

Tip Sheets

Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Creating Rich Play Opportunities for All Children

Young children learn through play. Play provides children with opportunities to solve problems, make decisions, resolve social conflicts, practice skills, and feel competent in their world.

A special need can affect how children play and to what extent they use play as a means of exploration and learning.

Educators must be knowledgeable regarding the value of play and its relationship to the development of the whole child — as well as the effects a special need may have on a child's ability to use play as a means of learning about the world.

Considerations for Play

A special need can affect the way a child plays, the quality of play or the ability to use play as a primary means of learning. Yet, there are no specific rules on how to adapt a curriculum for a particular special need.

Be a careful observer of children in order to learn about their strengths and needs. These observations will provide guidance in planning and implementing interventions.

Remember the Key Messages of DAP

- Participation in life has little to do with disability or ability.
- Children construct their view of themselves and their world during their early years.
- A children's sense of reality is formed by their early experiences.
- All children deserve opportunities to participate in childhood experiences.

Inclusion is a developmentally appropriate practice for all children!



Developmentally Appropriate Inclusive Care

- ✓ Age appropriate
- ✓ Developmentally appropriate
- ✓ Individually appropriate
- ✓ Respects the child and family

Tips for Enhancing Play Skills for Children with Special Needs

Ask families and other professionals for help

Families can be invaluable resources in helping us understand their children. Professionals working with children are also important sources.

- Ask parents about toys a child enjoys and favorite activities.
- Find out whether adapted toys/materials are used at home or elsewhere, such as in motor therapy or special education programs.
- Invite parents to share techniques that have been successful at home to engage in play.
- Try out different approaches with children.

- Trust the child to be your guide.
- Knowledge is power — ask questions!!

Model appropriate language skills.

- Use comments like “show me” to help a child feel and be understood.
- Listen attentively, give good eye contact, and use words for objects and places.
- Avoid yes or no responses by asking open-ended questions.
- Use a variety of ways to communicate, and allow time for the child to process information.

Consider the physical space.

- Provide easily accessible toys and materials.
- Children should be positioned so they are able to interact with others.
- Plan for different levels of participation.
- Observe children for fatigue, allow time to complete tasks, and provide rest opportunities.
- Modify outdoor riding toys and use bucket swings for children who need additional physical support.

Give visual cues and assistance.

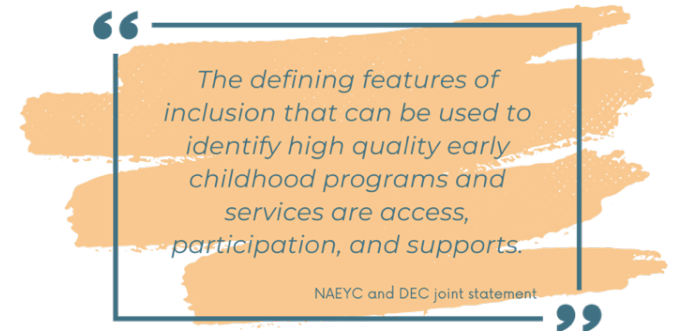
- Utilize visual tools such as prompting pictures, schedules, cueing cards, and visual scripts to show a process (i.e. washing hands).
- Guide children who need help learning to read cues from peers in initiating social interactions.
- Be at a child’s eye level and in clear view when modeling and using direct instruction.

Use auditory cues and assistance.

- Give auditory and/or tactile cues to alert a child to changes in activities or to solicit attention.
- Practice sign language with all children. Most children enjoy learning signs to communicate with friends who have hearing impairments.
- Consider using a microphone for the teacher that corresponds to a child’s earpiece and listen for distracting background noises.

Set clear emotional/behavioral limits.

- Instruct all children in how to use their words to communicate what they do and do not like.
- Model your use of words to describe your feelings and emotional responses.
- Use a daily picture schedule to establish routine and consistency (this can help enhance a child’s self-regulatory skill development).



Ask Yourself...

- After reviewing the DAP guidelines how does your program rate?
- Reflect on what you do great and where you could improve.

Additional Resources

NAEYC | Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) position statement

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/dap/contents>

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Funding provided by the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

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