

# What Does a High-Quality Program for Toddlers Look Like?

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Soft carpets, comforting family photos, colorful toys—everything's so cozy! Effective teachers design classrooms that are organized and familiar and that encourage children's learning.

When you visit a program, how can you tell if it's safe and supportive for your toddler?

Every toddler room might look a little different, but some things stay the same in all high-quality environments. Look for these things:

**Separate play areas.** Play spaces are organized by interest areas. For example, there are areas with materials for quiet play and more active play. Toddlers can play alone or in small groups.

**Secure open spaces** (both indoors and outdoors). Children have many opportunities for active play. The play equipment is safe and challenging for toddlers.

**Personal touches.** There are objects in the room that are familiar to each child, like family photographs and children's artwork. These are placed low enough for toddlers to see.

**Simple, interesting materials.** Toddlers use their senses to explore materials—objects to bang and make noises with, sand to scoop, and playdough to squeeze.

**Child-size furniture.** Chairs, tables, and shelves are sturdy, safe, and the right size for children so they can be more independent.

**Diverse books.** Teachers read simple stories to children and provide sturdy board books for toddlers to look at. The books reflect the children's languages, cultures, and families.

# How Do Teachers Plan a Curriculum for Toddlers?

You might wonder how teachers plan learning experiences for toddlers. They follow these general guidelines to support your child's development.

**High-quality programs use developmentally appropriate practice.** This means that teachers provide challenges that are not too hard or too easy—something toddlers can do with a little help. It also means that when teachers choose materials, activities, and strategies to use with toddlers, they think about

- What most toddlers need—like moving and being active throughout the day
- What individual toddlers need—like giving child-size scissors and paper to Grace, who enjoys using scissors and has mastered how to use them
- Ways to support every child's family and culture—like putting clean clothes on Poppy at the end of the day if her clothes are really messy, because cleanliness is important to her family

Teachers focus on four major areas of your child's development:

**Physical development.** Toddlers love to move—climbing, jumping, dancing! Teachers offer your child many ways to be active, both indoors and outdoors. They also provide materials and activities that interest children his age and help improve his hand coordination, like scribbling with crayons and stacking toys.

**Social and emotional development.** Teachers model behaviors like sharing and apologizing so toddlers can learn by example. They give your child opportunities to try new social skills and to try doing things for herself. Teachers encourage children and help them express their feelings in positive, healthy ways.

**Thinking (cognitive) skills.** Cognitive development is your child's ability to make sense of the world around him. It includes memory, language, thinking, and reasoning. Classrooms are set up so toddlers can learn to how to solve problems by sorting objects, doing puzzles, taking things apart and fitting them back together, and so much more! Teachers offer children a range of activities and experiences that inspire and challenge them, from building on their curiosity (“You've been watching that butterfly a long time. Where do you think it's going, Sebastián?”) to helping them use their imagination (“Oh, no, there's a leak in our boat! How else can we cross the moat?”).

**Language development.** Teachers spend a lot of time talking to children so that they learn how words should sound and how conversations go back and forth. They read books with simple stories and use songs, rhymes, and finger plays that have repeating patterns. They also help toddlers by asking questions about the books they read (“Ivy lost her doll. What do you think will happen next?”), expanding on their answers (“You said, ‘Cry.’ Do you think Ivy is sad about losing her favorite toy?”), and using new words (“Look how excited Ivy is now that she found her doll!”).

## Families and Teachers— Working Together

Teachers in high-quality programs welcome all families. They know that you are the most important person in your child's life—and her first teacher. They want to work with you to build a trusting relationship that supports your toddler. Let's see what makes this great partnership work!

**Respect.** Teachers and families respect children's individual personalities and abilities. They also respect each other's differences, cultures, backgrounds, and opinions. Teachers incorporate each child's culture and home language into the program, and ask families to help choose materials that are familiar and meaningful to the children.

**Communication.** Teachers communicate with families often. They share what their children are doing in the classroom—especially children's new skills and knowledge—and families share with teachers what their children are doing at home.

If families and teachers speak different languages, teachers find ways to share important information. For example, they might take photos of what the child is learning or send home translated materials. The more families and teachers communicate, the better they can meet children's changing needs.

**Listening.** Families listen to what teachers know about early care and education. Teachers listen to families to understand their goals and concerns for their children.

**Openness.** Teachers make families feel welcome and offer different ways for them to get involved with the program, like coming in to read a story with a child or help out at snack time. Teachers try to learn a few words in children's home languages to make them feel welcome.

**Primary caregiving.** High-quality programs provide primary caregiving, which means that one adult is mainly responsible for caring for a child and interacting with his family. Your child feels safe and confident knowing he can depend on his teacher.

**Continuity of care.** Great programs have continuity of care, which means one caregiver stays with a small group of toddlers for a long time. Children aren't constantly moved to new rooms with new teachers.

**Audience:** *Family*

**Age:** *Infant/Toddler*

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