

WAC

WAC 170-295-2120

Are there special program requirements for infants and toddlers?

- When you care for infants and toddlers you must:
 - Encourage them to handle and manipulate a variety of objects
 - Provide a safe environment for climbing, moving and exploring
 - Provide materials and opportunities for large and small muscle development
 - Read and talk to them daily
 - Provide daily indoor opportunities for freedom of movement outside their cribs in an open, uncluttered space
 - Place them in a prone (lying on the tummy) position part of the time when they are awake and under staff observation
 - Not leave them in car seats once they arrive at the center even if they are asleep
 - Not be left in playpens for extended periods of time excluding sleep time
 - Talk to and interact with each infant and toddler often; naming objects and describing care encourages language development
 - Hold and cuddle infants and toddlers to encourage strong relationships, and
 - Respond to and investigate cries or other signs of distress immediately.
- You must provide toys, objects and other play materials that:
 - Are cleanable
 - Are nontoxic, and
 - Cannot cause a choking hazard for infants or toddlers.
- You must not use baby walkers.

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Infant and toddler caregivers have an awesome responsibility. It is now known that the first three years of life are more critical to a child's development than ever imagined. Research shows that more rapid brain development takes place during these years

than at any other time of life. Babies are born learning. Children need the right experiences at the right times for their brains to fully develop.

Because infants and toddlers have special and unique developmental needs, three separate areas of this guidebook have been devoted to their child care requirements. Please see Section 3 (WAC 170-295-2030 and 2040) for information regarding infant and toddler emotional, social, intellectual (cognitive) and physical developmental needs. Please see Section 5, Care of Young Children for a complete discussion of the health, safety, and nutritional requirements for infants and toddlers in child care.

Special program requirements for infants and toddlers are discussed here.

Mobility, Exploration and Stimulation

To maximize infants' and toddlers' overall development, they should be in an environment that is safe and developmentally appropriate for climbing, moving, and exploring. They need age-appropriate toys and objects to handle and manipulate for the development of small muscles and fine motor skills. They also need materials and opportunities for development of large muscles and gross motor skills.

Infants need to lie on their tummies when awake and alert several times each day in an open, uncluttered, safe space, with the caregiver observing or interacting nearby. Freedom of movement and exploration outside the crib is important to a young child's development. An infant must not be left in a swing, bouncer, saucer or other piece of equipment for extended periods of time. Infants should be removed from their high chairs when they are done eating and taken out of their cribs when they wake up.

When babies have their needs met, they learn to trust. It is important to respond immediately, in a positive way, to their cries or other signs of distress. If you cannot get to the infant right away, you should call the child's name and reassure the child that help will be there soon. The sound of your caring voice can be very soothing and can help a young child calm down for a brief while.