

## Handout II.3B

### Mixed-age or Same-age Grouping? It Depends!

Aspect of Care	Same-age Grouping (Close in Age)	Mixed-age Grouping
Peer Friendships:	Children at a similar developmental level who stay together over time can develop strong peer relations. The range of differences between children is smaller.	Family Feeling: Siblings within the age range of the group can be cared for together. This may be important to families from cultures where interdependence is highly valued. Children have the benefits of older and younger children to relate to, imitate, learn from, and nurture.
Enrollment:	A child who leaves is replaced by a child of the same or similar age.	Newly enrolled infants and toddlers of any age within that range can be added to the group.
Environment:	The room must be large and flexible enough to accommodate changing interests and abilities as the children grow, or the group must move together to a room designed for the next stage.	The environment must be flexible and easily adapted to the interests and abilities of children of a wide range of ages. Infant/toddler care teachers and children can remain in the same room together as the children grow.
Age-grouping Regulations:	Children in same-age groupings are more likely to be ready to move up at the same time, making it easier to keep primary care groups together.	Licensing or other regulatory agencies may prohibit mixing younger and older infants in center programs, although in some states, licensing exemptions may be obtained. If the primary care teacher cannot remain with the whole group because of age restrictions, the older children may move with another familiar infant/toddler care teacher (for example, the team care teacher or a secondary care teacher from another shift), while the younger children remain with the primary care teacher.
Toys, Equipment, and Activities:	It is easier to provide developmentally appropriate routines, toys, equipment, and activities for each primary group when children are close in age.	Infant/toddler care teachers in mixed-age groups must be able to meet the very different interests and abilities of the youngest infant and the oldest toddler with respect to routines, the environment and toys, equipment, activities, safety, and so forth.
Meeting Needs:	An infant/toddler care teacher may have difficulty adapting to the care of, for example, four young infants who require a great deal of one-on-one attention or, conversely, four older infants in the throes of identify formation and nay-saying.	Primary care teachers working in a room with a wide age range may divide the children by age, but are less likely to have a whole primary group of children of the same age, stage, and interests and abilities.
Training:	Specialized training for working with children as they move from one stage of infancy to another is recommended.	Specialized training for working with children of different ages at the same time is recommended.