



March 9, 2021

Inclusive Learning Environments for Infants and Toddlers

Viewer's Guide

This viewer's guide gives you ideas for creating learning environments for all infants and toddlers. The reflection questions and activities will help you think about ways to support children's learning. Helpful resources can be found in the Resources section of this guide.

Definition of Early Childhood Inclusion

The Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) together provided a shared definition of what inclusion means and looks like in early learning environments.

“Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society.

The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high-quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports.”

(DEC/NAEYC, 2009)



National Center on

Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

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Video 1: Disability Laws Video (Available on MyPeers)

Below is a list of important terms and acronyms related to disabilities laws and practices.

Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Accepting children with disabilities into educational programs is the law. IDEA, or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the special education federal law that ensures the educational needs of students with disabilities are met throughout the nation.

IDEA Part B and Part C

IDEA Part B regulations relate to the education of children aged 3 and above with disabilities. IDEA Part C regulations relate to early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

An IEP is a written legal document that describes individualized special education and related services a child qualifies for. It includes annual goals and objectives and specific accommodations and modifications.

Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)

Every infant and toddler who is eligible for early intervention services has an IFSP. An IFSP is a written legal document that describes individualized early intervention services for infants, toddlers, and their families. The plan includes specific outcomes and services for children and families.

American with Disabilities Act (ADA)

This federal law requires that all childcare and early learning programs make reasonable efforts to serve children with disabilities.



Familiarize yourself with the terms and acronyms



Access this video on MyPeers



Share this video with parents and colleague

Video 2: High-Quality Learning Environments

Write down some of the things in this high-quality learning environment that you'd like to try!

Strategies for Supporting Quality Inclusive Learning Environments

Infants



A safe and supportive physical environment

Create safe, protected spaces

- A space for tummy time. Infants need open, padded space away from lines of traffic and other hazards to experiment and engage in large motor movement.
- A quiet, intimate space with soft and comforting materials (blankets, soft dolls, and cloth books).

Individualize: If an infant is fussy and shows signs of distress, move the infant to a quiet space. Dim lights, play soothing music, and offer a favorite toy.



A daily schedule and consistent routines

Plan a consistent order of caregiving routines each day

- Be prepared to adjust activities to fit individual infant's rhythms for feeding, diapering, and napping.

Individualize: If an infant has trouble with a routine, introduce a favorite object, game, or song as part of the routine.



Engaging interactions and meaningful learning experiences

Follow the infant's interests

- Watch and join in the infant's play. Encourage exploration and new activities.
- Talk with them about what is happening.

Individualize: If an infant has difficulty communicating interests or needs, observe carefully to learn their preferences.

*Source: Circle Time Magazine, Season 3, Episode 1

Toddlers



A safe and supportive physical environment

Arrange furniture to promote active exploration

- Have furniture that is safe, stable, and age-appropriate.
- Arrange furniture so you can see and provide support to toddlers as needed.

Individualize: If a toddler has difficulty moving independently, take the child to where the child wants to go.



A daily schedule and consistent routines

Keep the order and timing of daily activities consistent

- Be flexible. Adjust duration and timing of activities depending on children's interests, needs, and individual styles.

Individualize: If a toddler has difficulty in following a routine, allow more time or help the child do the first steps. Encourage the child to do the last step alone.



Engaging interactions and meaningful learning experiences

Encourage active exploration while providing guidance

- Build on a child's play to expand their understanding of the physical and social world.
- Promote language skills. Make comments and ask questions. Teach new words.

Individualize: If a toddler is not yet mobile, bring materials of interest to them.

**Source: Circle Time Magazine, Season 3, Episode 1*

Try it Out!

Begin with taking time to reflect on how well your early learning environment offers equitable and inclusive experiences for children and families.

Here are some aspects of high-quality inclusive early learning social and physical environments. Think about each of these aspects and what you do or can do to increase access and participation for all children.

A Safe and Supportive Physical Environment



Is your early learning environment welcoming and comfortable for all children, families, education staff, and consulting specialists?

Your answers:

What you might change:

Is the space arranged to allow all children to move around safely and explore?

Your answers:

What you might change:

Inviting Materials



Are toys and materials interesting and stimulating for all children?

Your answers:

What you might change:

Have materials been adapted to facilitate use by all children?

Your answers:

What you might change:

A Daily Schedule and Consistent Routines



Is the daily schedule posted at children's level, so it is visible to all children?

Your answers:

What you might change:

Do you adjust routines to facilitate all children's participation?

Your answers:

What you might change:

Connecting and Communicating with All Children



Have staff developed strong personal relationships with all children?

Your answers:

What you might change:

Do staff use a variety of ways to facilitate communication for all children?

Your answers:

What you might change:

Engaging Interactions and Meaningful Learning Experiences



Do learning activities build on children’s interests and individual strengths?

Your answers:

What you might change:

What supports and modifications do you provide to make sure all children participate in regular learning activities?

Your answers:

What you might change:

Small Changes – Big Impact

Here is Teddy. He is 9 months old and has a motor delay. Teddy has an IFSP and works with a physical therapist twice a week in the classroom. When Teacher Monica puts him down for tummy time, often times Teddy has a hard time keeping his head up. Teacher Monica knows how much Teddy loves to play independently, especially when all of the other babies are down on the floor. Plus, she has put out some of his favorite materials.



What can Teacher Monica do to support Teddy so that he feels included in this tummy time activity? Who can Teacher Monica ask for suggestions to support Teddy?

Try This!

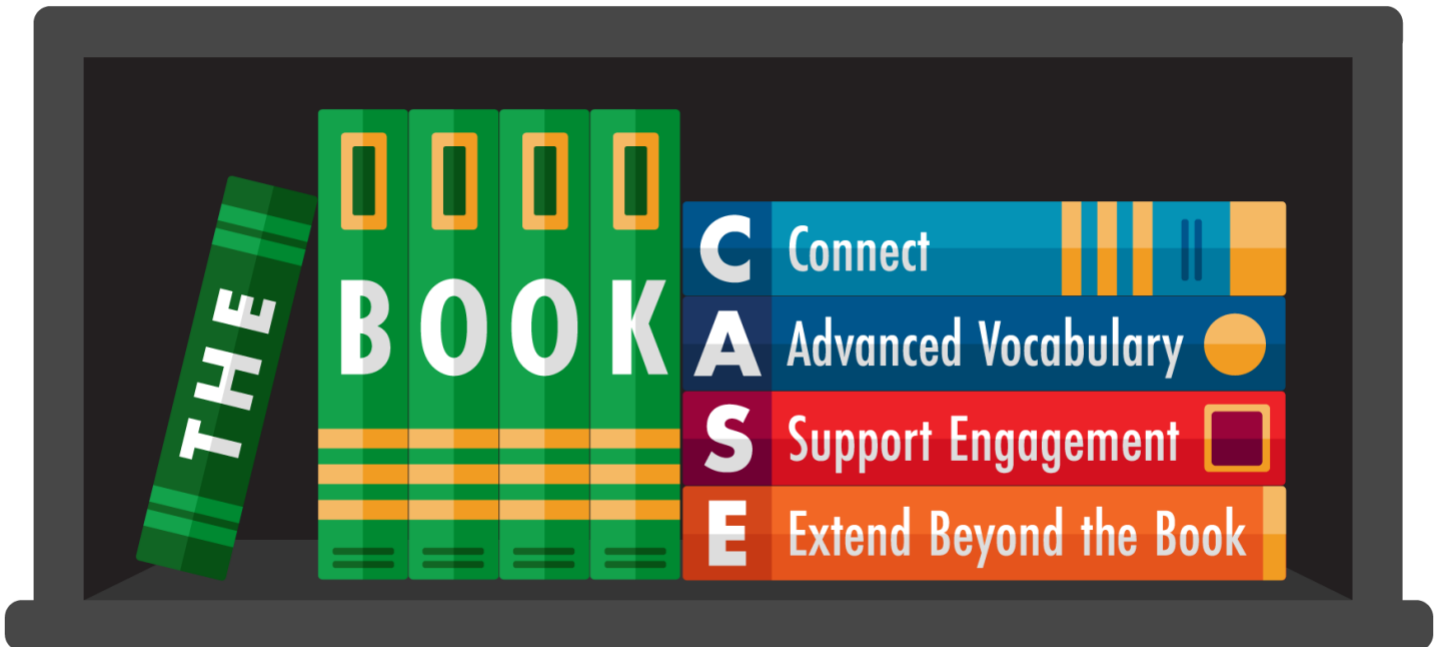
Use a pillow or roll up a towel and place it under the infant's arms to support their back and neck.



Video 3: Predictable Schedule and Routines

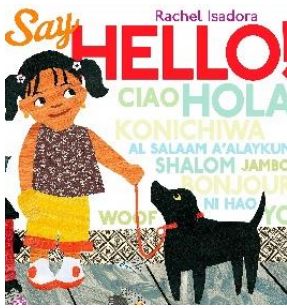
Write down some of the things this caregiver does or says that you would like to try during this routine!

The BookCASE



Books are a great way to engage with children. There are books about many things in our world, too. So, matching books with the themes and activities helps meaningful learning experiences. Choosing books on topics that infants and toddlers are interested in is another way to help them feel included and that their interests are important.

Selected Books from the BookCASE



Say Hello!

by Rachel Isadora

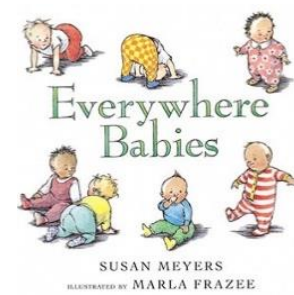
Introduce your babe to the sounds of different languages with a glimpse at a diverse neighborhood full of people speaking Spanish, French, Japanese and more.



We are Family

by Patricia Hegarty

This is an inclusive book for children that highlights families of different sizes, races, abilities and more.



Everywhere Babies

by Susan Meyers

This board book shows babies of all origins being cared for in all sorts of ways. One thing they all have in common is that they're all kissed and fed and rocked to sleep by people who love them

Exploring the BookCASE with *Everywhere Babies*

Connect

Toddlers love to discover babies! You can have baby dolls in the learning environment, so children have something similar to hold to build the connection.

Advanced vocabulary

There is so much vocabulary to learn in this book like body parts, math (tall, small), and everyday items (diapers, t-shirts). Say the words to infants and encourage toddlers to point and name objects they know. Ask families member to translate some of the words in the book to the children's home language to build the continuity between home and the learning environment.

Support engagement

Teachers, infants, and toddlers can explore the repeating sentence "everyday everywhere...," Teachers can also help children learn their own body parts and types of clothing.

Extend

Teachers can ask children questions about what the babies are doing in the book (What do you like to eat? Do you like to be held? What games do you like to play?). Talk with families about the things they enjoy doing. Remind children of their favorite activities like "I hear you love to play bounce bounce with daddy like the babies in this book!"

Explore the BookCASE on Your Own

The infants and toddlers in my learning environment love this book:

Make the CASE:

Connect:

Advanced vocabulary:

Support engagement:

Extend:

Explore the BookCASE on Your Own

The infants and toddlers in my learning environment love this book:

Make the CASE:

Connect:

Advanced vocabulary:

Support engagement:

Extend:

Books I would like to add to my learning environment:



Helpful Resources

Online Resources

Resources for Infant/Toddler Learning Environments

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/learning-environments/article/resources-infanttoddler-learning-environments>

Environments That Support High-Quality Inclusion

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/environments-support-high-quality-inclusion>

Including Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/children-disabilities/specialquest-multimedia-training-library/including-infants-toddlers-disabilities>

Head Start Center for Inclusion

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/children-disabilities/article/head-start-center-inclusion>

Research Briefs

You're the Best Teacher! Responsive Interactions with Young Children

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/youre-best-teacher-responsive-interactions-young-children>

Supporting Children with Disabilities or Suspected Delays

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/supporting-children-disabilities-or-suspected-delays>

Responsive Learning Environments

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/responsive-learning-environments>

Mobile Apps

ELOF2GO Mobile App

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/elof2go-mobile-app>

Text4Teachers

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/teaching-practices/article/text4teachers>

Ready DLL Mobile App

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/ready-dll-mobile-app>

Online Communities

MyPeers: Teacher Time Community

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/mypeers-collaborative-platform-early-care-education-community>