



## Individualized Care

Use this resource to help communicate the importance of individualized care. It will help promote essential program practices to ensure quality in family child care and center-based programs that serve infants and toddlers.

### Rationale

High-quality relationship-based care is central to children's early brain development, emotional regulation, and learning (Center on the Developing Child, 2012). The Program for Infant/Toddler Care recommends six essential program practices as a framework for relationship-based care. One of these practices is **individualized care**—the practice of being responsive and adapting to each infant's and toddler's interests, needs, and abilities to support their healthy development (Lally & Mangione, n.d.). The unique temperament, learning style, interests, and developmental stages of infancy require individualized care and support (Lally & Mangione, 2006; Lieberman, 1995; Raikes & Edwards, 2009). In high-quality infant and toddler care, caregivers adapt their strategies to meet individual needs of infants and toddlers and provide responsive relationship-based care (Raikes & Edwards, 2009).

### Why Is Individualized Care Important for Infants and Toddlers?

- ◆ Valuing and responding to a child's unique developmental abilities and individual needs leads to respectful and responsive caregiving (Lieberman, 1995; Mangione, 2006).
- ◆ Meeting unique needs communicates to infants and toddlers that they are important, their needs will be met, and their choices, interests, and preferences are respected (Lally & Mangione, 2006).
- ◆ Providing individualized care honors a child's abilities, needs, temperament, and the cultural practices and preferences of the child's family (Bernhard & Gonzalez-Mena, 2000; Lieberman, 1995).

### How Does Individualized Care Promote Positive Child Outcomes?

- ◆ Strategies to provide individualized care that meet the unique temperament needs, home language, and learning styles of each child promote optimal development (Virmani & Mangione, 2013).
- ◆ Prompt responses to a child's individual needs support his or her ability to self-regulate (Tarullo et al., 2009; Valotton, 2008).
- ◆ Having a secure attachment with a caregiver who follows the child's individual rhythms and relational style promotes her healthy sense of self, social competence, and well-being (Ahnert et al., 2006).



## Planning to Implement Individualized Care in Diverse Child Care Settings

**Goal:** High-quality infant and toddler programs adapt to the individual needs of each child through several key strategies.

- ◆ Develop written guidance that reflects strategies for implementing individualized care practices. This includes creating staff and family handbooks that explain the importance of meeting the individual needs of each child. Handbooks can also provide methods for observation, developmental assessment, and adaptation of caregiver interactions that support infants and toddlers and their families.
- ◆ Plan a curriculum that reflects and supports the developmental level, temperament, and cultural and linguistic background of each child.
- ◆ Create job descriptions for infant and toddler caregivers that include expectations for individualized caregiving practices. This includes having an understanding of differences in temperament and developmental needs and how to communicate with culturally and linguistically diverse families about specific care practices for their infant or toddler. It also includes observing and reflecting on each child's ways of interacting with people and the physical environment.
- ◆ Provide professional development on how to implement individualized care practices. Support ongoing communication with caregivers and families about how to adapt caregiving practices to meet the individual needs of each infant and toddler.
- ◆ Use an intentional review process to continually strengthen individualized care practices across the center or family child care program.



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