

Five reflective questions to ask about your infant and toddler curriculum

A curriculum for infants and toddlers should be set in a calm, safe and secure environment in which children's ability and motivation for learning is respected and developed. An effective curriculum requires skilful observation and planning in the moment as you observe. The curriculum draws on relationships and developing strong connections in moments of shared attention that enable you to support infants and toddlers in their learning interests. This enables you to provide them with the relevant vocabulary and resources to extend their learning.

Consider the following aspects as you reflect upon how your infant and toddler curriculum might be improved.

Do you promote a calm environment?

An effective curriculum for infants and toddlers does not depend on obvious teacher action. Instead of providing activities and entertainment for infants and toddlers, can you instead ensure a calm, slow pace in which children have the space and time to lead their own learning? This kind of pace gives infants and toddlers opportunities to play without interruption. Can you wait for the infant to look at you, smile at you, to check in, as an invitation to interact with them? Can you be available watching at just the moment a toddler makes a new discovery, before you put it into words for them?

Do you observe carefully and plan in the moment?

Planning an infant and toddler curriculum involves ongoing observation and interpretation of infants' and toddlers' actions and cues, so that their cues can be used for enhancing their learning. Watchful observation is very important. Can you give infants and toddlers your full attention? This means not thinking about when your break is, or the shopping you need to do in your lunch break!

Do you feel comfortable being busy observing without actually doing? Do your colleagues understand that you are actually very busy noticing, tuned in with full attention, as you sit still beside infants and toddlers and just watch them?

Watchful attentiveness can help you to recognise and respond to infants' and toddlers' learning. *Do you have empathy for children's perspectives?* Can you make links between what you see infants and toddlers doing and their history and context, both in the setting and at home? Can you put yourself in the child's shoes, *imagining what they might be thinking, and taking the cue from this for your planning?*

As you observe, you also plan, making adjustments to space, resources and your own involvement based on what you see and how you interpret that. *Can you set up resources that relate to children's current interests, but also plan for them to be used flexibly when interests change? Can you build continuity in learning? Can you select appropriate teaching strategies by drawing upon your intimate knowledge of the infant or toddler?*

Do you draw upon your relationships with children for learning and teaching moments?

Curriculum consists of children's everyday, embodied experiences which occur in close interconnections between teachers and children, and between children. Relationships are built upon care, respect, security and belonging. These are also prerequisites for developing the capacity to learn. *Do you regularly find time to have fun, laugh and sing with infants and toddlers? Can you still provide a secure base from which an infant or toddler feels safe to explore?*

Can you be caring, playful and curious and use your strong relationship with infants and toddlers to encourage their emerging interests and competencies? Can you use your relationship to direct their attention to interesting challenges and intriguing materials and relationships?

When an infant's or toddler's success is rewarded by you noticing and celebrating it, they learn to persist in challenges. *Do you recognise when children achieve accomplishments or make discoveries, and can you share in these?*

Do you share in infants' and toddlers' exploration, to develop moments of connection in which you can enhance learning?

Infants and toddlers wonder and explore with their bodies and their senses rather than with their minds or words. *Can you join infants and toddlers at this level, being very present, wondering, noticing and mirroring their intentness as they explore? Can you follow their point of attention, and create moments of mutual enjoyment and delight? Do you know when to get involved? Can you use your intuition to guide you about when to stay silent, when to wonder out loud, what to notice and what vocabulary to use?*

Are you poised to listen and learn and to seek opportunities to widen and deepen infants' and toddlers' knowledge and experience? Do you understand the infant's non-verbal communications? Do you plan your response based on children's verbal and non-verbal cues, their temperament, culture, interests and stage of development?

Do you trust children to lead their own learning?

Infants and toddlers demonstrate their agency when they explore, enquire and play in both self-driven and co-operative activity. *Do you give infants and toddlers opportunities to actively participate in the social process of learning? Do you see children as competent, curious and motivated to lead their own learning? Teachers need to find ways to support infants and toddlers to increase their competence and minimise their vulnerability. Do you respect and make opportunities for infants' and toddlers' agency? Can you appreciate the learning and teaching possibilities that surprise you? Can you honour the child, their intentions, and give them credit as competent and curious learners who discover, invent and create?*