



Developmentally Appropriate Early Care and Education

4Cs of Alameda County | www.4calameda.org

“Developmentally appropriate practice” is something you can spend your whole life learning about. But it’s based on two simple ideas:

- **Understanding child development.** The more we understand the typical order in which children learn skills, knowledge, and concepts, and the typical ages for each stage of learning, the better we will understand how to promote positive development.
- **Intentionality.** That means planning environments and activities based on your understanding of children’s development - setting goals for children’s learning and development, and understanding how your activities, routines, and environment help children meet these goals.

When you understand and plan how the different aspects of your program contribute to children’s development, the children thrive - and your job is more interesting and satisfying.



BUILD CURRICULUM AROUND PLAY

Play is not just a way for children to have fun or relax - it’s an essential way for them to learn. By doing activities they choose and enjoy, children naturally develop math skills (shapes, quantity, size comparisons), language skills (talking with peers and teachers), large- and small-muscle skills (drawing, manipulating toys, climbing, throwing), imagination (pretend play), social skills, confidence, problem-solving, and the ability to plan and carry out activities (“executive function”). Having fun is important, too - it helps children build a positive approach to learning and to life.

YOU CAN INCREASE LEARNING THROUGH PLAY BY:

- Providing environments and materials that enhance active learning, including many traditional early childhood items: a variety of toys, blocks, dolls and stuffed animals, balls, puzzles and manipulatives, water and sand tables, with a variety of containers and tools, dress-up and housekeeping materials, a variety of art materials, etc.
- Engaging with the children - asking questions, making suggestions, adding information, posing new challenges, providing specific feedback (“you used a lot of red and orange in that painting”) as opposed to general praise (“good job!”). Your participation greatly increases children’s learning through play, building language and concept development.

PROVIDE A VARIETY OF EXPERIENCES

Children need experiences that help them develop in all “domains” (emotional, social, physical, and mental). They thrive through activities that naturally integrate these domains to involve the whole child. To be well prepared for school and for life, children need to learn:

- Emotional skills, such as self-regulation and problem-solving,
- Social skills such as sharing and cooperation,
- Large motor skills (walking, running, jumping, climbing) and small motor skills (holding pens and pencils, working with small objects), and
- “Academic” disciplines, such as language and literacy, mathematics, social studies, science, art, and music.

They also need a daily schedule that allows time for active and quiet play, exploration, and interaction, as well as rest and nutrition.

ENGAGE CHILDREN AS ACTIVE LEARNERS

Young children don’t have enough experience or neurological development to process abstract information. They learn through immediate, real-world activities that involve all their senses as well as their minds, bodies, and emotions.

You can train them to fill out work sheets that say $4 + 4 = 8$, but they won’t really understand what that means. On the other hand, if there are four plates on the table, and eight children are ready for lunch, a child can figure out that we need four more plates. Another example: explaining the concept of one-third doesn’t work. But if they want to make two sides of a building the same length, you could ask how many short blocks they need to match a long one. They will discover that it takes three.

Through such experiences, children learn, not only math, but problem-solving skills - and confidence in their own problem-solving abilities.

FOR MORE IDEAS:

The National Association for the Education of Young Children has many materials describing developmentally appropriate practice for young children of every age.
www.naeyc.org

BASE ACTIVITIES ON CHILDREN'S INTERESTS

- Allow plenty of time for children to choose their own activities. When children follow their interests, they are more likely to be engaged, focused, and persistent—abilities that will be crucial for their success in school and in life.
- You can also develop “emergent curriculum”, introducing materials and activities to explore children’s interests or questions. For example: interest in a new puppy can lead to science activities (comparing what puppies, children, and other living things need to be healthy), art and dramatic play activities, practical knowledge (pet care, dog safety rules), reading aloud and discussing books about dogs and puppies, social studies projects (learning how people and dogs have worked together).

PROVIDE A SUPPORTIVE, CARING COMMUNITY

Positive relationships provide the safety, motivation, and encouragement children need for healthy learning and development. This also includes the caregivers’ relationships with co-workers and the children’s families.

- Children need adults to model positive ways of relating.
- Children need to feel that every member of the community is valued and that interactions are safe and enjoyable, not stressful or scary.
- They need an orderly, predictable routine that is also flexible, adapting to needs and opportunities that come up.
- They need adults to take responsibility for guiding their behavior and helping them learn self-regulation.
- They need adults to respect their views and feelings and to help them learn conflict-resolution and problem-solving skills.

TO LEARN MORE:

4Cs offers workshops on many topics, including developmentally appropriate practices. See our training calendar at www.4calameda.org.