

The Parent's Guide to the Creative Curriculum®



For Infants, Toddlers & Twos



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How to Use this Guide

This guide is designed to help families understand what the Creative Curriculum is and how it is implemented at the Early Childhood Development Program. We have broken down each of the five routines and 8 experiences.

Hellos and Goodbyes

Every day, you and your child say good-bye to one another in the morning and hello again in the afternoon. These hellos and good-byes are children's first steps on a lifelong journey of learning how to separate from and reunite with the important people in their lives. Learning to say hello and good-bye to people we love is a process, not something to be achieved in the first week, month, or even year of child care. Indeed, after many years of experience, we adults sometimes find it difficult to separate and reunite. We give special attention to hellos and good-byes in our program because they are such a major part of your child's life—now and always. Being able to separate is necessary if children are going to develop as confident and capable individuals. Learning to reunite is equally important.

How We Can Work Together

- **Try to spend some time here with your child, when you arrive and before you leave each day.** Your presence will help make the transition between home and child care easier for your child.
- **Never leave without saying good-bye to your child.** It is tempting to leave quietly if your child is busy and not noticing you. By saying good-bye, you strengthen your child's trust in you. Your child knows that you will not disappear without warning. When you are about to leave in the morning, we will be happy to help you and your child say good-bye.
- **Create hello and good-bye rituals.** A good-bye ritual might be as simple as giving your child a giant hug before you leave. A hello might be to come into the room, kneel near your child, smile, open your arms wide, and softly call his name. Having rituals offers both of you the comfort of knowing what to do.

- **Every day is different.** Be aware that, on some days, good-byes and hellos will be harder than on other days. Your child's stage of development and other factors, such as being hungry, tired, or upset by a change in your schedule, can make saying good-bye and hello difficult.

- **Bring familiar items from home.** We welcome family photos and other reminders of home that we may keep where your child can reach them. Seeing these special objects will help your child feel connected to you throughout the day.

By working together, we can help your child feel comfortable, secure, and confident in child care.

Diapering and Toileting

If your child's diaper is changed six times a day for 2 1/2 years, he or she will have had a diaper change more than 5,400 times. Anything experienced 5,400 times is an important part of your child's life—and of yours. Over time, your child will become physically, cognitively, and emotionally ready to begin using the toilet. We will celebrate this milestone together! While diapering may not be your favorite task, it can be a special time for you and your child. It offers a chance to focus all of your attention on your child. You can talk together, sing, or play a game of "Where are your toes?" When you approach diapering as an opportunity to spend time with your baby, rather than as an unpleasant task to hurry through, you teach your child an important lesson: that bodily functions are a normal, healthy part of everyday life.

How We Can Work Together

- **Let's share information about diapering and toileting.** Tell us how you approach diapering at home. How often do you change your baby's diaper? How do you know that the diaper needs to be changed? Are there any special instructions for diaper changes? Here, we keep track of when we change your child's diapers every day. Be sure to take a look at our daily log and let us know if you have any questions.

- **Please make sure that we have changes of clothing so we can keep your child clean and dry.** Don't be surprised or upset when we send

home soiled clothing in a tightly closed plastic bag. Germs can be spread easily during diaper changing, and experts tell us not to rinse soiled clothing at the center. This procedure helps keep your child healthy.

- **Let's talk about approaches to helping children learn to use the toilet.** We'll look together for the signs that your child is ready to learn to use the toilet. We'll also talk regularly about your child's progress. Then we can decide together about ways to support your child and resolve any differences we may have.

- **Remember that toileting accidents are normal.** Learning to use the toilet takes time. Even children who can use the toilet successfully sometimes have toileting accidents. Having realistic expectations allows us to respond to toileting accidents matter-of-factly. We have some great books that you can read to your child about going to the toilet. *Everyone Poops*, by Taro Gomi, is sure to become a family favorite! By keeping a sense of perspective and a sense of humor, we can give your child the time and support needed to learn to use the toilet.

Eating and Mealtimes

Imagine your child eating a meal or snack in child care. What is he or she experiencing? Certainly your child is getting the foods he or she needs to be healthy and strong. Children also experience much more. Snacks and meals—and, for older children, related activities such as setting the table, cleaning up, and brushing their teeth after eating—give your child a chance to feel cared for and to develop personal care, communication, and social skills. Mealtimes also give children chances to begin practicing good nutrition and health habits. Children's experiences and the attitudes they form now will affect their future eating habits. By modeling healthy practices and making eating a pleasurable and social time, we can lay the groundwork together for nutritious and enjoyable eating for the rest of their lives.

How We Can Work Together

- **Join us for a snack or meal whenever you can.** Your child will love having you with us and so will we! In addition, you will have a chance to see how we do things, and you may ask questions and make suggestions. Of course, if you are nursing your child, please come anytime.
- **Let's communicate about changes in your child's diet or eating habits.** For example, please let us know when your pediatrician recommends adding new foods. After you introduce a new food at home, we'll introduce it here at the center. We can also work together when your child is ready to be weaned from the bottle.
- **Give us any information we need to keep your child healthy.** For example, let us know whether your child has allergies or a tendency to gag or choke. Keep us informed of any changes.
- **Please tell us what your child experiences during mealtimes at home.** What does your child eat and drink? What are your child's favorite foods? Do you have special family foods? What do you talk about? How does your child participate? This information will help us give your child a sense of continuity. It enables us to talk about family meals and serve some of the same foods.
- **Please ask us for menus and ideas for mealtimes.** Sometimes it's hard to come up with ideas for lunches. We'll be glad to give you some tips. We welcome your ideas as well. Together, we can make mealtimes an enjoyable and valuable learning experience for your child.

Sleeping and Naptimes

Every young child needs enough sleep during the day and at night for healthy growth and development. When children are rested, they enjoy and benefit from learning opportunities throughout the day. When your baby was born, you may have expected him to sleep easily. Many babies do, but sleeping is sometimes difficult for others. Your infant needs you to figure out how to comfort him and help him relax into sleep. As his needs and preferences change when he gets older, it will still be very important for you to respond to his changing patterns. Sharing information will help us make

sure that the sleeping routine we offer at the program is consistent with the care you provide at home.

How We Can Work Together

- **Let us know your child's preferences.** We are helped by knowing what works or does not work at home. Does your baby fall asleep quickly, or does she take some time? Is there a special lullaby you sing or words your child is used to hearing at bedtime?
- **Keep us informed about any changes in your child's sleeping patterns.** When we know that your child's pattern has changed at home, we can adapt his schedule at the program. We will share the same information with you so we can both plan better. For example, if we know that your child did not sleep well the night before, we can offer an early nap if necessary. If you know your child took a long nap and is well rested, you may decide to vary your routine instead of going straight home. Please let us know if you have concerns about your child's sleeping schedule at our program. For instance, please tell us if you think he is sleeping too little or too much.
- **Bring special items that comfort your child.** If your child has a special blanket or other object that makes falling asleep easier, please bring it to the center. Please label it with your child's name and make sure we have it every day. We will take care that it does not get lost and help you remember to take it home at night.
- **Always put your baby to sleep on his or her back.** This is a recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatrics to help prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or SIDS. You can check on the latest recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics by reading their Web site or asking us for this information. We will be happy to share what we have learned with you.

Getting Dressed

Infants, toddlers, and twos are dressed and undressed throughout the day—every day—at home and in our program. Dressing is one routine that adults and children often want to finish as quickly as possible. After all, dressing a squirming infant, a protesting toddler, or a 2-year-old who insists on putting on her own clothes is not a simple task. From the child's point of view, stopping what she is doing and being still while an adult dresses her is not fun, either. We view the dressing routine as rich in learning possibilities and as an opportunity to focus on one child at a time. As we pull on a shirt or pants, we talk, listen, sing, and play a simple game.

How We Can Work Together

- **Please provide extra articles of clothing.** We want your child to be warm enough or cool enough, dry, and as clean as possible. Spare clothes that your child is used to wearing help us keep your child comfortable. When extra clothing is labeled with your child's name, we have time to interact with your child because we do not need to spend it to figure out which clothes belong to whom. Remember that, as your child grows and as seasons change, you will need to replace the extra clothes you have left with us.
- **Select clothing that is easy to manage.** Pants with elastic waists, shoes with Velcro® fasteners, and overalls with straps that stretch make getting dressed easier for your child and for us.
- **Share ideas with us about dressing your child.** Let us know what works well when you dress your child at home. We will let you know what works for us, too. By sharing ideas, we can learn from one another and strengthen our partnership to benefit your child.
- **Dress your child for active, sometimes messy play.** Also be sure that your child's clothes are appropriate for the weather. That way, playing outside will be healthy and pleasurable. Remember that clothes with a snug fit or that need to be kept clean prevent children from fully enjoying such activities as climbing, food preparation, and painting. Together, we can make getting dressed a positive learning experience for your child.

Playing with Toys

Toys are designed for children's enjoyment. They are also important tools for learning. When children play with toys, they learn how to move, how things work, and how to communicate with and relate to others. Here are just a few of the ways that toys help your child grow and learn.

When your child does this...

- bats a ball to make it move
- rolls a toy car
- puts pieces in a form board

- snaps plastic beads together
- builds with blocks

Your child is learning...

- cause and effect
- about movement and space
- concepts such as shape, size, color
- eye-hand coordination
- how objects can be used

What You Can Do at Home

Here are some ideas that can help your child make the most of playing with toys at home.

- **You are your child's favorite toy.** Your interest and involvement make playing with toys even more fun and engaging.

- **A few good toys are better than too many.** Too many toys can overwhelm a young child. It's far better to have a few good toys that can be used in a variety of ways.

- **Choose simple toys at first.** Good toys for infants are those that they can explore with all their senses. Plastic rings and rattles that they can grasp, squeeze, and mouth are especially good. Mobile infants enjoy playing with toys that they can push or pull, such as plastic lawnmowers. They also like toys with movable parts, such as doors, knobs, big buttons, switches, and so on.

- **Pick toys that challenge your child.** Toddlers are ready for simple puzzles with 4–5 pieces, plastic and wooden cars and trucks, blocks, shape sorters, nesting cups, and riding toys. Your 2-year-old will enjoy puzzles with more pieces, matching games, large beads and laces, balls, and blocks of all kinds.

- **Common household objects make wonderful toys.** An empty box, large empty thread spools, pots and pans, plastic food containers, and kitchen utensils are just a few of the things that young children use as toys. Whether you buy or make your child's toys, what's most important is that you take pleasure in watching your child play, talk about what he or she is doing, and respond enthusiastically to each new discovery.

Imitating and Pretending

Imitation and pretend play are among the most important ways that children learn about the world and relationships with people. The foundation for this type of play begins when young infants form secure attachments with the important people in their lives and explore their surroundings. They imitate other people, in order to understand how objects are used and as a way to get and keep the attention of others. Before long, they make believe with realistic items. For example, a toddler might feed a doll with a spoon or rock a doll to sleep. Two-year-olds learn to use objects to stand for other things, for example, to use a block as a car by pushing it along the floor. As social pretend play begins, children explore social roles such as being a mother, a father, a doctor, and a baby. Being able to pretend also helps children cope with fears and anxieties. This is why children pretend to go to the doctor or to be a monster. Children who have good pretend play skills are more likely to be ready for school than those who lack these skills, because pretend play benefits every aspect of a young child's development. Children who have good pretend play skills are also often good at making friends.

What You Can Do at Home

Because imitation and pretend play are so important to every child's development and eventual success in school, we hope you will pretend with your child at home.

- **Encourage your child to explore.** The more children learn about objects and people, the more information they have on which to base their pretend play.

- **Talk about real life experiences as they take place.** When you take your child to various places—to the grocery store, post office, or a clinic—talk about what is happening. Explain what people are doing, their jobs, and the names of tools and other objects they use. This helps your child understand and recall experiences.
- **Provide props that inspire pretend play.** Dolls, doll blankets, a cradle, telephones (toy or real), pots, pans, and plastic dishes will inspire your child to explore social roles. Other useful props include plastic people and animals; transportation toys such as cars, trucks, and boats; and various ride-on toys.
- **Let your child dress up.** You can encourage your child's interest in pretending by providing dress-up clothes and work-related props such as firefighter hats, work gloves, and a toy stethoscope.
- **Play make-believe with your child.** This is one of the best ways to encourage your child to pretend. You can also encourage pretend play by asking questions; offering a new prop; and taking on a role, yourself.

Enjoying Stories and Books

Everyone agrees that books are a necessary part of a child's education. Even young infants benefit from having simple books read to them! Looking at books and hearing them read aloud stimulate an infant's brain development in important ways. Before children learn to read, they need to know a lot about language, how a story progresses, and how books work. Children who learn to love books are more likely to become successful learners and lifelong readers. In our program, we offer your child a wide variety of good books, and we read together every day.

What You Can Do at Home

Read and tell stories to your child every day. The words and pictures are important, but, most of all, spending time with you as you read aloud and tell stories lets your child know how much you value these activities. Reading is a wonderful way to be together, whether during your child's bedtime routine or a relaxed daytime opportunity.

Here are some suggestions for reading with your child.

- **Pick a story that you enjoy.** Share rhymes, songs, and stories from your childhood. Your enthusiasm will be contagious. Start by talking about the book's cover or simply by beginning to read.
- **Talk about the pictures.** You do not always have to read a story from beginning to end.
- **Ask your child questions as you read.** Have your child find an object in a picture, for example, "Where is the dog's ball?" Take cues from your child's gestures, sounds, or words, for example, "Yes, that's the baby's Grandma, just like Nona Maria." As your child is able to follow a story, you can ask more open-ended questions. For example, you might ask, "What do you think will happen next?" or "What did you like best about the story?"
- **Be prepared to vary the length of your reading sessions.** Your child might want you to read a story again and again, but you also need to be prepared to stop at any point. There is no need to force your child to be still while you read. Sometimes children want to be more active. Stop when your child no longer seems interested. Let us share. We can give you the titles of the books your child enjoys here, and you can tell us your child's current favorite books and rhymes at home.

Connecting with Music and Movement

Listening and moving to music are important for children. Newborns are comforted when they are rocked or gently bounced to a steady rhythm. Older infants, toddlers, and twos have favorite songs and love making music by banging a pot with a spoon. In addition to being pleasurable, these experiences are important to children's overall development. Here are some examples of what children learn.

When your child ...

- is soothed when you play soft music
- holds hands and dances with

Your child is learning...

- to comfort himself
- about playing with

another child

- stomps around the room to a march
- joins a fingerplay

other children

- to use his large muscles
- fine motor skills

What You Can Do at Home

It's easy to make music and movement a part of your child's life. Here are some suggestions to try at home.

- **Call your child's attention to a variety of sounds.** Listen to the ticking clock and a singing bird, and talk about them.
- **Sing to your child.** Start with simple songs, including those that you particularly enjoy.
- **Make up songs with your child.** To start, use a familiar tune and just substitute a few words, such as a person's name or an event. For example, you might sing, "Sarah had a little doll, little doll, little doll..."
- **Play different types of music.** In addition to children's music, your child may enjoy listening to a variety of melodies and rhythms: folk songs, reggae, jazz, classical music, popular music, and so on.
- **Move and dance together.** It's fun to take giant steps and then tiny steps during a walk. You can even try to hop like a frog or wiggle like a worm!
- **Offer your child simple rhythm instruments.** You can make a drum from an oatmeal box, cymbals from metal pie pans, and shakers by filling containers with rice or buttons and fastening them securely. Your kitchen is a child's orchestra. Listen as your child bangs on your pots, pans, and unbreakable bowls. It doesn't matter whether you can carry a tune or play an instrument. Sharing your enjoyment of music and movement with your child does matter. We'll be happy to share the songs we sing, and we'd love to learn some of your family's favorites.

Creating with Art

When you think about art experiences, do you imagine a child with crayons or a paint brush in hand? Painting and drawing are just two of the many ways young children enjoy art. In fact, art experiences begin early in life as a baby enjoys stroking the fringe on her blanket or finger paints with the blob of yogurt that falls on her tray. As they get older, they enjoy scribbling with a crayon and squeezing playdough with their hands. Art experiences allow children to have wonderful sensory experiences and to experiment with a variety of materials. They also help children develop thinking and physical skills.

Here are some examples.

When your child does this...

- covers paper with paint
- pokes a hole in playdough
- tears paper for a collage
- uses paste successfully

Your child is learning...

- about cause and effect
- how objects can be used
- eye-hand coordination
- to solve a problem

What You Can Do at Home

Young children like to explore and experiment with art materials. They are more interested in feeling, seeing, smelling, tasting, and controlling tools and materials than in making something. Here are some ideas for offering art experiences at home.

- **Offer your baby different textures to explore.** Place a basket with a collection of different fabrics near your child and encourage her to play with them. Talk about how they feel.
- **Make simple art materials together.** You can make playdough for your child to squeeze and pound, or make Goop for another wonderful sensory experience. We have several recipes for making art materials that we'll be glad to share with you.
- **Keep plain paper and crayons available for your toddler.** Encourage your child to draw freely and to experiment. Do not expect her to draw something you will be able to recognize.

- **Encourage your child to use art materials freely.** For young children, the process of creating is important, not the finished product. Show your interest in what your child is doing by describing his actions: “You made lots of different marks on the paper. These are round circles, and these are lines.” Together, we can give your child the kinds of experiences that encourage exploration.

Tasting and Preparing Food

Perhaps the idea of involving very young children in food preparation seems strange to you. However, one of the reasons that preparing food appeals to children is that it is a meaningful, grown-up activity. Participating in activities that your child observes you doing every day is exciting for them.

In our program, we build on the children’s interest in food experiences because they help your child develop many concepts and skills. For example, what do you think your child might learn from a simple task such as snapping the ends off green beans? Did you think about these concepts and skills?

- shape
- color
- part and whole
- cause and effect
- sustaining attention
- eye-hand coordination
- fine motor skills

As you can see, preparing food is educational as well as practical and fun!

What You Can Do at Home

At home, children can be involved easily in food preparation. Here are some ideas.

- **Let your child help.** Because you probably already cook at home, it’s easy for you to involve your child. You can even include a young infant. Let her sit where she can watch you as you describe what you are doing. Older

infants, toddlers, and twos can participate more actively. When you let your child help you prepare and serve foods, you show that you value his contributions to family life.

- **Talk about the foods and what each of you is doing.** Here are some topics to discuss as you prepare and taste foods together:
 - the names of different foods and how they look, smell, feel, taste, and sometimes sound
 - what different utensils are used for and where you keep them
 - why you serve a variety of foods with each meal

Maybe you'd like to help the children cook at our program. We'd love for you to supply a recipe or help the children make their snack. Also, please send us your ideas for food preparation experiences. We especially welcome your family favorites. We want your child to have wonderful food-related experiences both here and at home.

Exploring Sand and Water

Sand and water play is messy, no doubt about that. Children love it, though, and they learn a lot from it. When an infant splashes water, he learns that slapping it makes the water move (cause and effect). When a toddler pours a cup of sand into a bucket, she begins to learn about size, shape, and quantity. When a 2-year-old makes a birthday cake with sand and puts sticks in for candles, he is pretending with objects. In our program, the children play with sand and water both indoors and outdoors. Young infants splash water in a tray. Older infants wash dolls and rubber toys, and they dig and pour sand. Toddlers and twos squirt water with basters, blow bubbles into the breeze, and make designs in sand with combs and molds.

What You Can Do at Home

We encourage you to enjoy sand and water with your child. Of course, close supervision is needed to keep your child safe. Here are some suggestions to consider.

- **Fill a tray or plastic tub with an inch or so of water.** A small amount of water is all your child needs to have fun. Place the tub on the floor, on top of some towels, and then let your child splash! If you have an older infant,

toddler, or 2-year-old, also offer plastic measuring cups, squeeze bottles, and perhaps a funnel or a sieve.

- **Talk with your child during bath time.** Ask questions to encourage observation and thinking: “What will happen if you drop your rubber frog in the water?”

- **Fill a dishpan halfway with clean sand.** That way, your child can play with sand both indoors and out. The dishpan will keep the sand contained. To vary the experience, add a shovel, funnel, coffee scoop, and small plastic animals.

- **Pretend with your child.** When you add a few simple props, sand and water are wonderful materials to encourage pretend play. You and your child can have a tea party, drive boats through the water, and build sand castles and tunnels. One wonderful benefit of sand and water play is that they are both soothing materials. They can calm a child who is having a hard time. This helps you as well. We will be happy to suggest more ideas for sand and water experiences that you can offer at home.

Going Outdoors

Going outdoors gives children an entirely different environment to explore. Outdoors, they can stretch their large muscles, breathe fresh air, take in the sunshine (or the rain or snow), and enjoy the freedom of open space. They can marvel at the creatures they find on the playground, watch the wind blow the trees, and collect seeds and stones. We try to take the children outdoors every day, because we know how important it is for their overall development and learning.

When your child does this...

- crawls through the grass
- climbs over a tree stump
- picks up pinecones to put in a bucket
- rolls a ball to another child

Your child is learning...

- to explore with all senses
- to use gross motor skills
- to group objects
- social skills

What You Can Do at Home

Here are some activities to try next time you go outdoors with your child. You probably do some of them already. Perhaps others are new ideas.

- **Enjoy nature.** Talk about the breeze touching your cheeks. Roll down a grassy hill together. Plant a garden in your yard, a window box, or in a wheelbarrow that you can move as the sun moves. Take a bucket so your child can collect things such as stones and leaves. Be sure that the items do not present a choking hazard.
- **Take a texture walk.** Call your child's attention to natural materials and describe them. For example, you might point out *soft sand*, *rough pinecones*, and a *smooth rock*.
- **Invent games.** When your child walks well, create a balancing path by laying a piece of rope on the ground to walk along. Play a gentle game of catch. Set up a bowling game in which your child tries to knock down empty food boxes by rolling a beach ball.
- **Visit public playgrounds designed for children under age 3.** Playgrounds with equipment for very young children offer wonderful opportunities for children to practice their developing skills and to begin engaging with other children.
- **Take some "inside" activities outdoors.** For example, you might sit together under a tree and read a book. Give your child a paintbrush and water to paint the side of your house.

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