

Family Child Care and Mixed Age Groups Throughout the Day: Resource Guide

Children’s relationships shape the way they experience the world and are critical for their happiness, early learning and development, and later academic success. There are multiple benefits to children being cared for in family child care and other mixed age group settings. “Age mixing allows younger children to: engage in and learn from activities that they could not do alone or with just playmates of the same age (age-mates); observe and emulate models of activities more advanced than their own; and receive emotional support and care beyond that which age-mates could provide” (Gray, 2011). Research shows that high-quality early learning experiences have long-term benefits for children including increased cognitive abilities, advanced language development, the development of responsive relationships and future academic success.










Benefits of Family Child Care and Mixed Age Groupings

Family Child Care: continuity of care; responsive relationships; family and home-like settings; diverse learning communities; one-on-one interactions; comfortable and secure





Mixed Age Grouping: cooperative learning; varied intellectual and social groups; scaffolding; confidence building; increased language and literacy skills; peer mentoring; problem solving; and critical thinking




















Early Learning and Development Standards Key

	Approaches to Learning (AL)		Cognitive Development (CO)
	Creative Development (CR)		Language and Literacy (LL)
	Mathematics (MA)		Physical Development and Wellness (PW)
	Science (SC)		Social and Emotional Development (SE)
	Social Studies (SS)	Note: Domain icons in the next section indicate integrated learning throughout the day	

Examples of Integrated Learning Throughout the Day

How children may exhibit these skills	How early care and education providers can encourage these skills
Daily Routine: Arrival 	
Reach for caregiver and smile while transitioning from parent. Take off coat, hang up backpack, and wash hands. Read a book or play quietly before breakfast.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Greet each child and family member joyfully. Make eye contact and respond immediately and consistently to child’s communication and needs. ▪ Establish welcome routines that encourage a sense of belonging. For example, hello song/finger-play, find picture magnet, put name-rock in bucket, quiet play, etc.
Daily Routine: Meals 	
Help clean-up toys, wash hands, and set the table before meals. Chat with friends, count strawberries and “compare” who has more. <i>Example:</i> “One, two, five, seven...I have lots of strawberries. I have the most.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide healthy portions of nutritionally balanced meals with age-appropriate tools/utensils for manipulation. ▪ Promote the development of personal health and self-care skills with increasing independence, such as wash hands, set table, serve food, clean-up, etc. Offer modeling and support when needed. ▪ Encourage meaningful communication and relationship building during mealtimes and take advantage of authentic, child-led learning opportunities. For example, categorize food groups and group items; notice shapes and colors of foods; count items and compare more and less; notice weather and change of seasons; discuss special family events, etc.
Daily Routine: Transitions 	
Check visual schedule while putting on coat, mittens, and boots before going outside. Walk down steps holding adult’s hand then run to play with friends.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish clear, predictable rituals to engage children in routine activities. For example, sing a “clean-up” song, or when caregiver sits in the rocking chair, it’s time for story, etc. ▪ Offer verbal and non-verbal support, modeling, and assistance during a variety of transitions such as clean-up, preparing for meals and rest, and going outside. For example, use a picture schedule with simple step-by-step directions, make items accessible to children, etc.
Daily Routine: Whole Group 	
Gather for a variety of group activities. Enjoy conversation, songs, finger-plays, music and movement, and stories together.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Respond to verbal and non-verbal communication. Use daily routines to have positive interactions and conversations with children about feelings, families, past or future experiences and events, etc. Ask open-ended questions to extend conversation and thinking. ▪ Sing or play songs, nursery rhymes, and finger-plays together. Enjoy music and movement activities daily. ▪ Tell and retell familiar stories using props, puppets, etc. Engage in interactive reading daily.

How children may exhibit these skills	How early care and education providers can encourage these skills
<p style="text-align: center;">Daily Routine: Story Time</p> <div style="text-align: center;">     </div>	
<p>Choose favorite book from basket, turn pages, and look at pictures. Ask caregiver to read the story. Invite friends to listen to story together.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide a variety of cloth, board books, and fiction and nonfiction picture books for exploration. ▪ Respond to children’s interest in books and stories by engaging in interactive reading with individuals and in small groups throughout the day. ▪ Engage children in conversations about books: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Label</i> animals and objects; ○ <i>Explain</i> objects or situations in illustrations; ○ <i>Ask questions</i> that inspire thinking and response; ○ <i>Describe</i> the appearance of objects/animals/people pictured; ○ <i>Draw attention</i> to print (print referencing) by pointing to and talking about the features of print.
<p style="text-align: center;">Daily Routine: Outdoor Experiences</p> <div style="text-align: center;">      </div>	
<p>Push friend on swing, then collect leaves, sticks, and rocks in bucket, sort natural materials, and create collection piles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide outside play on age-appropriate equipment where safe risks are possible in all kinds of weather. ▪ Include opportunities for walking, running, riding, pushing, pulling, and climbing to promote different physical activity skills. ▪ Take walks and enjoy nature together. Observe change in weather and seasons.
<p style="text-align: center;">Daily Routine: Rest</p> <div style="text-align: center;">    </div>	
<p>Read books quietly to stuffed animal before falling asleep.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage healthy sleep and rest behaviors by providing consistent, daily, and age-appropriate opportunities for rest/quiet time. ▪ Offer alternative activities for children who do not sleep, such as quiet reading or listening to books, quiet play with stuffed animals or fidgets, looking at family photo albums, drawing or coloring, etc.
<p style="text-align: center;">Daily Routine: Departure</p> <div style="text-align: center;">      </div>	
<p>Reach for family member/caregiver and smile during end of day transition. Show family member/caregiver work from earlier in the day, such as painting, drawing, block structure, sensory experience, favorite book, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Invite families to share elements of their heritage, cultures, customs, and traditions. Ensure that the learning environment is inclusive of diverse family backgrounds. ▪ Encourage opportunities for children and families to share in learning together. For example, display children’s artwork, drawings, or writing; share photographs or videos of children engaged in learning throughout the day; allow children to bring home a favorite book to share, etc.

Individual or Small Group Learning Experiences

(May be planned or spontaneous and each activity encompasses multiple domains)

How children may exhibit these skills:



Construction Area

Build block structure using a variety of age-appropriate materials, such as wooden blocks, Duplo, vehicles, linking cubes, rocks, etc. Work in other play areas after knocking down the structure.

Sensory Exploration

Scoop, sift and pour sand into a variety of different-sized containers in small sensory bin.

Math Area

Connect linking-cubes and chain-link manipulatives together. Measure and compare objects to find the longest size, such as shelf, rest mat, rug, easel, etc.

Count teddy bear counters and touch each bear when counting, then sort by color. Compare groups to see which group has more or less.

Science

Show curiosity, engage in conversation and experiment with materials (such as mixing bowls, spoons, measuring cups, ingredients, etc.) during small group cooking activity.

Language & Literacy

Attempt to complete new alphabet puzzle with friends and ask adult for help. Copy alphabet letters on dry erase board when finished.

Writing Center

Draw a picture and experiment with mark-making. Dictate message “*I love mom.*”

How early care and education providers can encourage these skills:

- Offer a variety of opportunities for individual, small and large group activities, and peer interactions.
- Be flexible within each activity following the children’s lead, regardless of the original plans, and provide ample time and space for extended concentrated play. *Example:* “You are working so hard on that alphabet puzzle. Do you notice any letters from your name? Can you show me? That’s right, M for Mabel. M sounds like /m/.” or “Let’s touch and count each bear together, one, two, three, four... I wonder which color has the most bears?”
- Provide an environment for children to explore and experience by engaging all their senses and offer a variety of familiar and new materials for open-ended, creative play. For example, loose parts like wooden blocks, cubes, baskets, seashells, fabric squares, small boxes, etc.
- Remind children of choices they have made in the past. *Example:* “Yesterday you worked so hard building a structure for the vehicles. Would you like to build again today or choose another place?” Provide opportunities for children to plan their play, such as what play area, what they plan to do, and who they would like to play with.
- Engage in work/play with children to learn about their interests and take advantage of opportunities for spontaneous, authentic learning.
- Show interest in what children are doing. Encourage them to work together and try out new ideas and strategies. Support children when they are frustrated and encourage them to try again.

Project-Based Learning

How children may exhibit these skills:



Science

Ask questions about caterpillars and butterflies after observing butterflies during outdoor play. Search for books about caterpillars and butterflies and read independently. Participate in focused observations and exploration of indoor caterpillar/butterfly habitat.

Creative Development and Social and Emotional Development

Collect natural materials during a walk (such as branches, buckeyes, leaves, acorns, rocks, flowers, etc.) and create a collage. Use materials to create faces (self-portraits) showing different emotions.

Social Studies, Science, and Physical Development and Wellness

Build structures to represent a variety of homes and habitats during outdoor and indoor play using a wide range of materials. For example, forts using large blocks and blankets, tents using scarves and large branches, bear den using large cardboard blocks, cave using large boxes, zoo using wooden blocks and stuffed animals, etc.

How early care and education providers can encourage these skills:

- Capitalize on naturally occurring events during play; observe children's interests and listen to children's questions to inspire inquiry, experimentation, and investigation to guide a variety of learning experiences.
- Offer a variety of purposeful materials and tools for exploration and manipulation. For example, sensory table with sand and measuring cups for scooping and pouring; light table and flashlight with opaque materials; natural materials and magnifying glass; simple machines; objects that come apart; and living organisms such as plants, caterpillars, or ant farm.
- Invite children to document and discuss their explorations through drawing, sketching, painting, sculpting, writing, etc. Provide learning experiences in many modalities and learning styles and encourage children to share their ideas with peers and families.



Books to Promote Learning and Development

Infant/Toddler	Preschool
<p>Language and Literacy <i>Baby Says</i> by John Steptoe <i>Besos for Baby</i> by Jen Arena <i>Brown Bear, Brown Bear</i> by Bill Martin, Jr. <i>Goodnight Moon</i> by Margaret Wise Brown <i>Little Blue Truck</i> by Alice Shertle <i>Moo, Baa, La La La</i> by Sandra Boynton <i>Opposites</i> by Sandra Boynton <i>Peekaboo Morning</i> by Rachael Isadora <i>Peek-a-Who?</i> by Nina Laden <i>Treasury of Nursery Rhymes</i> by Lucy Cousins <i>Where Is the Green Sheep?</i> by Mem Fox</p>	<p>Language and Literacy <i>Chicka Chicka Boom Boom</i> by Bill Martin Jr. <i>Don't Wake the Dragon</i> by Bianca Shultz <i>From Head to Toe</i> by Eric Carle <i>If You're a Monster and You Know It</i> by Rebecca Emberely <i>Jump, Frog, Jump</i> by Robert Kalan <i>Rhyming Dust Bunnies</i> by Jan Thomas <i>Silly Sally</i> by Audrey Wood <i>Snowy Day and A Whistle for Willie</i> by Ezra Jack Keats <i>We're Going on a Bear Hunt</i> by Michael Rosen</p>
<p>Mathematics <i>Big Little and Higher! Higher!</i> by Leslie Patricelli <i>Black and White</i> by Tana Hoben <i>Dear Zoo</i> by Rod Campbell <i>Counting Kisses</i> by Karen Katz <i>Eric Carle's 123</i> by Eric Carle and <i>My First Math Book: An Introduction to Math</i> <i>Symbols for Babies and Toddlers</i> by Christine Kimiko Dillard <i>My Very First Book of Shapes</i> by Eric Carle <i>Ten, Nine, Eight</i> by Molly Bang</p>	<p>Mathematics <i>1 Big Salad: A Delicious Counting Book</i> by Juana Medina <i>Is It Larger? Is It Smaller?</i> by Tana Hoban <i>Measuring Penny</i> by Loreen Leedy <i>Mouse Counts and Mouse Shape</i> by Ellen Stoll Walsh <i>Quack and Count</i> by Keith Barker <i>Swirl by Swirl</i> by Joyce Sidman <i>Ten Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed</i> by Annie Kubler <i>Ten on a Twig</i> by Lo Coe</p>
<p>Science and Social Studies <i>Antiracist Baby</i> by Ibram X. Kendi <i>Babies Around the World</i> by Puck <i>Everywhere Babies</i> by Susan Meyers <i>Families</i> by Shelley Rotner <i>The Family Book</i> by Todd Parr <i>Full, Full, Full of Love</i> by Trish Cooke <i>Hello, World! Solar System</i> by Jill McDonald <i>Robots, Robots, Everywhere</i> by Sue Fliess <i>Rocket Science for Babies</i> by Chris Ferrie</p>	<p>Science and Social Studies <i>Ada Twist, Scientist</i> by Andrea Beaty <i>All Kinds of Families</i> by Mary Ann Hoberman <i>Families Around the World</i> by Margriet Ruurs <i>Love Makes a Family</i> by Sophie Beer <i>Rosie Revere, Engineer</i> by Andrea Beaty <i>The Very Busy Spider</i> by Eric Carle <i>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</i> by Eric Carle <i>The Tiny Seed</i> by Eric Carle <i>We Belong Together</i> by Todd Parr <i>What is a Scientist?</i> by Barbara Lehn</p>

Books to Promote Learning and Development (Continued)

Infant/Toddler	Preschool
<p>Social and Emotional Development <i>Baby Faces</i> by Margaret Miller <i>Baby Happy Baby Sad</i> by Linda Patricellei <i>Grumpy Bird</i> by Jeremy Tankard <i>Hands Are Not for Hitting</i> by Elizabeth Verdickem <i>I Can Share</i> by Karen Katz <i>I Like Myself</i> by Karen Beaumont <i>Lots of Feelings</i> by Shelly Rotner <i>No No Yes Yes</i> by Linda Patricellei <i>The Color Monster</i> by Anna Llenas <i>Tiger Days</i> by M.H. Clark <i>Words Are Not for Hurting</i> by Elizabeth Verdickem</p>	<p>Social and Emotional Development <i>Be Kind</i> by Pat Zietlow Miller <i>Bear Feels Scared</i> by Karma Wilson <i>Box Meets Circle</i> by Aaron Hartline <i>Breathe and Be: A Book of Mindful Poems</i> by Kate Coombs <i>The Feelings Book</i> by Todd Parr <i>Grumpy Pants</i> by Claire Messer <i>I am Enough</i> by Grace Byers <i>Llama Llama Mad at Mama</i> by Anne Dewdney <i>The Way I Feel</i> by Janan Cain</p>

Materials to Promote Language and Literacy Development

Reading: cloth books, board books and fiction and nonfiction picture books; magazines; picture dictionaries; flannel boards; props and puppets; pocket chart and stand; print used authentically to support the life and work of the learning community such as daily schedules, menus, children’s names on cubbies, job chart, signs, and books in learning centers)

Alphabet Knowledge: magnetic letters and trays; wooden letter blocks; alphabet tiles; alphabet puzzles; alphabet charts; sandpaper letters; and letter stamps and stamp-pads

Writing: salt or sand tray; attendance list with sign-in chart; clipboards to hold writing materials; paper with crayons, markers, pens, and colored pencils, etc.; whiteboards or chalkboards; sidewalk chalk; blank notecards and envelopes; and paint, paper, and brushes

Fine Motor: modeling clay, salt dough, or Play-Doh; finger-paint and glossy paper; sewing materials; nuts and bolts; padlocks and keys; rolls of tape and paper; stickers and stamps, scissors, and scraps of paper; glue and glue stick; and beads, pasta, Cheerios and yarn (for stringing)

Tools and Resources

[Administration for Children and Families: Program for Infant/Toddler Care's Six Essential Program Practices for Relationship-Based Care Continuity of Care Rationale Paper](#)

[Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University: Executive Function: Skills for Life and Learning](#)

[Early Childhood Education Blog: Caring for Mixed Age Groups in Early Childhood Education](#)

[Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Using the ECIPs with Children in Mixed Age Groupings](#)

[Head Start ECLKC: Using Mixed-Age Groups to Support Continuity of Care in Center-Based Programs](#)

[Cox Campus Emergent Literacy Training](#)

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