of children in the playgroup and their families? This is another way of providing a mirror to caregivers and the positive interactions they have with the children.
- Ask families about songs that they sing at home, or favorite books. Make a recording of the song so that you can learn it and share it at circle time.
- Make a playlist of songs that families enjoy listening to at home. If possible, invite families to add songs directly to the list.

How can you create a warm and welcoming social environment?

- Always greet family members when they arrive and depart from the program setting. Pay attention to how you are greeted, and return the greeting in kind. (Handshakes, polite inquiries or small talk, compliments etc.)
- When possible, ask caregivers for feedback on your own practice. Be ready to make changes in response to the answers. If you are REALLY attached to your “Welcome Song”, don’t start by asking about it. But ask families “What do you think?” and listen to their answers. Be willing to make changes based upon what you hear.
- How can conversations support families as decision-makers and educators of their children? When families ask you for advice, avoid making yourself an “expert”. Ask them what they are thinking about or considering, before offering your opinions.
- Actively solicit and listen to families’ goals, aspirations, and concerns about their children’s development.
- Learn a few words in each child’s home language, such as greetings, names of family members, words of comfort, and important objects or places. Parents and other family members can be good resources for learning their language.
- Participate in discussions about families’ culture that are in-depth and ongoing.
- Seek and use resources to facilitate communication with family members in their home language, ensuring that all families are included

How can you design your space with trauma in mind?

- It can be helpful to avoid “too many” smells, sounds, colors, or people because it can be overstimulating.
- Designate space and times for children and adults to practice calming our bodies both when stress is present, and when it isn’t.

What's next? Set Your Priorities

When we see all the possibilities of playgroups, and we recognize how critical they can be in the lives of children and their families, we want to do everything we can to make our playgroups as supportive as possible. This can be overwhelming, and can actually prevent us from moving forward. Let's take a moment to see what changes are possible, and could be the most impactful. Review this list of recommendations modified from the California Department of Education[6]. Reread your reflections on page 2.

Choose which are most important to focus on for the benefit of the families you serve and for your own professional development. **Say why you chose your answers in the space provided.**

Write a handbook or playgroup philosophy

- emphasize how the child's experience at home connects to the playgroup
- Share the written statement with family members; ask their feedback.
- Adapt policies as needed in response to each family.

Develop and implement program policies

- With families whenever possible and appropriate
- Protect families' and facilitators' observations and discussions of children's play, learning and development

[6] https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/itguidelines2019.pdf

Schedule regular meetings, social times, and other special events for families

- so that they can learn more about the program, get to know each other and the facilitators, and build a sense of community.
- Create strategies to engage family members from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and invite family members to share goals and strategies for supporting children's home languages in the group. Home language support may require the use of interpreters and translators.

Community partnerships:

What local organizations might be good partners to your playgroup?

What needs do your families have that could be served by a community partnership?

What changes could you make to your playgroup space to make it more family friendly?

Further Learning

Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences:

Video: Traumatic Experiences by Sesame Street Communities

Helpful collection of handouts (in English and Spanish) to promote protective factors for families.

Watch this webinar about the Center For Study Of Social Policy's report, Supporting The First 1,000 Days Of A Child's Life; An Anti-racist Blueprint For Early Childhood Well-being And Child Welfare Prevention

Implicit Bias:

Harvard Implicit Attitude Test

Everything you know about obesity is wrong.

California Home Visiting Program website and an informational video:

Environments:

"Calm down corner"

Description and suggestions

Module 6: Wellness

Overview

Children's and families' experiences with the play group should be emotionally and physically safe, full of opportunities for play, learning, and belonging. Therefore, play group facilitators' must create and maintain environments and relationships that provide these opportunities.

This module will give you concrete strategies for keeping yourself and the people you serve safe, healthy, and well. We don't always know the stressors, traumas, illnesses and injuries that are present in children and families, so we must take a humble, positive stance toward supporting wellness. You have opportunities every day through your programming, modeling, routines, observation, and communication practices to support the physical, emotional, and mental health and well-being of the children and families who are a part of your playgroup community. Together, you are building a web of support and a foundation of resilience.

You'll find explanations and examples of daily health, safety, and nutrition practices such as daily wellness checks, preparing delicious snacks, and providing experiences of mindfulness and vigorous physical play. This module outlines how to plan for and provide upkeep for safe playgroups and learning through play. It also supports your ability to fulfill required safety policies and procedures for playgroups and provides basic understanding of how individual and collective wellness are tied to identity and biases.

For health and safety checklists, go to the appendices.

Learning Goals

- ☐ Understand how individual and collective wellness are tied to identity and biases
- ☐ Able to fulfill required safety policies and procedures for playgroups
- ☐ Have concrete strategies for keeping yourselves and others well
- ☐ Plan for safe playgroups and learning through play about wellness

Personal Reflection

Where do you feel safest?

What does safety feel like in your body?

What were your favorite foods when you were a young child?

What messages did your family give you about food and health?

What kinds of play feel dangerous to you?

Defining our terms

Challenge	Something obvious to a child where they can determine their ability and decide whether to take that risk.
Danger	The possibility of suffering harm or injury.
Harm	Injury, hurt or damage inflicted on a human, object or environment.[1]
Hazard	A potential source of harm or danger. Hazards can be mitigated or avoided. They are a source of harm that is obvious (e.g.: walking on the railing of a bridge) or not obvious, such that the potential for injury is hidden, or where the child does not have the competence to manage the hazard, or where there is no obvious benefit to the child in experiencing the hazard (e.g.: broken railing, fast moving current in a river).
Health	A state of physical, mental, intellectual, social and emotional well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Healthy children live in families, environments, and communities that provide them with the opportunity to reach their fullest developmental potential.[2]
Resilience	Resilience is the ability to cope with, and adapt to, stress brought on by a difficult life event. Resilience is a learned skill. Resilient children are able to cope with stress, particularly after a traumatic life event.[3]
Risk	The possibility of gaining or losing something of value, with an intentional interaction with uncertainty, the possibility of a hazard actually causing harm.
Risk Aversion	Human behaviors or actions to reduce uncertainty and danger when exposed to unknown, potentially negative outcomes.
Risk Benefit	Part of a risk assessment method in which an evaluation of the potential benefits to children and others. Play and social value are considered alongside the potential risks associated with the provision. It allows providers to satisfy legal obligations, while promoting a balanced approach.

[1] Outdoor Play Canada. Draft 5.1. May, 2019 OUTDOOR PLAY GLOSSARY OF TERMS

[2] Health Workgroup, First Things First, October, 2007

[3] Resilience. SickKids. About Kids Health.

Risk Benefit Analysis	A process where the practitioner or program weighs, with equal consideration, the duty to protect children from avoidable, serious harm and the duty to provide them with valuable play opportunities.
Risk Benefit Assessment	A practical process and tool for making judgements about the risks and benefits associated with an activity and play space. It includes the control measures that are required to manage the risks while securing the benefits. It assumes that caregivers in the place of play are trained and entrusted with the capacity to make judgements.
Risk Management	Is a systemic rational approach to managing uncertainty within an operating environment.
Safety	A state in which dangers and conditions that could cause physical, psychological or material harm are controlled in a manner to preserve the health and well-being of individuals and the community. Safe or safety are perhaps the most commonly encountered terms in debates about children and risk. e.g.: 'Is this playground, park, tree, public space safe?' It is important to understand that the word 'safe' can mean different things to different people.

Wellbeing:

"Wellbeing incorporates both physical and psychological aspects and is central to belonging, being and becoming. Without a strong sense of wellbeing it is difficult to have a sense of belonging, to trust others and feel confident in being, and to optimistically engage in experiences that contribute to becoming.

Wellbeing includes good physical health, feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and successful social functioning. It influences the way children interact in their environments. A strong sense of wellbeing provides children with confidence and optimism which maximize their learning potential. It encourages the development of children's innate exploratory drive, a sense of agency and a desire to interact with responsive others.

Wellbeing is correlated with resilience, providing children with the capacity to cope with day-to day stress and challenges. The readiness to persevere when faced with unfamiliar and challenging learning situations creates the opportunity for success and achievement."

—Belonging, Being & Becoming - The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia

Every child and family deserve to be healthy and well, but the systems that promote wellness reproduce the unfair advantages and harm of white supremacy. Please make time to watch this webinar.

Health Disparities: Responding with a Lens on Race and Ethnicity.

Webinar. (2020) Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center

Double-click the image below start the video.

What is something that was familiar to you in this video?

What was surprising?

What are the implications of this video for your work as a playgroup facilitator?

Creating a Safe and Healthy Environment

As a playgroup facilitator, making space for healthy play is a top priority. Draw a map of your indoor and outdoor playgroup space(s). You'll reference it in the next few sections.

Make sure children have space for healthy play. Use markers to analyze your play space(s).

- **Purple:** Where can children play together with friends?
- **Blue:** Where can a child go to be alone?
- **Green:** Where can children contact the natural world (bugs, clouds, plants, rocks)?
- **Yellow:** Where can children move their bodies in big ways?
- **Orange:** Where can a child take risks (balance, climb, jump, reach)?

Look at your map.

My place space has plenty of:	I need to create more space for:

(See Module 4 for more information about creating healthy environments).

Play and Wellness:

Play has already been connected to growth, learning and development in the first module. Here it is important to state that play supports social connections, emotional development and resilience. Playing with a child very literally links you to them in a way that supports their self-confidence, self-awareness, positive self-concept and understanding of relative safety in the world. When children play together they are supporting their brain's development and learning to be with other people.

For more information about how different types of play support physical, social and emotional wellness, check out Voice of Play.org's colorful, easy to use website here.

Play and Risk:

Every adult has our own ideas about safety and risk. As a play facilitator, you have a responsibility to yourself, to notice when you feel nervous or worried about children's safety, a responsibility to children; they need to take risks in play to grow and develop, and a responsibility to their families who have their own boundaries around safety and risk.

It is important to recognize the difference between a "risk" and a "hazard".

Name some risks that might make you uncomfortable, but that are not a hazard:

Name some hazards in or around your play space:

Our Language:

Notice when and how you say, "Be careful." or "Watch out" or "Pay Attention". These phrases can communicate our worry, and actually distract a child when they are trying to do something difficult (like pedaling fast on a trike or pulling to the next level of the climber). As children grow and develop, they'll hear adult voices in their heads.; it would be better for them to hear "I knew you could." or "You fell down because you tried something really tricky!" rather than a tense and nervous "WATCH OUT!"

Note: This is a learning exercise for you as a facilitator. It's not a rule to follow, or to impose on families. As your relationships with families deepen, adults may ask you about how you support children's risk taking, or you may feel confident enough about your decisions that you'll offer your thoughts on the matter. For now, pay attention to your own impulses, reflect upon them and try new things; this is how we learn.

Language and Disability Justice:

It's also critical that we choose our words about disabilities in ways that support and honor people with a variety of bodies, abilities and illnesses. These resources will help you think about the language you choose.

Start here with an article about why our language is important when talking about illness and disability.

Language Matters: Disability Terminology. 2018. LifeSource Group + Public Annex

Here are some great lists of vocabulary and definitions:

Appropriate Terms to Use about Disability. National Disability Authority

Glossary. Abolition and Disability Justice.

Glossary of Disability Terms. ADL.

Environmental Safety Activity: Health and Safety Spot Check

Modify the questions below to your specific indoor and outdoor locations.

Use the map you drew above.

Mark the following health and safety items in red: first aid kits, fire extinguishers, attendance binders, emergency exits, and any other key health and safety items.

Are they accessible to adults, but not to children?

Do any of them not have a permanent place?

Do other adults know the locations of these items?

How would you describe to emergency services how to access your location?

Are there special instructions? (Another street with the same name nearby? Which door, bell, staircase or elevator to use? Would an ambulance driver need advice about where to park?)

Address:
Phone number:
Special directions:

Keep this info, your spot check list and your map with your first aid kit or contact lists.

[4] https://playgroupwa.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Health-and-Safety.pdf

Outdoor Environment Spot Check

- ☐ Where might unsafe litter collect? (bushes, trashcans)
  _____
- ☐ Check fences or other barriers; are they secure?
- ☐ Is there pooling water?
- ☐ Look into sandboxes or sensory tubs; are there traces of animals?
- ☐ Trees; are there fallen branches or piled leaves?
- ☐ Play equipment and shade structures; is everything functioning well? Is it wet?
- ☐ Are any outside outlets or light fixtures covered?
- ☐ Is there clean water available for drinking?
- ☐ Does installed outdoor equipment meet all US Safety Standards?
- ☐ Is the playgroup venue and equipment checked regularly for insects, spiders and other hazards both inside and out?
- ☐ Do all self-closing gates work properly?
- ☐ Is access to the parking area restricted during the playgroup session?
- ☐ Are all dangerous areas of the building such as grates and drainage pipes inaccessible to children during the playgroup session?

When you have created your own checklist of items to inspect, walk through your space and conduct an assessment.

What are three ways you could improve the health and/or safety of your environment?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Information

- ☐ Are emergency numbers for all playgroup members listed in the playgroup attendance book?
- ☐ Is there a record for all playgroup members' allergies, including food allergies, listed in the playgroup attendance book?

- ☐ Do all playgroup members know where the first aid kit is kept?
- ☐ Can all members easily locate and use the fire extinguisher?
- ☐ Do facilitators and members of the playgroup know the procedure for leaving the venue in case of a fire?

Indoor Environment:

- ☐ Is the first aid kit accessible and out of reach of children?
- ☐ Are all poisonous substances out of reach of children?
- ☐ Are all adults' bags and belongings stored out of reach of children during a playgroup session?
- ☐ Are all storage areas at playgroup inaccessible to children during sessions?
- ☐ Do all cupboard doors have safety latches?
- ☐ Are all playgroup toys and equipment checked regularly for cleanliness or damage?
- ☐ Are members satisfied with the child safety aspects of access to kitchen, toilets, external doors and doorways to stairs and playgroup?
- ☐ Are all craft materials at playgroup non-toxic?
- ☐ Are the cords from electrical equipment inaccessible to children at playgroup and all accessible power outlets covered?
- ☐ Does the venue have a working smoke detector?
- ☐ Do large windows and sliding doors have safety film?

Daily practices:

- ☐ Does the playgroup have a policy for attendance of members with contagious and infectious diseases?
- ☐ Do playgroup members take sun protective measures at playgroup?
- ☐ Are hot beverages consumed according to the playgroup's "hot drink" policy?
- ☐ Are effective hygiene methods used at playgroup, e.g. washing of hands and toileting?
- ☐ Is all playgroup equipment cleaned and disinfected regularly?

Wellness and You

Put on your own oxygen mask

If you've ever flown in an airplane, you know that part of the safety information is to be sure to put on your own oxygen mask before assisting others. This is a helpful metaphor for those of us in the helping professions because we sometimes forget.

Please consider your wellness needs and be as specific as possible.

What helps you feel your best?

How do you know that you are in need of some care (food, rest, relaxation, time with loved ones, movement, laughter, etc.)?

Who can you ask for help or care when you need it?

Planning for Wellness
Food and Playgroup

"We have to make sure that our kids still feel good about themselves no matter what their weight, no matter how they feel. We need to make sure that our kids know that we love them no matter who they are, what they look like, what they're eating."

—Michelle Obama

Support children's learning about food and nutrition

"If you provide food, follow the nutrition guidelines for children under 6. Information on nutritious foods, portion sizes, and sample menus for planning snacks and meals are available free through the CDC.

Offer fun, healthy snacks. Ants on a log (celery sticks with peanut butter or cream cheese topped with raisins), sliced fresh fruit on a skewer, or raw vegetables and low-fat yogurt dip are favorites of many young children.

Teach children to listen to his or her stomach. When children do this, they'll learn to know when they have had enough to eat. It takes 15 to 20 minutes after eating to know if you're really hungry for seconds.

Plan a taste-testing event. Family members can taste and vote on new, healthy foods—veggie burgers, baby spinach, turkey hot dogs, whole wheat pasta, kiwis, and the like. Then make the favorites part of your regular menu.

Give hugs and kisses—not food—for comfort and encouragement. This simple action helps children associate eating healthy foods with taking care of themselves. They are likely to grow up to be adults who avoid using food as a reward or a way to cope with stress."

Source: Adapted from the Message in a Backpack for L. Colker, 2008, "Trends in Children's Well-Being," News from the Field, Teaching Young Children 1 (4): 20–21.

Play-based learning about food.

Children often play about food. Follow their lead, and don't correct children in this play. Instead, learn more about their understanding about food through how children pretend to prepare and eat food together. Then you can offer materials at the next playgroup that might support their play

Communicating Values

It is common for playgroups or other community organizations to have rules about food; they protect people with allergies, and promote particular views of nutrition or fairness.

However, if we are looking to build relationships and share power, it is helpful to communicate our values instead or at least before creating rules.

Here is a sample value statement. It is the result of a series of conversations among teachers, staff and families at Peabody Terrace Children's Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts. They considered their ideas, biases and experiences about food in the context of their child care center. These may be more in-depth and extensive than a playgroup may produce; they are provided as an example to provoke your thinking.

Read the statement and reflect upon it using questions below.

What We Value About Food and Mealtimes at Peabody Terrace Children's Center

Teachers at Peabody Terrace Children's Center came together in November of 2013 to discern our shared values about food and mealtimes. As we talked and reflected together, we honored our commitments to anti-bias curriculum, developmentally appropriate practice and the principles of the Reggio Emilia approach. We value food in many ways, but they fall into three interacting domains; "Food and bodies", "Food and culture" and "Food and the natural world".

We value:

How food interacts with our bodies:

- Function; food is related to strength, health and emotions
- Enjoyment: the aesthetics and sensuality of food; beauty, flavors, textures, colors, temperatures
- Opportunities to talk about the body and its processes; food and poop
- Safety for all children; freedom from allergens and choking
- Time and space for children to learn to be present to their bodies during meal times

How food interacts with our cultures:

- Mealtime is a social time for children and adults for enjoying one another
- Our willingness as a center to reconsider and change our practices to match our values
- Children's autonomy to decide what, how, when and how much to eat

- The time and energy that families put into the food that they offer their children
- Enjoying a variety of foods and the different cultures present in our center
- Learning more about one another as individuals and members of a family through the food and stories we bring to the table
- Developmentally appropriate, everyday rituals and celebrations at mealtimes
- Making food together, passing on knowledge about preparing food
- Honoring the people whose work brings our food to us
- Recognizing our economic privilege and honoring the value of food by not playing with food in sensory tables or art projects

How food brings us closer to the natural world:

- respect for food and prevention of waste by learning about recycling and composting
- respect for the plants and animals and people who make our food
- The universality of eating; every living thing does it!
- growing some of our food in windows, our homes and our garden plot

Reflection Questions

Where do you see these educators meeting each of the anti-bias goals with this statement?

Goal 1: (Identity)	
Goal 2: (Diversity)	
Goal 3: (Justice)	
Goal 4: (Activism)	

What are some rules about food that you are familiar with?

What values are implied in those rules?

What sorts of agreements or rules might a playgroup invent if they shared Peabody Terrace Children's Center's values about food?

Rituals and Routines

"We have a holistic approach for children when they come to playgroup by just having it be play based. The playgroup is not focused on academic goals as much as it's focused on self-regulation, gross motor and expression of what the child would like to do. Families come as they are and feel safe. There is no pressure or judgement."

—Playgroup Facilitator

Build a flexible routine for the playgroup that includes opportunities to drink enough water, wash hands, eat healthy food, use the bathroom, maintain good dental hygiene (if this is part of your program).

As a facilitator, you keep families safe by being consistent with your practices and expectations. See more about this in Module 5: Our Image of Families. These practices could also spring from your traditions or those of caregivers. While secular programs like playgroups don't pray before a meal, you might take time to sing a short song about food or gratitude or gathering when you sit down for a snack.

One way to support young children's connection to nature is to "tell the story of snack". While you eat, you can talk about the apple tree growing in an orchard, the people, animals, insects, sun, rain and wind that nurtured it. Then about the tree's flowering and fruiting, the people who picked the apples, loaded them onto trucks, the people who drove them to a store. The people who stocked them on the shelves, and rang up the order when the apples were purchased. And the person (you? A caregiver? Someone else in the community?) who brought the apples to the site, washed them, cut them and served them.

Cultural Humility

Food brings up a lot of biases for most people. Pause frequently and notice what judgements, instructions and advice you have in reaction to children's or adults' actions around food. There isn't just one "right" way to teach children about food, health and nutrition. Practice linking common caregiver behaviors (on the right) to the values these caregivers may hold.

Values	Behaviors
"Food is precious; we should never waste it."	Forgoes plastic utensils and eats with their hands, shares a napkin with their child.
"I value community and interdependence. Children must become part of the group."	May let their child "graze", eat only their favorite foods, or eat while they play.
"Children need to develop self-awareness. They deserve autonomy; to be in charge of themselves."	May insist that a child continue to eat after they've said that they are "done'.
"The planet is precious; I don't want to teach my child to create waste."	Tells children to wait until everyone is served to start eating, or for everyone to be done before leaving the snack area.

All of these adult actions are developmentally appropriate in a variety of contexts. Once you've noticed your reactions, consider what you want to do or say in response. If you're not sure, and there's not a safety hazard, take your time and respond another day.

Making Food with Families

Would you like to prepare food with families? Here is a protocol you can use. The first part you can print out and share with a family to help them prepare. The second page is for you to consider so that you can be ready to support the family during their cooking experience. Remember to have this translated into whatever languages your families speak.

A Recipe for Cooking Projects
By Kendra PeloJoaquin

This recipe makes one fun experience for kids and adults working together; feel free to double it.

Preparation: So, you're going to come in and cook with your child at playgroup… Thank you so much! Sharing food is a way of sharing ourselves and our cultures while creating something that engages our senses. So many of our learning goals are met by cooking, especially with families. This "recipe" is a way for you to think about your plan with the facilitator project with teachers and for us to share some of our collective wisdom about what seems to work best.

Ingredients: You'll need:

- 1 Simple Recipe
- 1 brief Plan (might be homemade or created by or with teachers)
- A Dash of Patience
- Fun (to taste)

Directions:

1. Choose a time that works for you and the classroom
2. Prepare food with children and a teacher.
3. Eat it together, if time allows!
4. Clean up together

A simple recipe:

You may have a recipe that is special to your family or you may be looking for a kid-friendly recipe. Local libraries have cookbooks written just for cooking with kids. Consider:

- What foods does your child love? What foods did you enjoy eating or making as a child?

- Please avoid allergens. In this class, that means: _____
- Nutrition; we like to model healthy habits. Talk with teachers about a special treat
- How many steps does the recipe take? With young folks, fewer steps is better..

A plan: Decide with teachers "who, what, when, where, why and how"

Patience: Your child may act differently when you are playing a "starring role". Have patience for her or him and for yourself. Feel free to look to teachers for assistance.

Fun! Children are very sensitive to our emotions. If you can relax and have fun, then they can too. If there's something you're nervous about, feel free to share it with your teachers.

For Facilitators:

Plan ahead:

Answer these questions with the family before the day they will visit.

Who: Which adults will be there to help? How will you divide the labor?

What: Does the recipe make sense for your group (consider allergens, nutritional needs)? Will the family member bring the ingredients and materials? Do you have them already on-site?

When: How long will take? What time works? Does the recipe include chilling, baking or cooking time?

Where: Do you need to use a stove top or an oven? Look around your site to determine how this will use.

Why: Ask the family; It can be helpful to offer children a context, even one as simple as "We icked these tomatoes in Pepe's garden." or "In my family, we make these pancakes to celebrate birthdays."

How: It's a good idea to think it through specifically...

- Will you divide into groups?
- How will the children take part, when will they have to wait for a turn and how will they be supported as they wait?
- Who will be with children who are not cooking?
- Which parts of this activity will the family do and which parts will the teacher do?

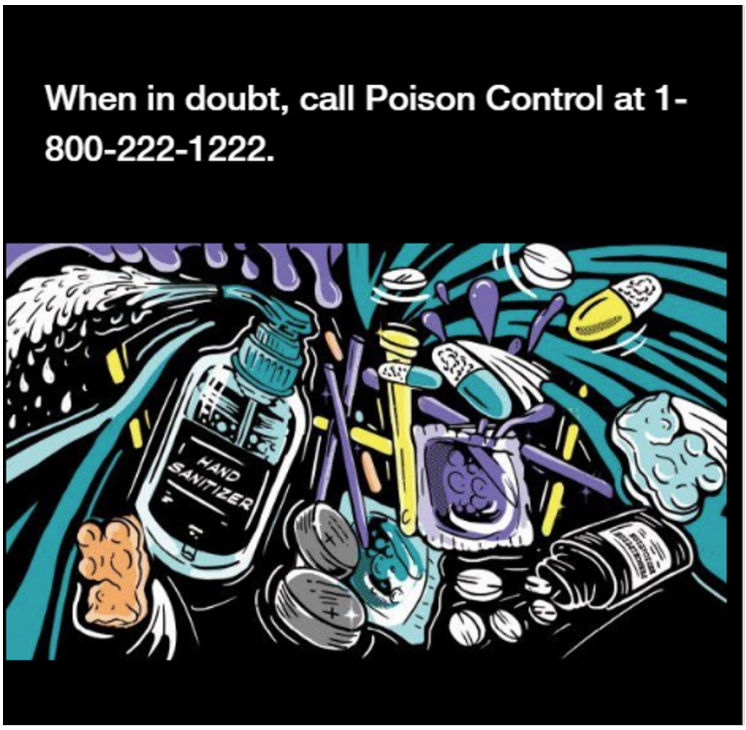
Think about how you might break things up; one table of kids mixes the dry ingredients while the other group mixes the wet, for example. Or, make bread dough one day and baking it the next.

Tips for Making Safety Everyone's Business

It is important that all members are happy with the health and safety aspects of their playgroup -- and that they are all involved in identifying and resolving issues. This can be done in a number of ways:

- Ask different facilitators to lead health and safety reviews to ensure everyone has a thorough understanding of requirements.
- Have a group meeting to discuss any issues or improvements.
- Use this topic for caregiver/family education and do a health and safety walk through of the site with them during a Caregiver Cafe. This enables caregivers to notice and actively engage in health and safety at playgroup and in their homes.
- Larger playgroups may invite members to complete a survey or designate a working group to carry out a formal health and safety check and use the results to make improvements and address any new health and safety issues.

Further Learning



Play:

Developmental benefits of play.

Risky Play:

The Risk of No Risk by Deb Curtis. Exchange. (2010)

Distinguishing between hazards and risks, and how to work with both. Kids Safe NSW.

A Playworker's Guide to Risk; an in-depth resource by Play Wales. (2018)

Risky Play Kids Safe NSW.

Covid Safety:

Guidelines for California Department of Public Health

Safety protocols from the California Department of Education

Supporting Children's Social and Emotional Growth

Recognizing and Overcoming False Growth Mindset Carol Dweck, 2016

Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs, Fourth Edition. This very comprehensive document describes our National standards. It has a great table of contents; use it to navigate more quickly. The appendices contain many useful documents.

Resources specific to child abuse and neglect:

How, and when, to teach little kids about consent and their bodies

The Resilience Project of the American Academy of Pediatrics

The Child Welfare Information Gateway

Prevent Child Abuse America

The Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center

Environmental Health and Safety

Early Childhood Health and Safety Resources. American Academy of Pediatrics (This page includes tip sheets and webinars about common health and safety concerns.)

Chapter 5: Facilities, Supplies, Equipment, and Environmental Health https://nrckids.org/CFOC/Database/5 To learn more, click to Caring for Our Kids

For a formal Health and Safety Checklist for Early Care and Education Programs, please click this. The Checklist is based on Caring for Our Children National Health and Safety Performance Standards, Third Edition. While it is not specific to playgroups, there are many similarities with other ECE settings.

Social Emotional Development

Culturally Appropriate Positive Guidance with Young Children NAEYC document shares practical hypothetical situations, and suggestions.

DAP in the time of COVID: Questions to consider. NAEYC. 2020.

From fear to freedom; risk and learning in a forest school Voices of practitioners. Heather Taylor 2019

Teaching Consent to Young Children. Naima Taaj Ajmal Brown

High five or hug? Teaching toddlers about consent. Kathy Kinser 2019. Zero to Three.

Young Children and Communication: This is an excellent resource from the Better Health Channel in Australia. It has simple suggestions for communicating with, infants, toddlers and young children. You may want to print out and translate some of the lists into hand-outs for families.

The Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center offers a wealth of resources for better understanding what can be done to provide a holistic approach to health and well-being. You are encouraged to visit the following pages.

https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/nutrition

https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/mental-health

https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/safety-practices

Appendix A: Playgroup Health and Safety Checklist.

- ☐ The location
  - ☐ is readily identifiable and accessible to emergency response personnel.
  - ☐ allows for the safe arrival and departure of children.
- ☐ I am prepared for emergencies. I...
  - ☐ am trained in First Aid and CPR First Aid kit
  - ☐ have a First Aid kit, manual and contact numbers with me at every group.
  - ☐ easy access to a phone.
  - ☐ can see every child and am aware of all adults present.
- ☐ I have made sure that all equipment and materials, indoors and outdoors, are safe, in good shape and appropriate for the abilities of the children.
- ☐ I follow a regular schedule that I may have already set for cleaning and sanitizing materials.
- ☐ I know how to recognize and report any child abuse using guidelines and reporting forms from the state department responsible for child services.
- ☐ I know resources available for families for prevention.
- ☐ I am familiar with the site's Health and Safety Policies and Procedures.

Additional items are listed for checking the safety features of the indoor and outdoor environments, as well as the supplies, which are to be checked once or twice a day.

- Best Practices in Playgroups: Research Review and Quality Enhancement Framework

Appendix B: Disaster Planning

The California Child Care Disaster Plan is an Annex to the California State Emergency Plan. It outlines the roles and responsibilities of key state agencies to support the child care infrastructure in an emergency or disaster. The overall goal of the California Child Care Disaster Plan is to reduce the risk of injury, loss, and destruction for children and staff in child care programs.

California Child Care Disaster Plan supports child care providers to be ready for, respond to, and recover from an emergency. The resources in the Appendix assist child care providers to meet licensing regulations, Child Care and Development Block Grant funding requirements, and best practice recommendations. The Step-by-Step Guide and Emergency Plan Library (checklists, forms, templates, worksheets, and other tools and resources) provide guidance to develop custom emergency plans based on individual child care program needs and local resources. The California Child Care Disaster Plan is available in English and Spanish and is free to download.

While we are mindful that playgroups are not child care centers, the information and resources may be helpful as you develop your own policies, guidelines, and overall plans.

You can access the California Child Care Disaster Plan at
https://cchp.ucsf.edu/content/disaster-preparedness