

Developmentally Appropriate Practice-DAP Overview

DAP is the acronym for Developmentally Appropriate Practice a guide which was developed by NAEYC the National Association for the Education of Young Children in reference to promoting a standard of high quality in Early Childhood education.

Standards of professional practice in early childhood programs are based on commitment to certain fundamental values that are deeply rooted in the history of the early childhood field:

☼ *Appreciating childhood as a unique and valuable stage of the human life cycle and valuing the quality of children's lives in the present, not just as preparation for the future.*

☼ *Basing our work with children on knowledge of child development and learning.*

☼ *Appreciating and supporting the close ties between child and family.*

☼ *Recognizing that children are best understood in the context of family, culture, and society.*

☼ *Respecting the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each individual child, family member and colleague.*

☼ *Helping children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based upon trust, respect and positive regard.*

☼ *When today's children become adults they can- communicate well, respect others and engage with them to work through difference of opinion and function well as a team.*

☼ *Analyze situations make reasoned judgments and solve new problems as they emerge.*

☼ *Access information through various modes including spoken and written language and intelligently employ complex tools and technologies as they are developed.*

☼ *Continue to learn new approaches, skills and knowledge as conditions and needs change.*

Children's experiences during early childhood not only influence their later functioning in school but also can have effects throughout life. The early and lasting effects of their environment and experiences on brain development and cognition studies show that from infancy through about age 10, brain cells not only form most of the connections they will maintain throughout life but during this time they retain their greatest impressionability. Several

decades of research clearly demonstrate that high-quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood programs produce short- and long-term positive effects on children's cognitive and social development. Children who experience high-quality, stable child care engage in more complex play, demonstrate more secure attachments to adults and other children, and score higher on measures of thinking ability and language development.

Children learn best through play and they construct their knowledge based on hands-on experiences and activities. Young children need opportunities to explore, observe, and experiment with a balanced schedule of small and large group activities, quiet and active play, and the ability to make choices- childhood is a time of wonder, awe, and curiosity, and children should not be rushed to be academic.

Preschool age children have not yet developed all the cognitive skills necessary to fully understand symbols such as the alphabet- those skills come with maturation at ages 6-8 years- they need time to be young children. All children feel their name is the most important word in their lives, and it is the first word they want to write. However, most 2 or 3-year-old children do not have the strength to hold a pencil and write their name correctly. The best way to teach preschool age children their alphabet and numbers is through rich language experiences.

☺ Working on alphabet sounds through story, poem, song, reading and writing opportunities in an environment that is rich with the printed word.

☺ Labeled shelves, children's cubbies and coat hook so they value "words".

☺ A language rich environment with many age appropriate books that are richly illustrated and at the child's reach throughout the classrooms.

☺ Finger plays, listening games, sound lotto, alphabet bingo.

☺ Clay, play dough, and hole punches help strengthen fine motor muscles setting up the development of pen and paper skills.