

10 Components of Quality Child Care for Infants and Toddlers

FSU Center for Prevention & Early Intervention Policy

The quality of child care given to infants and toddlers has a long-term effect on their school achievement. High quality care is found to be related to better mother-child relationships, decreased probability of insecure attachments in infants of mothers who exhibit low sensitivity, few incidences of problem behaviors, increased cognitive scores, increased language skills and higher levels of school readiness. *

Component	Definition
Responsive Caregiving	The responsive caregiver facilitates the development of self-esteem by respecting, accepting and comforting children, regardless of the child's behavior. The responsive caregiver takes cues from each child about when to expand on their initiative, when to guide, when to teach and when to intervene. Responsive caregivers are alert to signs of undue stress in children's behavior and utilize appropriate stress-reducing activities and techniques.
Continuity of Care	Having one primary caregiver for more than a year (optimally, from entry into child care until the child is three years of age or older) is important to the child's emotional development. Switching from one caregiver to another takes its toll on the child. Too many changes in caregivers can slow children's development and leave them reluctant to form new relationships. When very young children switch repeatedly from one caregiver to another, the time they spend grieving the loss of the old caregiver and learning the new caregiver's ways may slow down their overall development.
Primary Caregiving Assignments	Relationships between caregivers and children are crucial in quality child care. It is through close relationships with caring adults – including child care providers – that children flourish, learn about the world and learn who they are. Each child in group care should be assigned a primary caregiver. A primary caregiver is principally responsible for the child and helps build a positive, continuing, intimate relationship with that child. This also offers family members a consistent child care contact who knows the child well.
Small Groups with High Staff-to-Child Ratios	Ratios and group size determine the amount of time that the caregiver has to spend with each of the children. Small groups create a sense of intimacy and safety. A rich dialogue between caregivers and infants is possible in small groups because there are fewer individuals, less noise, and less activity to interfere with a child's ability to learn. Small groups and more staff enable caregivers to build strong relationships with individual children and adapt activities to meet the changing interests, needs and capacities of the group. The recommended group size for infants is six to eight. The best adult to child ratio is one adult for every three or four children.

Component	Definition
Individualized Programming	In high quality programs, caregivers understand the needs, temperaments, moods and preferences of each child and adapt their care to meet those individual needs. Caregivers have an overall plan for each day, including materials and activities that are appropriate for the developmental stage of each child. In addition, the caregiver continually observes each infant or toddler to discover what skills he is ready to explore and eventually master.
Responsive Environments	High quality programs provide classroom arrangements that are responsive to the individual needs of the infant or toddler, rather than the needs of the caregiver. In order to facilitate a child's optimal development, caregivers must provide caring, well planned environments which maximize the child's ability to explore and grow in their physical, cognitive, emotional and social abilities.
Cultural and Linguistic Continuity	In order to effectively and genuinely implement culturally appropriate practices, caregivers must reflect on their own attitudes, beliefs and biases regarding cultural differences. High quality programs incorporate practices that reflect the values and beliefs of the families and culture of their community. Using the child's home language, following cultural norms related to daily routines, and engaging in ongoing, open communication with the family are examples of such practices.
Competent Staff Trained in Early Childhood Development	The strongest indicators for long term success tied to early child care are related to the education level of the caregivers and their level of participations in ongoing training in the field of early childhood development and care. Having competent staff trained in early childhood development is considered the most critical factor that contributes to the social environment in which children learn best.
Appropriate Health and Safety Practices	A quality group child care setting for young children should be safe and sanitary as well as interesting to children and conducive to intimate, responsive interactions. This includes careful planning of areas for food preparation and diapering/toileting; detailed emergency, injury and health procedures; awareness of and collaboration with community health and safety resources; time for caregivers to meet to share current health and safety information; and daily communication between family members and caregivers. To reduce the risk of SIDS all healthy infants should be placed on their backs to sleep.
Curricular Resources	Learning is an interactive process with concrete, real activities and materials, and many opportunities for exploration and interactions. Quality programs utilize curricular resources to plan and prepare an environment where children can choose from a variety of activities.

*Shonkoff, J.P. & Phillips, D. (Eds.). (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Components of Quality adapted from:

Bredenkamp, S. & Copple, C. (Eds.). (1997). *Developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood programs*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

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Teen Parent Child Care Quality Improvement Project

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