



Infants and Toddlers: Learning Through Routines

Daily routines are a big part of a child's day—at child care and at home. Through the daily routines of hellos and good-byes, diapering and toileting, eating and mealtimes, sleeping and napping, and getting dressed, a child care program meets a child's basic needs. These routines also provide opportunities to promote learning and development.

Hellos and Good-byes

Learning to separate from and reunite with people we love is a lifelong process that can bring out deep feelings in everyone involved. Because they provoke such strong feelings, hellos and good-byes provide valuable learning for infants and toddlers. Infants can learn about trust when you say good-bye and return as promised. Toddlers can learn what it means to be a separate person with deep attachments to others.



How you can help:

- Try to encourage parents to stay a few minutes to help ease their child into the day. Remind them to always say "good-bye" even when it is tempting to sneak away.
- Have parents bring reminders of home, such as family photos or a tape of their reading their child's favorite story. These sights and sounds from home will help the child feel safe and secure.
- Remember that transitions can be hard for all of us. If a child breaks into tears or ignores a parent for a few minutes at the end of the day, explain how these behaviors show their child's deep love and trust for the parent.

Diapering and Toileting

Diapering is a time to talk together, sing a song, or play "Where are your toes?" In addition, you as a caregiver can help the child learn the names of body parts and clothes, concepts such as wet and dry, and that body functions are a natural part of life. Sometime around the age of two-and-a-half, most children begin using the toilet. By waiting until a child is ready to do so and avoiding power struggles, you can make toilet learning a positive learning experience--and give the child the sense of achievement that comes with wearing "big kid" underpants and gaining self-control.



How you can help:

- Try to think of diapering as a positive experience. Approach diapering as a time for meaningful interactions, rather than as tasks to hurry through.
- Work with parents to plan a consistent approach for helping their child learn to use the toilet at home and in child care.
- Keep reminding yourself and the parents that learning to use the toilet is a complex skill that takes time to develop. By taking a matter-of-fact approach to accidents, you can promote a child's sense of competence and reduce stress for everyone.

Eating and Mealtimes

Mealtimes and related activities--such as setting the table, washing hands before sitting down to eat, carrying on a conversation with others, and brushing teeth--give older infants and toddlers opportunities to develop self-help, communication, and social skills. Mealtimes are also times to practice fine motor skills and lay the groundwork for good nutrition and health habits. The foods children eat at home often reflect not only their families' personal taste, but their culture. Include this in your program. For infants, talk with parents about issues such as nursing, weaning, and introducing solid foods.



How you can help:

- Encourage parents to join their child for a snack or meal whenever they can so they can see how your program does things. Encourage them to ask questions and offer suggestions.
- If you have nursing mothers, offer them a comfortable place where they can feed their baby without interruption.
- Encourage families to share what mealtimes are like in their homes so your program can provide children with a sense of continuity.
- Make sure parents provide you with any information you need to keep their child healthy, for example, that the child has allergies to certain foods, or tends to choke.

Sleeping and Naptime

Sleeping and naptime give children needed rest during an active day in child care. Even if a child doesn't sleep, naptime can serve as a break from group life and a chance to develop trust in the child care environment.



How you can help:

- Keep informed. Knowing how long a child has slept the night before and whether there have been changes in sleep patterns, will promote better planning when the child is in child care. It's equally important that you as a caregiver give this information to parents to help them make plans at home.
- Encourage parents to share ways that you help their child fall asleep. This will help you to be able to do similar things, and help the child experience some of the same safe and secure feelings they feel at home.

Getting Dressed

Dressing offers pleasant and sometimes challenging moments. When you dress an infant or encourage a toddler to push a foot into a shoe, you promote cooperation, introduce names of body parts, provide practice in self-help skills, and help a child learn to make decisions. As a care giver you may sometimes find yourself dealing with a protesting child. You should respond by being firm, respectful, and finishing as quickly as possible.



How you can help:

- Have parents leave an extra set of clothes at child care--labeled with their child's name.
- Encourage parents to dress their child for active, messy play so he or she can participate in everything without worrying about getting dirty.
- Encourage parents to choose clothes for their child that are easy to manage. The child will feel competent when he or she can close the Velcro fasteners on shoes and manage pants with elastic waists.