



Overview of the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards

1. Relationships

Program Standard: The program promotes positive relationships among all children and adults to encourage each child's sense of individual worth and belonging as part of a community and to foster each child's ability to contribute as a responsible community member.

Rationale: Positive relationships are essential for the development of personal responsibility, capacity for self-regulation, for constructive interactions with others, and for fostering academic functioning and mastery. Warm, sensitive, and responsive interactions help children develop a secure, positive sense of self and encourage them to respect and cooperate with others. Positive relationships also help children gain the benefits of instructional experiences and resources. Children who see themselves as highly valued are more likely to feel secure, thrive physically, get along with others, learn well, and feel part of a community.

2. Curriculum

Program Standard: The program implements a curriculum that is consistent with its goals for children and promotes learning and development in each of the following areas: social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive.

Rationale: A curriculum that draws on research assists teachers in identifying important concepts and skills as well as effective methods for fostering children's learning and development. When informed by teachers' knowledge of individual children, a well-articulated curriculum guides teachers so they can provide children with experiences that foster growth across a broad range of developmental and content areas. A curriculum also helps ensure that the teacher is intentional in planning a daily schedule that (a) maximizes children's learning through effective use of time, materials used for play, self-initiated learning, and creative expression as well as (b) offers opportunities for children to learn individually and in groups according to their developmental needs and interests.

3. Teaching

Program Standard: The program uses developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches that enhance each child's learning and development in the context of the program's curriculum goals.

Rationale: Teaching staff who purposefully use multiple instructional approaches optimize children's opportunities for learning. These approaches include strategies that range from structured to unstructured and from adult directed to child directed. Children bring to learning environments different backgrounds, interests, experiences, learning styles, needs, and capacities. Teachers' consideration of these differences when selecting and implementing instructional approaches helps all children succeed. Instructional approaches also differ in their effectiveness for teaching different elements of curriculum and learning. For a program to address the complexity inherent in any teaching-learning situation, it must use a variety of effective instructional approaches. In classrooms and groups that include teacher assistants or teacher aides and specialized teaching and support staff, the expectation is that these teaching staff work as a team. Whether one teacher works alone or whether a team works together, the instructional approach creates a teaching environment that supports children's positive learning and development across all areas.

4. Assessment of Child Progress

Program Standard: The program is informed by ongoing systematic, formal, and informal assessment approaches to provide information on children’s learning and development. These assessments occur within the context of reciprocal communications with families and with sensitivity to the cultural contexts in which children develop. Assessment results are used to benefit children by informing sound decisions about children, teaching, and program improvement.

Rationale: Teachers’ knowledge of each child helps them to plan appropriately challenging curricula and to tailor instruction that responds to each child’s strengths and needs. Further, systematic assessment is essential for identifying children who may benefit from more intensive instruction or intervention or who may need additional developmental evaluation. This information ensures that the program meets its goals for children’s learning and developmental progress and also informs program improvement efforts.

5. Health

Program Standard: The program promotes the nutrition and health of children and protects children and staff from illness and injury.

Rationale: To benefit from education and maintain quality of life, children need to be as healthy as possible. Health is a state of complete physical, oral, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (World Health Organization 1948). Children depend on adults (who also are as healthy as possible) to make healthy choices for them and to teach them to make healthy choices for themselves. Although some degree of risk taking is desirable for learning, a quality program prevents hazardous practices and environments that are likely to result in adverse consequences for children, staff, families, or communities.

6. Teachers

Program Standard: The program employs and supports a teaching staff that has the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children’s learning and development and to support families’ diverse needs and interests.

Rationale: Children benefit most when their teachers have high levels of formal education and specialized early childhood professional preparation. Teachers who have specific preparation, knowledge, and skills in child development and early childhood education are more likely to engage in warm, positive interactions with children, offer richer language experiences, and create more high-quality learning environments. Opportunities for teaching staff to receive supportive supervision and to participate in ongoing professional development ensure that their knowledge and skills reflect the profession’s ever-changing knowledge base.



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7. Families

Program Standard: The program establishes and maintains collaborative relationships with each child’s family to foster children’s development in all settings. These relationships are sensitive to family composition, language, and culture.

Rationale: Young children’s learning and development are integrally connected to their families. Consequently, to support and promote children’s optimal learning and development, programs need to recognize the primacy of children’s families, establish relationships with families based on mutual trust and respect, support and involve families in their children’s educational growth, and invite families to fully participate in the program.

8. Community Relationships

Program Standard: The program establishes relationships with and uses the resources of the children’s communities to support the achievement of program goals.

Rationale: As part of the fabric of children’s communities, an effective program establishes and maintains reciprocal relationships with agencies and institutions that can support it in achieving its goals for the curriculum, health promotion, children’s transitions, inclusion, and diversity. By helping to connect families with needed resources, the program furthers children’s healthy development and learning.

9. Physical Environment

Program Standard: The program has a safe and healthful environment that provides appropriate and well-maintained indoor and outdoor physical environments. The environment includes facilities, equipment, and materials to facilitate child and staff learning and development.

Rationale: The program’s design and maintenance of its physical environment support high-quality program activities and services as well as allow for optimal use and operation. Well-organized, equipped, and maintained environments support program quality by fostering the learning, comfort, health, and safety of those who use the program. Program quality is enhanced by also creating a welcoming and accessible setting for children, families, and staff.

10. Leadership and Management

Program Standard: The program effectively implements policies, procedures, and systems that support stable staff and strong personnel, fiscal, and program management so all children, families, and staff have high quality experiences.

Rationale: Excellent programming requires effective governance structures, competent and knowledgeable leadership, as well as comprehensive and well functioning administrative policies, procedures, and systems. Effective leadership and management create the environment for high-quality care and education by

- Ensuring compliance with relevant regulations and guidelines;
- promoting fiscal soundness, program accountability, effective communication, helpful consultative services, positive community relations, and comfortable and supportive workplaces;
- maintaining stable staff; and
- instituting ongoing program planning and career development opportunities for staff as well as continuous program improvement.