

## *A Staff Training Aid*

# Schedules for Infant & Toddler Programs

## **A Publication of the Environments Professional Group**

The classroom schedule is much more than just a list of activities and their times. The schedule is an important part of the curriculum and provides structure for classroom activities as well as daily routines. Developing the classroom schedule can be a challenge for educators and requires careful adjustment, good time management skills, and creative thinking.

### **The Importance of a Good Schedule**

A good schedule meets the developmental and individual needs of the children in the classroom. The schedule includes planned learning activities as well as routines such as greeting/departing; snack and lunch time; hand washing and toileting; tooth brushing; and nap or rest time. The daily schedule should also include a balance of quiet and active times as well as large and small group activities. Transitions, such as story time or quiet table activities, are also an important part of the schedule because they help ease the children from one activity to the next.

The classroom schedule provides a written plan for *when* various curriculum activities and routines will occur, thereby providing a helpful reference for parents and educators. Young children need a predictable routine, so it is important to have a schedule that will help them develop a sense of security and trust. It is especially helpful to young children to have the schedule posted in picture form and at their eye level. A pictorial schedule allows the young child to practice developing concepts of time and sequence. Although the schedule provides needed consistency for children, educators should be flexible when “teachable” moments arise or when the children are actively involved in projects so that the clock doesn’t disrupt the children’s “work.”

Schedules can provide important documentation for program quality assessment because the schedule demonstrates the priorities and emphases of the classroom teacher. For example, the schedule documents the amount of time that will be spent in group or individual activities, routines, free-choice centers, teacher and child-initiated activities, language and literacy activities, or outdoor activities. **Ideally, the schedule will offer activities that interest the children and that allow a balance of child-directed and teacher-directed activities that include ample opportunity for active,**

**hands-on learning both inside and outside.** A carefully selected flow of active and quiet activities will ensure more effective lessons and help children remain interested, focused, and on-task.

## **Scheduling Tips for Infants and Toddlers**

Infant and young toddler schedules are less structured than those for older children. Daily structure for infant and toddler programs revolves around important care routines. In infant rooms especially, there may be several schedules being followed throughout the day depending on individual needs.

- **Arrival Time** Provide a safe space with quiet toys for infants and toddlers to play with during arrival times. This will help make it easier to care for young children while allowing caregivers opportunities to greet arrivals, perform health checks, and talk with parents.
- **Diapering and Toileting** For the youngest children, diapering times will be on demand. For older infants and toddlers, scheduling regular times for diapering and toileting will ensure that they are not overlooked. Try scheduling a diapering routine after arrival and before departure as well as every hour or so throughout the day. This will prevent infants from going too long without being changed and will also allow toilet-training toddlers more opportunities for success.
- **Feeding, Snacks, and Meal Times** Young infants will be fed according to their own schedules, but older infants and toddlers are ready for scheduled snacks and meals. Lunch and at least a mid-morning and mid-afternoon snack need to be scheduled. Caregiving programs with long hours may want to schedule a third late-afternoon snack. Family style dining with older infants and young toddlers encourages self-help feeding and oral language skills.
- **Nap and Rest Time** Young infants will follow their own sleep schedules. However, toddlers require a quiet time set aside after lunch to rest. Provide an area with quiet toys for toddlers to go to after getting up from resting. Have a secure quiet area available to allow toddlers to rest as needed at other times throughout the day.
- **Play and Curriculum Times** Several times should be scheduled for play and explorations that include a balance of active and quiet activities. Daily planning keeps play fresh and interesting and ensures inclusion of age-appropriate sensory experiences such as art and sand and water play. Sub-dividing these times gives caregivers an opportunity to move non-mobile infants so they can receive fresh views and be brought new toys to keep them engaged.
- **Group Time** Some young toddlers will be ready for short group times. Mid to late morning is often a good time to set aside 10 to 15 minutes for this. A group time may involve a caregiver sharing a picture book

or a simple fingerplay or song with two or three toddlers. A simple music activity involving moving to music is often enjoyed by several toddlers at once.

- **Outdoor Play** Infants and toddlers should have daily access to the outdoor environment. An outdoor time should be scheduled for both morning and afternoon.
- **Departure and Good-bye Time** Providing a choice of soft books, board books, and quiet play materials in one or two areas of the room will help organize going home times. This makes it easier for staff to care for infants and toddlers while being available to talk with parents and to gather things to go home.

## References

Dodge, D., Colker, L., & Heroman, C. (2002). *Creative Curriculum for Preschool*. Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies.

Petersen, E. (2003). *A Practical Guide to Early Childhood Curriculum*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

### A Publication of the Environments Professional Group

The Environments Professional Group is a team of educators and designers who come together to make the connection between the needs of early childhood programs and the developmentally appropriate products that meet these needs.

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*These suggestions and guidelines are general in nature and are not intended to take the place of any specific instructions provided to you by your supervisors or regulatory agencies. In addition, appropriate caution, reasonable safety precautions, and adult supervision of children are recommended at all times. Do not leave children unattended at any time.*

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