

Quality Indicators in Infant Toddler Programming

Infants and toddlers do not naturally live in groups. It is essential that child care settings are as sensitive as possible to the needs of this very vulnerable group. Several approaches make group care for infants and toddlers more manageable.

Low Staff to Child Ratios

Caregivers need to know and understand each child as an individual. This is facilitated by low staff/child ratios.

- Wisconsin licensing regulations for staff to child ratios and group sizes support quality
- Accreditation criteria state that infants should have one teacher for every three or four babies

Small Group Sizes

Small group sizes allow appropriate attention for each infant.

- In Wisconsin, Children under two years old may not be in groups larger than eight children.
- The number of individuals infants are exposed to at any one time should be limited
- Small group size reduces the spread of infection and stress levels in infants

Primary Caregiving

When a caregiver is responsible for establishing primary relationships with just a few infants, she is better able to respond effectively to the individual temperament, needs and cues of each baby. This is important because:

- The caregiver is able to listen to parents about concerns
- There is a chance to learn about the parent's child care practices
- Child care providers are able to be responsive to parent's needs
- Primary caregivers are able to observe each baby in detail and develop a deeper understanding of them as individuals
- A primary caregiver is better able to advocate for the needs of the child and the family because of this fuller understanding
- Children are allowed to establish their own daily routines
- Together babies and their caregiver develop consistent caregiving rituals which have deep meaning and help to establish trusting relationships.
- The caregiver, the baby and the family are able to establish a pattern of communication that

works well for all of them.

Continuity of Care

- Infants and toddlers need to develop relationships with their caregivers which are:
 - Supportive
 - Nurturing
 - Trusting
 - Maintained over time
- High quality early childhood programs have established enrollment systems which allow groups of children and caregivers to remain together for as long as three years. Long term child/caregiver relationships promote:
 - Bonding
 - Time for families and caregivers to work together to influence a child's

development

Safety Concerns

Health and

Children require safe and healthy environments which allow them to explore the world around them. A safe and healthy setting includes:

- Appropriate sanitation procedures
 - Hand washing
 - Before diapering
 - After diapering
 - After toileting
 - Before, and after, food preparation
 - Clean and disinfect:
 - Diapering area
 - Food preparation areas and counters
 - Tables, highchairs and other eating areas
 - Toys
 - Equipment
- Safe storage of potentially dangerous materials/equipment
- Floors are smooth and have non-skid surfaces
- Rugs are skid-proof
- Adequate lighting
 - Home-like level of lighting is bright enough for good visibility
 - Emergency lighting equipment works
 - Electrical cords are out of children's reach
 - Incandescent bulbs are easier on children's eyes than fluorescent
 - Natural daylight is best of all
- Safe doors
 - Glass doors have decals on them both at child and adult eye level
 - Doors have slow closing devices on them
 - Doors have rubber gaskets on the edges to prevent finger pinching
- Ill children are isolated or excluded
- Emergency procedures are clearly defined
- Health records are carefully maintained

Parent Partnerships

A parent is a baby's most important teacher. A caregiver's most important role is to strengthen the relationship between a parent and a child. This can be accomplished by:

- Respecting parent views and child rearing styles
- Communicating with parents daily about:
 - The child's daily activities
 - The child's eating, toileting, napping
 - Incidents involving the child
 - Problems and/or concerns
- Supporting the breast-feeding mother by providing a quiet, comfortable space for nursing
- Encouraging parent suggestions and ideas
- Seeking parent evaluations about the child care program and staff

Environments

Infants and toddlers thrive in an environment which has a home-like setting. Be sensitive to their needs by creating settings which:

- Use natural materials
- Provide a variety of soft spaces
- Incorporate private spaces
- Balance the child's need for safety with the sense of adventure

- Provide new things for infants and toddlers to try out each day
- Provide toys, books and posters that reflect real things and people in the child's world
- Have low open shelves allowing children to choose their own play materials
- Use child-scaled furniture with rounded corners
- Provide well-organized personal storage space for each child
- Protect young infants from more active, mobile babies
 - Furniture and equipment can be used to create separate areas
 - Be sure all spaces are visible and can be easily supervised
- Incorporate a no-shoes' policy for adults in the infant room. Stockings, slippers, or hospital booties' will:
 - Keep the room and floor clean
 - Minimize the risk of injury by stepping on a child

Early Brain Development

The first three years are a critical period in the development of every child. No education a child receives in the future will have as great an impact as that which is learned in these early years.

- The brain is the only organ not fully developed at birth
- Early experiences influence the way in which the brain structure grows
- By age three, 85% of the core brain structures are formed
- Children must receive appropriate stimulation for normal development
 - Babies need to hear conversation in order to develop language. An adult's vocabulary is largely determined by the speech she/he heard during the first three years of life.
 - Speak to babies often
 - Speak in full sentences
 - Read to infants and toddlers often
 - The number of words and the tone used affect a child's ability to think conceptually
 - Explain what you are doing as you interact with infants and toddlers
 - Infants need to see a variety of things to develop their vision
 - Young infants respond to pictures and objects with high contrast
 - Use large pictures which depict real objects in the child's world
 - Tasting and smelling a variety of foods and aromas refine those senses
 - Cuddling, stroking and touching is important because this:
 - Develops trust and attachment
 - Helps premature infants gain weight
 - Helps healthy babies digest food better
 - Lowers stress hormones in infants
- Caregivers and parents should strive for balance between under- and over- stimulation

Policies that Support Quality Caregiving:

- Time to plan programs and prepare classrooms when not responsible for caring for the children.
- Opportunities for professional growth and additional training
- A system that supports continued improvement in staff skill level through self reflection and examination and through peer and/or supervisory evaluation.
- A level of compensation which allows staff to stay in their positions and support their own families.
- Spaces where staff can be away from the children during break and preparation time or meet with parents and others in private.

The Wisconsin Child Care Improvement Project (WCCIP) is a statewide non-profit agency dedicated to helping improve child care by helping child care professionals give the best care possible to your children