

The Program for Infant/Toddler Care Philosophy

At the heart of the Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC) is a commitment to care for infants and toddlers that respects the differing cultures, lifestyles, preferences, abilities, learning styles, and needs of the children and families served. PITC follows an approach that is responsive to what the infants and toddlers and their families bring to care and emphasizes relationship-based implementation strategies. The positions advocated by PITC are based on sound child development and family research, leading to the following working assumptions:

- Families need to be partners in care. Programs should seek out families' beliefs, values, practices, and child-rearing strategies and include them in the program's caregiving practices whenever possible.
- Young children are unique individuals with varying temperaments, rates of development, and interests. These individual differences should be identified and strategies appropriate to each child's unique needs incorporated in child care practice.
- Young children are curious, motivated learners and also dependent upon adults for nurturance, support, and guidance. They need to be both respected as learners and protected in their vulnerability. Planning for a child's care in the program is a shared experience that includes families and program staff. Care teachers individualize programs for children by
 - welcoming family and cultural practices, including home language, as a part of the child care experience;
 - providing infants close and responsive relationships in intimate settings;
 - designing safe, interesting, and developmentally appropriate environments;
 - giving infants uninterrupted time to explore; and
 - interacting with infants during caregiving routines and throughout the day in ways that physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually support their initiations in discovery and learning.

Six Program Policies Anchor Our Work

Primary Care

In a primary care system, each child is assigned to one special care teacher who is principally responsible for that child's care. When children spend a longer day in care than their primary care teacher does, a second care teacher is assigned to provide the primary relationship. Each child should have a special care teacher assigned to him or her at all times during the child care day. Teaming is also important. Primary care works best when care teachers team up, support each other, and provide a backup base for security for each other's primary care children. Primary care does not mean exclusive care. It means, however, that all parties know who has primary responsibility for each child.

Small Groups

Every major research study on infant and toddler care has shown that small group size and good ratios are key components of quality care. PITC recommends primary care ratios of 1:3 or 1:4 in groups of 6–12 children, depending on the age. The guiding principle is the younger the child, the smaller the group. Small groups facilitate the provision of personalized care that infants and toddlers need, supporting peaceful exchanges, freedom and safety to move and explore, and the development of intimate relationships.

Continuity of Care

Continuity of care is the third key to providing the deep connections that infants and toddlers need for quality child care. Programs that incorporate the concept of continuity of care keep primary care teachers and children together throughout the three years of the infancy period or during the entirety of the child's enrollment in care as an infant.

Individualized Care

Following children's unique rhythms and styles promotes well-being and a healthy sense of self. It's important not to make a child feel bad about himself or herself because of biological rhythms or needs that are different from those of other children.

Responding promptly to children's individual needs supports their growing ability to self-regulate (i.e., to function independently in personal and social contexts). The program adapts to the child rather than vice versa, and the child gets the message that he or she

is important, that his or her needs will be met, and that his or her choices, preferences, and impulses are respected.

Culturally Sensitive Care

Children develop a sense of who they are and what is important within the context of culture. Traditionally, it has been the child’s family and cultural community that have been responsible for the transmission of values, expectations, and ways of doing things, especially during the early years of life. As more children enter child care during the tender years of infancy, questions of their cultural identity and sense of belonging in their own families are raised. Consistency of care between home and child care is always important for the very young and becomes even more so when the infant or toddler is cared for in the context of cultural practices different from that of the child’s family. Because of the important role of culture in development, care teachers who serve families from diverse backgrounds need to

- heighten their understanding of the importance of culture in the lives of infants;
- develop cultural competencies;
- acknowledge and respect cultural differences; and
- learn to be responsive and open and willing to negotiate with families about child-rearing practices—in this way, families and care teachers, working together, can facilitate the optimal development of each child.

Inclusion of Children with Disabilities or Delays

Inclusion means making the benefits of high-quality care available to all infants through appropriate accommodation and support so the child has full active program participation. Already embraced by PITC, a relationship-based approach to the provision of care that is individualized and responsive to the child’s cues and desires to learn is equally important for children with disabilities or delays. Infants who have responsive, enduring relationships develop emotional security, which gives them the foundation for becoming socially competent and resilient. Infants who have individualized care are allowed to learn and grow in their own way and at their own pace.

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